

My Sickness



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

BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

Vol. 49, No. 1

JAN./FEB. 1972

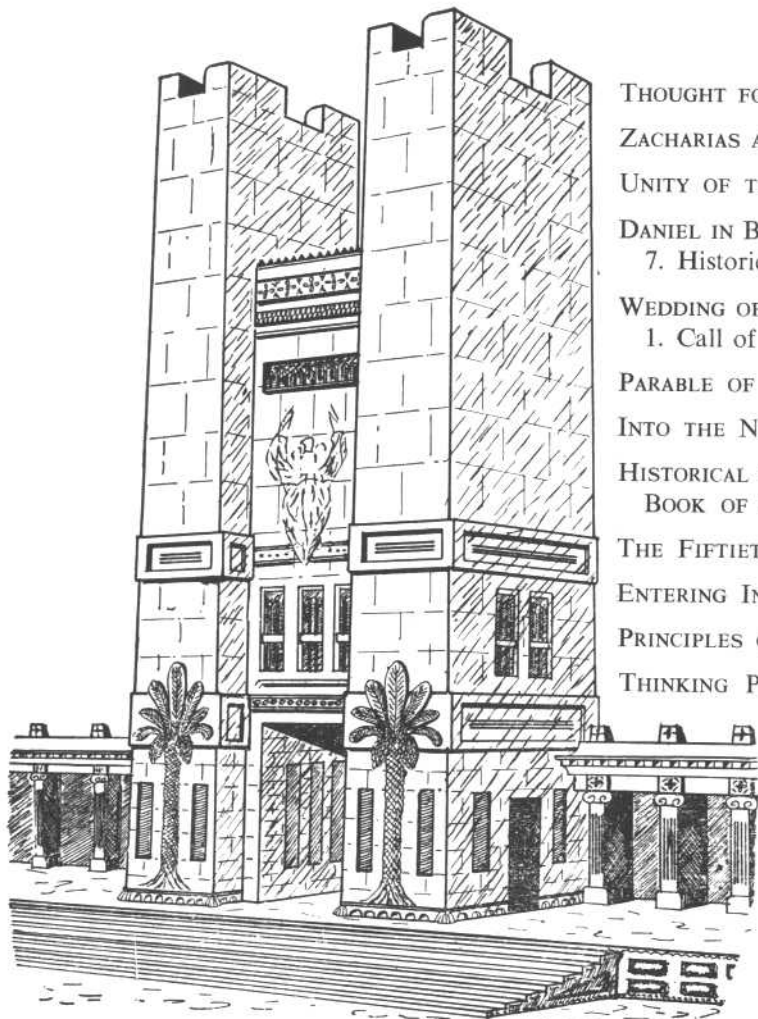
Published January 1st

Next issue March 1st

CONTENTS

THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH	2
ZACHARIAS AND ELISABETH	3
UNITY OF THE SPIRIT	6
DANIEL IN BABYLON	
7. Historical Interlude	7
WEDDING OF THE AGES	
1. Call of the Bride	9
PARABLE OF THE SHEEP AND GOATS	12
INTO THE NEW YEAR	14
HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE BOOK OF RUTH	15
THE FIFTIETH PSALM	17
ENTERING INTO REST	19
PRINCIPLES OF DIVINE DELIVERANCE	21
THINKING POINT	24

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



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

Published by
Bible Fellowship Union
11 Lyncroft Gardens, Hounslow,
Middlesex, England

Bible Study Monthly

FOUNDED 1924

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

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

Communications and donations to Bible Fellowship Union, 11 Lyncroft Gardens, Hounslow, Middlesex, England.
Secretary & Treasurer: B. G. DUMONT (Hounslow) Editorial & Publishing: A. O. HUDSON (Welling)

NOTICES

"Wedding of the Ages"

Taking its inspiration from the Parable of the Ten Virgins, a three-part series commences in this issue, based upon actual observation of wedding customs in the Holy Land by a reader during the early part of the century. Modern times have probably very largely extinguished these customs but this record well illustrates quite a number of Scripture allusions and will be of interest in that connection.

is now available as a 48pp booklet at cost of production and postage only. Post free 10p each or 5 for 40p (one dollar).

"God of all Space"

The series appearing during 1971 under the above title

A word of explanation

The heavy modern type face employed for the last few issues of the Monthly had perforce to be employed due to the printer having changed over completely to this style. Considerable dissent has been received from readers and in consequence as from this issue the Monthly is being printed by another firm able to offer a more suitable style.

Thought for the Month

JOB 15:22

"He believeth not that he shall return out of darkness, and that he is waited for of the sword"

The speaker is talking about the man who is knowingly vicious and immoral. He has no particular belief in God or in any kind of after-life; he just never thinks about such things and all his aims and efforts are to increase his own means of self-gratification without regard to the interests of others. Whether he achieves his ends within the law or outside it is immaterial, so long as he is not found out. The dictum that every man is his brother's keeper and that no man liveth to himself mean nothing to him. "Let us eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die" sums up his philosophy, and he is quite content to regard himself as a superior kind of animal thrown up by evolu-

dependent entirely upon his own efforts for his gains and achievements and is responsible to no higher power and no one cares what he does or what happens to him and in all this he is hopelessly and grievously wrong, for all men depend upon God for their very environment and powers, and God does care. Above all things he does come back from the darkness of death and the grave, and when he does come back there is a question of recompense for whatever of good or evil he has done in this life.

"What a man soweth" said St. Paul "that shall he also reap". It is true that in the next great Age of human history, the Age when Christ rules in righteousness and every encouragement and assistance is to be given the sons of men, the dead and

ZACHARIAS AND ELISABETH

Four long centuries had measured out their length since the voice of Malachi, the last of the Old Testament prophets, had been stilled in death, and now it was time for the first of the New Testament prophets to become conscious of the Divine fervour being kindled within him. In a very real sense the story of the New Testament began when Zacharias the aged priest saw the angel in the Temple. Fifteen months later and Jesus the Messiah, long expected by Israel, was to be born at Bethlehem. But Zacharias had no idea or thought of that in his mind on the day that he went into the Temple as usual to carry out his customary duty of offering incense at the Golden Altar during public prayers. Zacharias was an old man, somewhere between eighty and ninety years of age, and he had served God very faithfully in his appointed sphere, admittedly a humble sphere, for very many years. He was of the priestly line from Aaron and from the age of thirty had served as such; for over half a century he had filled a minor role in the priests' office and never dreamed that in the evening of his days he was to play a major part in the greatest event of all time, a part that would lift him up and set him apart from his fellow-priests for ever.

Luke says that he was "*of the course of Abia*" (Hebrew *Abijah*). A thousand years before this time King David had divided the priests of Aaron's line, grown to a considerable number, into twenty-four divisions or "courses", each to take turn in discharging the ceremonial duties of the Temple which he purposed to build. Of these "courses" the eighth was that of Abijah (1 Chron. 29. 10). Sixteen courses were of the lineage of Eleazar and eight of Ithamar, sons of Aaron; there is no way of determining to which lineage Zacharias belonged, except that the probability is two to one in favour of Eleazar. By the time of the First Advent the Temple ceremonial had become greatly modified and changed from that instituted by Moses in the days of the Tabernacle in the wilderness, but it is clear that Zacharias, as a priest, by blood descent one of the sons of Aaron, had the right of entry into the Holy Place in front of the Vail that shrouded the Most Holy, there to perform his allotted share of the ceremonial. Twice in the year he took his turn in the service for a week, and alone in the Holy Place he offered incense.

Much had happened in Israel during the course of his long life. He was born, in all probability,

during the time of the Maccabean priest-kings who ruled the independent Jewish state before the Romans came. Judea was, for a short period, a kind of theocracy; the sons of Aaron, represented by the Maccabean dynasty, combined within themselves the religious office of High Priest and the secular one of King. In all likelihood the reigning priest-king at Zacharias' birth was Alexander Janneus, proud of his descent from Aaron through the Davidic "course" of Jehoiarib, but equally proud of the fact that Judea, as a sovereign state, was in treaty relationship with the Roman empire as an equal. Under Alexander Janneus the frontiers of the State were extended to include Samaria, Edom, Trans-Jordan and half-way across Sinai to what is now El-Arish. The kingdom almost attained the extent it had enjoyed in the days of David and Solomon, and many believed that the time of Israel's prophesied supremacy over the nations had come and nothing now intervened before the coming of Messiah.

But before the lad Zacharias had outgrown his teens the Romans had torn up the treaty, Pompey had invaded Judea, attacked the Temple, committed the unforgiveable sacrilege of forcing his way into the Most Holy, and the bright vision faded. The brief period of independence, lasting only about a century, ended, and Judea became subject to Rome. At thirty years of age Zacharias assumed his duties as an Aaronic priest and commenced his ministry in the Temple, only to see it pillaged of all its wealth by Crassus the Roman general. Fifteen years later he experienced the terrors of war when the Parthians captured and plundered Jerusalem; within a few more years Herod the Edomite was laying siege to the Holy City. When Zacharias was about fifty an earthquake shook the country and thirty thousand perished; two years later came the horrors of pestilence. Another fifteen years, and he heard the news that Herod, now well established as Rome's puppet ruler of the land, was going to pull down the Temple, built by Nehemiah five hundred years earlier at the return of the Captivity, and erect a more magnificent one in its place. And now for nearly two decades he had been offering incense in Herod's new building; the glories of his youth had passed away, his nation was subject to an alien power, and still Messiah had not come. But with quiet faith he continued his allotted task in the daily ritual, doing that which lay to his hand to do and leaving the greater issues to God—until

the day he saw the angel.

The wife of Zacharias was Elisabeth, also of the lineage of Aaron. "*They were both righteous before God*" says Luke (1.6) "*walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless*". Those two words indicate the moral and the ceremonial aspects of the law respectively. In every respect this aged couple were fit vessels ready to the Lord's hand for his use—yet He waited until the near end of their lives before He used them. But Elisabeth had no child, none whom they could train up in the nurture and reverence of the Lord and send out into the world to crown their life-long service with his own. Even their names testified to reverence and respect for the faithful of their own tribe of ancient times, for "Zacharias" is the Hebrew *Zechariah*, the name of the High Priest murdered in the Temple in the days of King Joash, and "Elisabeth" is the Hebrew *Elisheba*, the name of the sister of Aaron. There is not much doubt that these two were convinced of the imminence of Messiah's Advent, and numbered among the little band of Messianic believers who at that time "*looked for deliverance in Jerusalem*". (Luke 2.33).

But above all things it is evident that Zacharias possessed the prophetic power; his life was lived so much in tune with God that he could hear things and see things that other men could not hear or see. The voice of the prophets had been silent for four hundred years and perhaps men in Israel had ceased to expect that it would ever be heard again. In Zacharias it was heard again. The time had come when a messenger was to be sent to Israel and a message given, a herald of the fulfilment of so much that the earlier prophets had predicted, and as a first step to the raising up of that messenger the Lord sought for a clean vessel, a righteous environment in which the messenger would be born and spend his formative years, before the time came for "*his shewing unto Israel*" (Luke 1.80). He found a man for his purpose, not among the decadent and corrupt relics of the Aaronic line manifested in the descendants of the Maccabean priest-kings, soiled and polluted by their contact with and involvements in the political manoeuvres and alliances of the day, but in the person of this humble and faithful man who had served so faithfully in his obscure position, but always close to God, always attending on the altar. So the angel was sent to Zacharias.

It was a thrilling message he brought. The boy that was to be born to them was destined to be "*great in the eyes of the Lord*." He was to stand before God in the spirit and power of Elijah, the rugged old prophet who once converted the whole nation from Baalworship in a single day; he was to turn many of the people to the Lord their God,

and he was to herald the coming of Messiah and prepare the people for his Advent. Wonderful news indeed; so wonderful that it is perhaps understandable that Zacharias, in mingled wonder and incredulity, asked for a sign to establish the angel's authority and convince him that he was not in fact the victim of a hallucination. It was not that he had no faith; he knew God could do this thing, but in asking for some material evidence that would linger with him after the messenger had departed he was but following the example of earlier worthies faced with similar situations. He got the sign he wanted, but it was accompanied by a reproof. The measure of doubt implied by his request was not justified after the lifetime he had spent in the service of God. As a man possessed of the prophetic spirit and living his life "in tune" with God his spiritual discernment should have been sufficiently clear to perceive the authority in the angel's words and accept them without question. There is a difference between Zacharias' question "*How shall I know this, for I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years*" and the quiet rejoinder of Mary to the same angel six months later, "*How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?*" Zacharias wanted proof of the angel's veracity; Mary accepted his word without question and only asked how the wonder was to come about.

Zacharias was to be dumb until the birth of his son. That was a sign to the people as well as himself. Upon his emergence from the Temple they saw that some great thing had happened to him, alone in there. "*They perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple*". Not until his son was born was his speech restored and he could tell to the full what had taken place that eventful day.

This is the point at which Zacharias takes his place among the prophets. The glowing rhapsody of Luke 1.68-79 is not only a song of praise; it is also a prediction of things to come. Right at the outset he declared that God had "*raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David*". The obvious reference is to Messiah, but Jesus had not yet been born; how then did Zacharias know anything about it? The obvious answer is given in verse 67; he was inspired by the Holy Spirit and empowered to see things that were yet to come. He saw the Advent of the Deliverer; he saw Israel saved from her enemies and the fulfilment of the Divine promise to Abraham; he saw Israel exalted in prosperity and he saw the coming of the light to the whole world that was sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death. And then, turning towards his new born son, he predicted that he should be the Prophet of the Highest, to herald the Messiah and prepare the nation for his coming, to turn the people from the

bondage of sin to serve the living God. A wonderful day was that and a wonderful prophecy. Thirty long years were to pass before it could begin to be fulfilled and many of those who heard it were destined to finish their lives and rest in death before that fulfilment commenced, but who can doubt that the story was handed down from father to son and from mother to daughter in those families that "*looked for deliverance in Jerusalem*" so that when one day, a young man startled the nation with his clarion cry "*Repent ye, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand*," there were those who at once were ready to listen and to follow him.

By that time Zacharias and Elisabeth were probably dead. Luke 1, 80 tells us that "*the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his shewing unto Israel*." That does not sound as though he had known a settled home life in one of the towns of Judah. Quite possibly he was an orphan from his teens. He might well have been a member of the community of Essenes at Masada, made so famous in recent years by the discovery of the "Dead Sea Scrolls". That would account very well for his characteristic outlook and ministry, and would well explain the expression "*in the deserts*". Like Elijah his prototype, he was a son of the mountainous and desert places, having no place in the cities and haunts of men—and all Israel went out into the desert to hear him.

John the Baptist was the last of the prophets and it is customary to say that he was the successor of Malachi. That is not strictly true, for Zacharias and Elisabeth came in between and they also were of the prophets. Elisabeth had the same

spirit of prediction as her husband; when Mary, immediately after the Annunciation, journeyed into Judea to visit her aunt, the older woman knew at once that the mother of the Messiah had come to her (Luke 1.43) and invoked the blessing of the Lord upon Mary. She, too, must have known, by the Holy Spirit indwelling in her, that her son was to be the herald foreseen by Malachi four hundred years earlier when he declaimed "*Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me; and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall presently come to his temple*" (Mal. 3.1). John was both "*Elijah that should come*" and the "*herald to prepare the way of Messiah*" and he fulfilled both offices faithfully as was ordained.

John is the last of the sons of Aaron recorded in Scripture. Of his precise relation to the High Priestly line nothing is known. The true succession was lost a hundred or more years before John was born and the last officiating High Priest of Aaronic descent was Aristobulus in 35 B.C. For all that is known to the contrary it might well be that John's pedigree was nearer the legal line of High Priests than that of the Maccabean priest-kings who held the office for the last century or so. We do not know; it would be very appropriate, though, if it was the rightful High Priest after the order of Aaron in the days of the First Advent who announced to Israel the coming of the Lord. Only God knows; whether of High Priestly lineage or not, these three, Zacharias, Elisabeth and John, priests and prophets, were faithful to their calling and in that faithfulness brought the Old Dispensation to a close and prepared the way for the New, the Dispensation of the Gospel.

Fruit of Evil

It has been suggested that it is quite within the power of an individual devoted to evil for its own sake to *destroy his own capacity for repentance*. Food for thought here! On the one hand, we hold firmly to the principle that whilst there is the least hope of the sinner turning from the error of his way, whilst there is anything at all left upon which Divine Love can work, God will not let go his hold of the erring one. Upon the other hand, Scripture is clear that there are circumstances in which it is impossible to renew a man to repentance, that for some there is reserved the "*blackness of darkness for ever*". There is hope of a tree, says Job, if it be cut down, that through the scent of water it will bud and become green again; that is because the life principle has not become altogether extinct in the stump and roots. A plant may wither and dry up in the scorching heat, and while life remains in it, rain will bring it renewed vigour, but if the life has gone, nothing can ever restore it.

May we then conclude that there is something in man, a capacity for appreciating the things of righteousness and goodness and purity, implanted there by God at the beginning, which can be smothered over, but need not be entirely obliterated in even the most degraded of men; but that continued and obstinate hardening of the heart against every good influence in the favourable environment of the Millennial Age can utterly destroy that capacity and leave nothing of the man but an empty physical frame possessing the spirit of life but no preserving influence of good; and that the workings of sin in that physical body will eventually encompass its destruction without hope of recovery? Thus seen, the "*Second Death*" is the inevitable result of a man's deliberate stifling of the powers of righteousness which God implanted within him. "*It shall come to pass, that every soul which will not hear that Prophet shall be cut off from among the people.*"

UNITY OF THE SPIRIT

"Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bonds of peace . . . till we all come in the unity of the faith . . . unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Eph. 4.3-13).

The picture in Ephesians 4 is that of Christian growth, from the condition of "babes in Christ" to that of full Christian maturity (but, even so, not the perfection of character which is to be ours beyond the Vail. Eph. 4 has to do entirely with this life and not the next). Right at the outset the immature believers are exhorted to "walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called" and an essential part of this "walking worthy" is the "endeavouring" to keep the unity of the Spirit. As a help to our efforts in this connection we are reminded that there is one Body—one Spirit—one hope of our calling—one Lord—one faith—one baptism—one God. In all of these we share as brethren, and we all have the same basis upon which to stand. Our abilities may and do differ, and so does our capacity for understanding the deep things of God's Word, and this will in turn affect our understanding of doctrine or modify the viewpoint we take, but "to every one of us is given grace (favour) according to the measure of the gift of Christ". He proportions his gifts according to our capacity for receiving and making use of them and as we are able to make use of more because of our growth in grace so He gives us more. Thus for the instruction and upbuilding of the one-time "babes" He has given, as the Apostle says here, "helps" of all kinds, apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers, in order that these same growing Christians, having attained Christian maturity, should come into the unity of the faith and knowledge of Christ and so become what he calls a "complete man, the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ".

Now this unity of faith into which such a mature Christian has entered is not, as so many imagine it to be, merely a unity of assent to vari-

ous points of doctrine, although an understanding of the great Bible doctrines concerning sin and death, redemption and life, the High Calling and mankind's destiny is a necessary factor in the attainment of that unity. But this unity of the faith is really the final fruitage of which the unity of the Spirit is the original seed. Unity of the Spirit is based upon our fellowship with each other and our belief in Jesus and his words; the unity of the faith is built upon our fellowship with God and our knowledge of him and his laws. The first can be entered into comparatively quickly, so soon as we come into Christ and meet with his people; the second is the result of long years spent in "growing up into him in all things". The one is therefore clearly a development from the other, but even when we have entered into the unity of the faith, and attained the full stature of a man in Christ, we are still like Paul, knowing only in part, seeing as in a glass, darkly. The day has yet to come—and it will not come this side the Vail—when, especially in matters of doctrine, we attain full perfection of understanding. That need not hinder our unity now; in fact, according to Eph. 4, if our unity now is hindered by any such consideration, if we allow ourselves to be carried hither and thither by every "wind of doctrine", never attaining, if we do not play our part in the oneness of the Body, then, implies the Apostle, we are still children. And although in one sense it is as children that we inherit the Kingdom of Heaven, it is not so in this sense. As children in innocence, sincerity, humility, teachableness, yes, but as immature babes as yet unable to manifest the character likeness to Christ which is an indispensable condition, by no means. This life is our training ground and until we have been proved fitted and qualified for the stupendous work of God which awaits all who are called and chosen, but also faithful, we cannot expect to hear the momentous words "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord".

Note on MATT. 10.8

"Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons." (Matt. 10. 8.).

This is a point not generally noticed, that the twelve disciples had power to raise the dead. One wonders if they ever used it. There is no record of any of them having done so before Pentecost. St. Peter raised Dorcas to life afterwards (Acts 10) but this is the only recorded instance

(Eutychus, who fell out of the window when St. Paul was preaching at Troas, was not dead. St. Paul revived him but this was not a raising of the dead). It may well have been that many more people in Judea and Galilee experienced a revival of life after death at the hands of Jesus and perhaps his disciples than those whose names the Gospel records have preserved.

DANIEL IN BABYLON

The story of a great man's faith

7. Historical Interlude

see previous issue - page 137 - last year! while exp. 1 year!

Three years after Nebuchadnezzar's recovery from his seven years' insanity, his long reign of forty-three years reached its end. He died at probably about seventy-five years of age, and with his death came the change in Daniel's circumstances which marks the division in the narrative. Up to Chapter 4 the story is set entirely in the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, during which time Daniel was Chief man in the kingdom. Now, at about sixty-three years of age, Daniel stood by while his royal master's son, Avil-Marduk, ascended the throne, and from that point until the accession of Belshazzar, the last king of Babylon, the Book of Daniel is silent. When the narrative is resumed, in the first year of Belshazzar, with Daniel's dream of the four great beasts and the coming of the Ancient of Days in Judgment (Daniel Chap. 7) the prophet is no longer chief political Minister of State. He is a private citizen and, as evidenced by the story of Belshazzar's feast, practically unknown to the king and probably to the leading men of the realm. Daniel spent forty years in the limelight, ruling the affairs of the empire of Babylon; then he spent nearly forty years more in measurable obscurity, his good works for the nation forgotten, his wisdom and counsel ignored. But it was during that latter forty years that he had those wonderful revelations from on high which have given the book which bears his name the title of "the Revelation of the Old Testament." The second half of Daniel's life, spent in obscurity, has meant far more to succeeding generations than the first half, stirring though the events of those earlier days are to us as we read them.

In order to fill in this gap in the Biblical narrative we turn for a moment to the records of the tablets. So many thousands of these tablets have been unearthed, many of them dated, that the history of Daniel's Babylon is better known to scholars than that of England in the days of King Alfred. There are dated tablets in the British Museum for every year of the reigns of every king from Nebuchadnezzar to Belshazzar so that the chronology of the period is no longer a matter of dispute.

The great king's son, Avil-Marduk, by all accounts a weak-willed man of no principles, reigned only two years, his reign being characterised by lawlessness and impiety. Jeremiah mentions him once, when in Jer. 52:31-34 he says that

in the thirty-seventh year of King Jehoiachin's captivity, "Evil-Merodach (the Hebrew form of Avil-Marduk) King of Babylon in the first year of his reign" released him from prison and dealt kindly with him. But at the end of two years, one of Nebuchadnezzar's military commanders, Neriglissar, husband of Nebuchadnezzar's eldest daughter, murdered Avil-Marduk and on the basis of his own royal marriage ascended the throne.

Neriglissar (a Greek form of the name) is mentioned in Jer. 39 under the native spelling, Nergal-Sharezzer, as having been present at the siege and destruction of Jerusalem in the days of Zedekiah. At that time, according to the Jeremiah account, he occupied the position of Rab-Mag, or master of the magicians, a title which the Book of Daniel indicates afterwards passed to Daniel. Neriglissar reigned three years only, was not particularly conspicuous, and died peacefully at Babylon. He left one daughter, Gigitum, whose marriage contract to a high Court official, Nabu-shum-ukin, now reposes in a glass case at the British Museum, and a youthful son, Labasi-Marduk, who succeeded him on the throne and after nine months was killed in a palace insurrection.

By this time it is probable that Jehoiachin was dead, but somewhere in Babylon there must have lived his grandson Zerubbabel, the child who at the time of the Return from Exile, now only about twenty years distant, was destined to be the officially appointed Governor of the new Judean state. Zerubbabel figures prominently in the books of Ezra and Zechariah. He was the man who wielded civil power among the people re-gathered to Zion without a king. And somewhere in Babylon there played also another child, Joshua the son of Jehozadek, the legal High Priest of Israel during the captivity, a High Priest without sacrifices, for the sacrifices could be offered only at Jerusalem. Joshua became the first High Priest of regathered Israel, and he too figures prominently in the books of Ezra and Zechariah. So in the time of obscurity which lies between the early and the latter parts of the Captivity, between Daniel the Statesman and Daniel the Seer, we discern dim shadows of those who were to lead God's people after Daniel and all his generation had passed away. That of itself ought to be a

sobering thought to us. We experience our own day of service for God and serve with our might while we have strength and opportunity, and then sometimes make frantic efforts to perpetuate the work we have commenced. All the time there is no need; God makes his own arrangements for the continuation of his work, and while our own generation is beginning to lower the torch He is already preparing, perhaps in another place that we wot not of, those who are to do his work in the next generation.

That of itself does not justify our relaxing our efforts in the vineyard we have tended maybe all our lives. Sometimes the new work and old work must progress side by side for a space. "He must increase, but I must decrease" said John the Baptist, speaking of Jesus and the new, greater work He was to do. A goodly company of God's stalwarts have seen their sphere of activity diminish as life draws on, and happy are those who can continue in unabated certainty and confidence despite the decreasing response, all the time that they can find a hearing ear or reverent heart anywhere. Daniel stayed in Babylon and saw visions which have enlightened every generation of the Church, even whilst his younger compatriots, Zerubbabel and Joshua, were actively engaged, away in Jerusalem, laying the foundations of the restored Jewish state.

Returning to Babylon and its Palace intrigues, *so like those of any court in any country, then or since*; the death of Labasi-Marduk left the way to the throne open to Nabonidus the husband of Nebuchadnezzar's younger daughter Nitocris. Nabonidus was a son of the High Priest of the Moon-god at Haran, the city in the north to which Terah emigrated with his family from Ur of the Chaldees, and from which Abraham set out "not knowing whither he went" to go to Canaan. Nabonidus as a youth had been brought to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar at about the same time as Daniel himself, and was one of those with Daniel intended to be trained in the wisdom of the Chaldeans. As such he would be included in the young men mentioned in the first chapter of Daniel. The two must have been well acquainted at the start and must have been well known to each other throughout life. When one remembers the high favour in which Daniel had stood with the great king, the fact that his fellow-exile Nabonidus married into the king's family evokes the surmise that Daniel himself might quite likely have had the opportunity, in earlier years, of becoming joined to the royal family by marriage and so eventually ascending the throne of Babylon.

He would obviously have been the king's first choice in preference to Nabonidus. If such a proposal ever was made in fact, another evidence of Daniel's sterling allegiance to God is afforded. He would serve faithfully in the place where God had placed him but he would make no alliance with the "people of the land". We can well imagine that to be his attitude.

Nabonidus was a better archaeologist than king; his devouring passion was the collecting of relics of the civilisations that were as much older than his own time as his time is older than ours. After reigning five years, the growing aggressiveness of the Persians under Cyrus demanded a younger man—Nabonidus, like Daniel, was about seventy-five years old by now—and that led him to associate with himself his son Belshazzar as joint king. This event marks what the Book of Daniel calls the "first year of Belshazzar the King". Nabonidus retired to his museums and archaeological studies, his daughter Bel-shaltinannar was appointed High Priestess of the Moon-god's Temple at Ur of the Chaldees, Abraham's birthplace, and Belshazzar, at probably little more than twenty years of age, became the real ruler of Babylon. At this point the Book of Daniel takes up the story again, after a silence of some twenty-five years.

No longer, though, do we see the stage set with the glory and pomp of the royal court, Daniel the statesman, the king's right hand man, administering and ruling the kingdom. No longer do we hear of mighty acts of faith and noteworthy miracles attesting to all beholders the all-powerful sovereignty of God. There is a difference. We see a darkened stage, the serene light of the moon shining through a window on the form of an old man, head buried in prayer, eyes poring over books, a recumbent form in the quietude of sleep seeing visions of God. We hear messages from another world telling of great events yet to transpire. We glimpse angels coming and going, bearing revelations and mysteries which that same old man is to be the means of leaving on record for all those who in after days would know the things which God is planning to do in the world of men. So it came about that in the first year of Belshazzar, king of Babylon, fifty-six years after Daniel first entered the city in which he was to spend his life-time of exile, this faithful servant of God, who had walked step-by-step with God during all those fifty-six years, began to experience the series of revelations which crowned his life's work. Like John on Patmos two and a half millenniums later, he saw and recorded "things which must shortly come to pass" to the abiding blessing of all who were to come after.

To be continued.

WEDDING OF THE AGES

1. Call of the Bride

"Let us be glad and rejoice and give honour to him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and his wife hath made herself ready".

The love of romance is as old as the ages. Never has there been a time when a tale of romance failed to excite the interest of normal, rational human beings. A marriage is hailed as a truly happy event by people of every rank and race. In the Bible, the oldest and most sacred of books, more than one bright page is devoted to some love-idyll, some sweet love lyric, delighting the senses, shedding a sweetness and beauty upon the more arid and sombre experiences of human history.

The Apostle tells us that *"Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope"*. (Rom. 14. 4). The nation of Israel was a company of people chosen and separated from the world for a special purpose; not the least part of that purpose was the use of their customs as well as their experiences to illustrate, foreshadow, enact or dramatise things which were to be part of the life of a spiritual House of Israel, another class of people also chosen and separated from the world for a Divine purpose.

Most fascinating among the customs of these eastern peoples are the betrothal and marriage customs. Eastern customs are almost always opposite to those of the west, a fact which brings to mind a verse of the Word; *"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord"*. Without doubt there are lessons for us to learn by observation of these customs and the experiences which have been recorded, not only that we may have a strong hope for the future, but that our own lives may be influenced for good by them.

When the Apostle wrote, *"All these things happened unto them for examples, and were written for our admonition upon whom the ends of the ages are met"*, we cannot afford to neglect any of them, either the failures, the successes, or the joys. In the west a man chooses his own bride and marries whom and when he pleases. In the east a bride is chosen for him and the time of the marriage fixed by the parents of the couple. It was the custom for the mother to seek out a bride for her son while still a boy. When he was grown to manhood she then fixed the time of his marriage

in consultation with the bride's parents, and the young pair dutifully accepted their choice. Nor did a son fear his mother's choice, for, like mothers the world over, only the best is good enough.

In the case of a son bereaved of his mother before a betrothal could be arranged, the father had to do the seeking. As a man was not allowed into the apartments or social gatherings of women, he had to employ a reliable woman agent. This agent was known as a *Waaheel*. It was her special business to go about the homes and meeting places of eligible women looking for the qualities desired by a father for his son. She was plainly dressed and heavily veiled so that she attracted no personal attention. Whenever she entered the social gatherings of the young women they knew at once her errand. Each would hastily veil her face. The *Waaheel* however, with gentle firmness, would draw aside each veil, closely scanning every face. Having mentally noted looks, deportment and disposition, she next inquired of her parents her capabilities, her dowry, and their consent, should the qualities of father and son meet with their approval. Everything being mutually satisfactory the marriage contract was made and in due time the wedding took place.

The contract was not made in writing. The agent, acting on behalf of the bridegroom's father, placed fingers and thumbs tip to tip with those of the bride's father, each swearing solemnly to do their part in bringing the desired union to a successful conclusion. This form of making a covenant was highly honourable, the form no doubt used by David and Jonathan when making their pact of friendship before the Lord. It was the custom of this people, when defeating a treacherous foe, to cut off the thumbs and big toes, so that never again could he pursue a foe or sign a contract. In other words he was disgraced and dishonoured as one not to be trusted. To be called "the breaker of a trust" was to give a man a bad character. This form of contract was therefore as binding as any signed document.

The agent and the father having now made all secure, the son is next informed of the plans made on his behalf. The agent sings the praises of the bride-to-be, acting as go-between, carrying gifts and messages from one to the other, who are not allowed to meet until the wedding day. The bride adorns herself with the jewels sent to her by her unseen lover, cherishing his messages, eager to

learn from the agent all she can of her future home, position, and the husband with whom she will share them. A wise agent can, by faithful ministries, so enamour the pair with each other that they look forward with as much eagerness to the marriage as though they had been in personal contact throughout the waiting period. The friends of the bride gather with her as much as possible, assisting her in the making of the bridal garments. Together they sing the wedding song in anticipation of the forthcoming event, not merely because there is going to be this joyous event but because the bride is making herself ready.

The day having been decided upon, preparations are made to honour the marriage. The ceremonial is colourful, the preparations long and lavish. The marriage takes place at the bride's home, but the wedding feast is spread at the home of the bridegroom. Should the father be a man of wealth, the banquet will be a full scale full dress affair. Many guests of all ranks and classes will be bidden to attend the festivities, which often last several days according to the wealth of the father.

With each invitation goes a wedding garment, so none may excuse himself on the grounds of having no proper dress for the grand occasion. This garment is by no means a uniform. Each dress is chosen to suit the individuality of the wearer. In the case of a rich man or a King's son the dresses would be costly, of fine fabrics, often ornamented with pearls or precious stones. The dress is a wedding gift from the bridegroom to the invited guests. The non-appearance of an invited guest is an offence to the host, for hospitality is regarded in the East as the highest asset of a household, while to appear without the wedding dress, attired for preference in his own garments, is publicly to insult the host. Such an one is considered totally unfit to mingle with other guests. Not only is he forcibly ejected, he is locked up until the ceremonies are over, so that he cannot again offend by his conceited self-esteem.

All preparations being completed, the joyful households await the actual marriage and the arrival of the bridal pair with their retinue of attendants. The bride waits in readiness at her father's house, choicely attired in a dress of fine white linen, embroidered by her own hands and those of her friends who have assisted her in her getting ready. Over this she wears a loose, short coat of red or purple silk richly embroidered in thread of gold, often sewn with jewels which have been her bridegroom's gifts to her during the period of betrothal. The richness of her attire is always in accord with his wealth. On her feet she will have silver shoes, round her waist a girdle of chased silver; while rings, bracelets, long pendant

ear-rings and other adornments add to the beauty of her appearance. Thus arrayed she sits patiently upon a pile of gay silk cushions, eagerly awaiting the coming of the bridegroom. Her virgin companions are gathered about her in the same state of glad expectation. As the Eastern wedding takes place at night anytime between sundown and midnight, her watchers carry with them lamps, small oilburning clay vessels, with a cruse of replenishing oil tucked into the waist girdle, for the lights may be required for hours if the bridegroom is long in arriving. The hour is never fixed. It is just a case of waiting, all in readiness for whatever time he may arrive.

And the bridegroom, what of him? He is in a state of no less happy excitement. Suitably attired for the important event, the feast all in readiness, he sets out with a band of his men friends for the home of his bride. He does not take a direct route, for while on the way he and his followers stop to publish to all and sundry the good news of the marriage about to take place. With songs and joyful music he and his friends go up and down the highways and byways. If the bridal pair are well-known this may take some time. The virgin friends of the bride watching, alert and intent from the porch or housetop, may discern lights which herald his approach. At once the cry is raised; "*He comes! Behold the bridegroom*", but before they are on their way to escort him in, the lights recede, the sounds of song and music die away. Disappointed they return to their post while the bride within, her hopes having been raised by their shouts of joy, sinks again into an attitude of patient waiting. The bridegroom tarries; almost he had been at the door when his friends drew his attention to some group as yet out of hearing of the proclamation. As this is an important event of interest to all the neighbourhood, none must be overlooked. They may not be bidden to the feast but at least they are to hear that a marriage is to take place, and who are the participants. They may be nobody of note but so great is the joy of the bridegroom that all must be made aware of the long anticipated event.

Within and about the house an air of weariness creeps over the watchers. It grows late. The bridegroom tarries long, it seems to them, yet in reality he is coming; every moment of time he is on his way to the appointed place and union with his beloved. Once more the drowsy virgins hear the songs in the night. Getting closer now, they leap to their feet with the glad cry "*Behold the bridegroom! Go out and meet him*". It is midnight. The wait has been long. Half the bride's attendants have fallen asleep. While they pull themselves together they discover that their lamps are going

out. Some have gone out, and there is no oil in their cruse for filling up the vessels. In the smoke of smouldering wicks and the darkness of lamps gone out, the bewildered virgins cry in panic to the wide-awake for oil, but this they refuse to give. They are already on their way with their lights, on the path of the bridegroom, eager and determined to go in with him to the marriage. Bustling the careless to the oilmerchants to buy fresh supplies, they join the glad chorus of welcome. It is difficult to buy anything at midnight, and while the unready are on their fruitless errand, the bridegroom and all the attendants have gone in to the marriage and the door is shut, barred with the stout wooden bar which locks an Eastern door. When the master of the house has once shut the door in this fashion he opens again for none. The unfortunate latecomers arrive to find their knocking for admittance all in vain. They are left in the dark, out of the honours which are going on inside.

The bride with veiled face stands before her husband, while their friends are grouped around them with their musical instruments ready to break out into the rapturous wedding song which the bride and her maidens have so often sung in anticipation of this event. The bride's father holds above her head a drawn sword, signifying she is still under his filial protection. Her father gives her into the care and keeping of her bridegroom and the sword is lowered and sheathed, its purpose finished. Now the bridegroom lifts the veil from the face of his betrothed, draping it over his left

shoulder. For the first time these two meet face to face. No distance separates them. The veil is not only removed but by placing it upon his own shoulder the bridegroom has now assumed the full responsibility of a husband. The bride has now become a wife with all a wife's responsibilities and the sharer of her husband's name, wealth and position.

There is no wedding ring in the East, but the bride's dowry, the gift of her father, in gold or silver coins, is fashioned into a tiara. This is now placed upon her head, giving her the regal aspect of a queen. The long pendants of silver chains which meet artistically below the throat is the ornament which distinguished a married woman of the East. Her wealth and position were noted by the crown. When Jesus told of the woman who lost a piece of silver and searched diligently till she found it, he was no doubt speaking of a coin lost from the head-dress of a married woman. The loss not only spoiled the symmetry of her crown, it lost a part of her wealth.

Here we take leave of the queenly bride and her proud husband as they stand side by side, radiantly happy, their friends grouped about them, the rapturous wedding song filling the night with music. Presently they will all leave for his father's house, making melody all the way. There the feast is spread, and there a father waits to welcome home a son's bride, presented to him in all her spotless loveliness with pride and exceeding joy.

To be continued

The Tragedy of Babylon

Some cities of antiquity there have been, such as Ur of the Chaldees, Damascus, Haran, Antioch, and, of course, Jerusalem, which have at one time or another—perhaps at many times—been the scene of great manifestations of the Divine purposes, or noted for some important event in the history of the Divine Plan of Redemption, but not so Babylon. In all its long history it never contributed to the building of the Kingdom of God and never housed within its walls any who lived and worked mightily for God except for that twenty years or so when the saintly Daniel served as Chief Minister to its famous king, Nebuchadnezzar II. Babylon was founded in impiety, rebellion and godlessness. It existed, millennium after millennium, without God, and it disappeared at last, utterly, as will disappear utterly at the end all that is opposed to God and His righteousness. The history of Babylon is the history of evil, its rise, its seeming triumph, and its eventual utter overthrow.

The tragedy of Babylon was that in rejecting the true God its founders made themselves slaves to false gods. In their pride and hardness of heart they made themselves gods in their own image and likeness, re-shaping that knowledge of God and His Plan which had been handed down to them, to suit their new godless world. There was religion and worship, of a sort, in their schemes of things. They did not dispute the existence of God but they did deny His claim to their lives' endeavours and their worship. "*The Gate of God*" was the name of their city in their own tongue, and at an earlier period "*the Place of Life*", but it has never been either a place of life or a gate of God through all the long ages of its existence. It always made a place—an important place—for religion, but it was a religion of false gods, gods that deluded and blinded and intoxicated, gods that had no power to save and did not save. When the time for Babylon's fall was come, all men found that her boasted gods were altogether powerless to avert her destruction.

THE PARABLE OF THE SHEEP AND GOATS

Matt. 25. 31-46

The opening verse of this parable indicates the time of its application. It refers to the period of Christ's reign over the earth, from His assumption of power at the commencement of the Millennium to the cleansing of the world from the last trace of evil. "*When the Son of Man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory; and before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats*" (Matt. 25. 31-32). Jesus cast this parable against the background of Daniel's vision (Dan. 7. 9-10) in which that prophet saw the "Ancient of Days" seated upon a throne of splendour with myriads assembled before Him for judgment, one "like the Son of Man" coming with the clouds of heaven to be brought before Him, and the kingship of earth being formally committed to that Son of Man and his companions, the "people of the saints of the Most High" that they might possess the kingdom for ever. Meanwhile the evil powers and institutions of the old world were being destroyed in a great holocaust of fire. Jesus knew himself to be that "Son of Man" and his disciples and those that should afterwards believe on His Name to be the "people of the saints of the Most High" that were to be joined with Him in that Kingdom, and in this parable He set down the purpose and the character of his kingship over the nations during the Age of his glory.

The disciples must have understood this parable more clearly than any other parable. They were so accustomed to this view of the Messianic reign. How often in the Temple services would they join with intense feeling in the inspiring strains of the twenty-fourth Psalm "*Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty...*" How they must have conned over the mystic vision of Zechariah "*Behold the man whose name is the BRANCH... he shall build the temple of the Lord; and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne; and he shall be a priest upon his throne*" (Zech. 6. 12-13). Jewish literature of the date of the First Advent is full of such references, and Jesus himself must have been thoroughly familiar with them. It is thought that the very phraseology of this parable was suggested to his mind by passages in the Book of Enoch,

a book with which He would certainly be well acquainted: "*On that day mine Elect One shall sit on the throne of glory and shall try their works... and I will transform the earth and make it a blessing... for I have provided and satisfied with peace my righteous ones, and have caused them to dwell before me: but for the sinners there is judgment impending with me, so that I shall destroy them from the face of the earth*". "*And the Lord of Spirits seated him upon the throne of his glory, and the spirit of righteousness was poured out upon him, and the word of his mouth slays all the sinners... and they shall be downcast of countenance, and pain shall seize them, when they see the Son of Man sitting on the throne of his glory*" (I Enoch 45. 3-6 and 62. 2-5). Another passage in the same work, quoted by Jude, runs "*And behold! he cometh with ten thousands of his holy ones to execute judgment upon all, and to destroy all the ungodly; and to convict all flesh of all the works of their ungodliness which they have ungodly committed, and of all the hard things which ungodly sinners have spoken against him*" (I Enoch 1. 9: compare Jude 14-15). Here is a reference that parallels the various sayings of Jesus regarding the "angels" or messengers that will be with him at his coming, the members of his Church, raised from the sleep of death, or changed "in the twinkling of an eye" as the case may be, united with him and revealed with him to the world in glory.

The vision of the Great White Throne of Revelation 20. 11 is parallel to that of Daniel 7 and to this parable. In Revelation there is the same standing of the nations, the "dead, small and great", before the Throne, the same judgment and separation between good and evil, and the same condemnation of sin and sinners. These three passages between them afford a wonderfully vivid picture of the work of judgment that is carried on throughout the Millennial Age, a work that divides and separates men into two classes, those who choose righteousness and life, and those who choose unrighteousness and death.

The basis of the selection, feeding or not feeding the hungry, clothing or failing to clothe the naked, and so on, is an allusion to the very practical ideas held by thinking men in Jesus' day as to what constituted fitness or unfitness for eternal life. Such "good works" have always been features of the religious life of true Jews. There is a

parallel to the Lord's words in the "Secrets of Enoch" (not to be confused with the Book of Enoch just now mentioned, and usually known as 2 Enoch to distinguish it from that book), a work which was known to pious Jews during His lifetime, or at any rate shortly thereafter. The book itself is of no particular value to Christians; it presents the truths of religion as they appeared to orthodox Jews of the First Century and was to them what many theological works are to us to-day; and was strongly coloured with Greek and Oriental philosophies. But the passage in question is interesting: it describes Enoch's visit to Paradise, in the third heaven (compare Paul's use of this term when writing to the Corinthians) and his guides say to him "This place, O Enoch, is prepared for the righteous who endure every kind of attack in their lives from those who afflict their souls: who turn away their eyes from unrighteousness, and accomplish a righteous judgment, *and also give bread to the hungry, and clothe the naked, and raise the fallen, and assist the orphans who are oppressed, and who walk without blame before the face of the Lord, and serve him only. For them this place is prepared as an eternal inheritance*". The likeness of these words to the parable is obvious. The following reference to the sinners is also highly significant. They are said to be *cast into hell in the third heaven*. That is a fitting description of that death which comes to sinners in or at the end of the Millennial Age, the third heaven of which Paul spoke. "And I (Enoch) said, Woe, woe, how terrible is this place! And the men said to me: This place, Enoch, is prepared for those who do not honour God: who commit evil deeds on earth... *oppressing the poor and spoiling them of their possessions... who when they might feed the hungry, allow them to die of famine: who when they might clothe them, strip them naked*..." (2 Enoch 9 and 10). If in fact Jesus was familiar with the book and did take these passages as the basis of his parable it is easy to see how readily his hearers would grasp his meaning, and connect the "sheep" and "goats" who "did" or "did it not" with the final judgment upon righteous and evil men. At any rate the similarity of thought shows that the sentiment portrayed was one that was quite familiar to Jewish ears.

In the parable the "sheep" are those who manifest the practical Christian virtues toward their fellows—feeding the hungry and thirsty, sheltering the stranger, clothing the naked, caring for the sick and delivering those in bondage. It has been pointed out that of the seven obligations laid upon the Christian in the New Testament only one—visiting the fatherless—is omitted in this parable. The reason is not hard to discern—there

will be no fatherless in the Millennium! All will have been restored to conscious life by the Redeemer, Jesus, and all may thenceforth become sons of God by reconciliation to him. But there will be many hungry, naked and in prison, at first. Men, returning from the grave, will have the same characters and dispositions that were theirs at death, and the result will be that, although physically whole, many will still be mentally and morally sick, in prison by reason of bondage to their past vices and depravity, naked as respects fitness for the new world into which they have come, and whether they realise the fact or not, hungry and thirsty for the blessings of life and knowledge that the Kingdom is designed to give them. There is a link here with the Parable of the Good Samaritan; it will be remembered that Jesus gave that parable in answer to a question "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" and the Samaritan who undertook the care and healing of the distressed wayfarer was the one shown to be worthy of such. So it will be in the Millennial Age; the man who is making progress toward perfection and harmony with God will be actively employed in helping and assisting his fellows in every conceivable way; the selfish and the sinner will be indifferent to such service and Jesus in the parable points to this as a touchstone by which the true state of the heart can be indicated.

The question put both by sheep and goats "*When saw we thee an hungred, or athirst...*" and so on, is a rhetorical one, put into the mouths of the characters in order to throw into prominence the essential principle of these "good works"; inasmuch as ye did it—or did it not—unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye did it—or did it not—unto me. Our Lord's concern for those He came to seek and to save is such that every service or disservice rendered to them He feels as if rendered to Him. More; since He gave his own life, at the cost of great suffering, for the salvation of men, and is to establish his thousand year reign on earth for the purpose of persuading as many as can possibly be persuaded to "turn from sin to serve the living God", it follows that every service or disservice rendered to men in that day is either a help or a hindrance to the execution of the King's plans, and therefore can be aptly said to be done, or not done, unto him. No one in that Age can escape working, either for or against the purposes of God—and all will be judged accordingly.

"*Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, 'Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world'*" (vs. 34). This "kingdom" is not the same as the Millennial Kingdom of Christ. *That*

is a kingdom in which all men are under discipline, and all, good and bad alike, are present in that kingdom and must perforce remain so until they have come to a full knowledge of the truth and made their choice between "life and death, good and evil". This is a kingdom entrance into which is granted only to the proved righteous, to those who have passed the test and are in no sense unclean. It thus corresponds to the Holy City of Rev. 21 and 22, into which nothing unclean or that defileth will ever enter. It is the kingdom of the earth *after* the Millennial Age, which men inherit as kings in their own right, living, moving and having their being in God the Father and conducting their own affairs on a basis of equality with each other in harmony with the laws of righteousness.

"Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, 'Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels' (vs. 41). Here we have the antithesis to the Holy City, the lake of fire of Revelation 19 and 20, symbolic

of utter destruction. The allusion is, of course, to the valley of Gehenna outside Jerusalem, where perpetual fires destroyed the refuse of the city. Jesus took the illustration from the apocalyptic literature of his day, and his hearers would realise quite naturally what He meant. The final verse of the parable perhaps makes this more clear *"These shall go away into everlasting punishment"*, where "punishment" is *kolasin*, disciplinary restraint, and not *timora*, which is the word that indicates penal infliction in the sense of the English word punishment. *Kolasin*, derived from the verb *kolazo*, which means to lop or prune trees, hence to check, curb or restrain, is very descriptive of the purpose of God with irrecoverable sinners. "They shall be as though they had not been"; they will be "cut off from among the people" and so the expression "everlasting" (or enduring) punishment can be accurately rendered "final cutting-off". That cutting-off is as permanent and everlasting as is the eternal life of the righteous mentioned in the same verse.

Into the New Year

Back of us lies the travelled road; before us the uncharted pathway of the New Year. We wish one another a Happy New Year, and happiness should be increasing each year if we know its true meaning and go the right way to secure it.

How should the worth of the passing year be estimated? Surely not in material things, but in spiritual values! Have we grown richer in the fruit of the Spirit? Do we know Christ better than we did a year ago? Does He mean more to us, and things less? What do we plan for this year as the chief end of effort? Are we determined that it shall be a year of closer accord with the Master and the purpose of God in us? Shall life be lifted above self-regard to the joyous plane of living for others? If we have found the real meaning of life then living should be a worth-while thing to the last moment, even though it be marked by pain and disappointment, by loss and sorrow, as for most of us it must be. If we have learned the real values we will not need to hide from ourselves the fact that we are growing older by the count of weeks and months, for the real values are eternal. We are not hurrying toward an hour when everything must be dropped, but rather toward the time when hope will be realised, faith may lay hold of its richest treasures, hope come into its full inheritance. For us, life is not narrowing toward the grave, it is broadening toward eternity. There are songs for the thoughtful in the passing of the year,

remembering God's leading in the old, and laying triumphant hold upon his promises for the new.

The infallible recipe for happiness, then, is to do good, and the infallible recipe for doing good is to abide in Christ. Joy is a fruit, and like all fruits must be grown. The Christian graces come under the law of cause and effect. No one can get joy merely by prayer, although that contributes; it is one of the fruits of Christian life, and must be grown. No man can make things grow; he can arrange circumstances and fulfil conditions, but the growing is done by God. Causes and effects are eternal arrangements, but man can place himself in fulfilling conditions of growth. No violent over-strained exertions are necessary to a noble life, nothing greater than simple faithfulness.

One thing more. If seeking to lose our lives in the service of Christ means practically living for others, let us live by the day. Some of us try to grasp too much of life at a time; we think of it as a whole instead of a day. The only way to make a radiant day is to make each hour bright with the lustre of approved fidelity, keeping the days as they pass pure with useful, holy living. Each day is one white page open before us, to fill in as a record of duty or victory. Let us remember our God, and remember those in need about us, to stretch forth a helping hand, and keep our heart open toward Heaven.

(The "Herald of Christ's Kingdom")

from which issue?

The Historical Background of the Book of Ruth

The Book of Ruth attaches no dates to the events it records; the only indication of when they occurred lie in the statements "*in the days when the Judges ruled*" (Ruth 1. 1) and that Boaz, a principal figure in the story, was the son of Salmon who was prominent in the tribe of Judah at the conquest, the entry into the Promised Land. Hence the story has its setting during the first generation of Israel's occupancy of Canaan. It is possible though to fill in this general picture quite a bit by a process of deduction from allusions in the story and based upon Scriptural principles.

The first time-period noted at this stage of Israel's history is the invasion and oppression of Chushan-Rishathaim the Hittite ruler of Aram-Naharaim, which is stated to have lasted eight years (Jud. 3. 8), but how long after the conquest is not said. Under the terms of the Mosaic Covenant, however, invasion and subjection to enemies was one of the penalties of apostasy. Apostasy reared its ugly head during the later lifetime of Joshua, was suppressed, but returned in force after his death and that of "*the elders who overlived Joshua*" and "*all that generation*" (Josh. 24. 31. Jud. 2. 10-11). Joshua died thirty years after the conquest aged 110; not many of his generation were likely to have survived him by more than 20 years and this gives abundant time for the emergence of the "*new generation which knew not the Lord nor yet the works which he had done for Israel*" (Jud. 2. 10). Hence the beginning of the Chushan oppression can be put at say year 50 from the Conquest. It could hardly have been less, and it could hardly have been more, for it was followed by Othniel's rule as judge for 40 years; Othniel would have been a young man in year 9 of the Conquest when he married Achsah (Jud. 1. 13) but he had just led the victorious assault on Kirjath-Sepher so could hardly have been less than 25; this would make him 125 at his death. Such age corresponds well with some of his contemporaries; Moses at 120, Aaron at 123, Miriam at 137, Joshua at 110, not to speak of the redoubtable Caleb who at 85 had the strength of a 40 year old and was still the chief leader of the army, (Josh. 14. 10-11) besides being the father of the (probably) teen-age Achsah.

The famine which decided Elimelech to move into Moab (Ruth 1. 1) would also have been a penalty under the Mosaic Covenant for apostasy so that that must be taken as occurring at the time of, or probably some years before, the Chushan

oppression, say year 45 of the Conquest. At this time Elimelech, with his wife Naomi and his sons Mahlon and Chilion, emigrated to Moab in search of better living. This action brands Elimelech as a man of no faith or an apostate, or he would not so soon after the Settlement have abandoned the land of Divine promise.

On this basis the Chushan oppression ended in year 58 of the Conquest by the military prowess of Othniel, who delivered the nation and assumed the rule. This deliverance, however, again under the terms of the Covenant, can only have been because the nation had repented and returned to God, and this is in fact so stated in Jud. 3. 9-11. Likewise the news coming to Naomi, away in Moab, that "*the Lord had visited his people in giving them bread*" (Ruth 1. 6) implied the same thing; the famine was over and the land was giving its increase in consequence of the nation's return to the Lord. Naomi, perhaps unlike her husband, was definitely a woman of faith, and it only needed the death of, first, her husband, and then her two sons to decide her to return to the land of Israel.

Elimelech had died in Moab and at an unspecified time after his death his two sons had married Moabite girls and had ten years' married life (Ruth 1. 4) and then, both of them, also died. Ruth, one of the widows, is described throughout the story by a word which means a maiden or a young woman so that at this time she could not have been more than in her late twenties. If married at 18 she would have been 28. On the assumption that the two husbands were say 21 at marriage they could have been born in year 35 of the Conquest and their father Elimelech in year 10. Thus he was of the very generation of which it is said they knew not the works the Lord had done.

With Ruth's arrival at Bethlehem at, say, the age of 28, Boaz comes into the story. Boaz was the son of Salmon (Ruth 4. 21) and was also a blood relative of the dead Elimelech (Ruth 2. 3). Salmon married Rahab of Jericho at the time of the Conquest so he must then have been a young man; his father Nahshon was "prince" or head of the tribe of Judah at Sinai (Num. 1. 7) but since Nahshon must have been well over 60 at the Exodus (his sister Elisheba was the wife of Aaron) he certainly died during the wanderings. This would allow for Salmon being say 30 at the Conquest; Rahab, both from the nature of her calling

in Jericho and the fact that her father, mother, brothers and sisters but no husband are mentioned could well be as young as 20. According to 1 Chron. 2. 51 & 54 Salmon was the founder of Bethlehem and his descendants founded at least four family clans in the surrounding districts so that Rahab must have had at least five or six sons, of whom Boaz was probably the youngest, both to fit the time scale and because he was still unmarried. On this basis Boaz could have been born to Salmon and Boaz after 35 years of marriage when Rahab was 55; this would mean that Boaz was 31 when he met Ruth.

Boaz was related to, "*of the kindred of*" (Ruth 2. 3) Elimelech. Hardly his brother, or this would have been so stated; more likely his cousin. It is of course highly probable that Nahshon had several sons although Salmon is the only one whose name is recorded. If Salmon had a brother born during the wanderings and somewhat older or younger, Elimelech could have been born to that brother in about year 10 of the Conquest, about the same time as Salmon's firstborn, so that Mahlon, born to Elimelech about the same time as Boaz, say year 35, would be the latter's nephew. Under the Levirate Law which obliged Mahlon's nearest living kinsman to marry Ruth and raise an heir to Mahlon's property such nearest kinsman, in the absence of living brothers, would be a first cousin. If it is postulated that Elimelech had a younger brother—who had not left the land during the famine—born about year 15, that brother's firstborn son might well have appeared after Elimelech's family had gone to Moab. This would account for Naomi's apparent ignorance of this individual, who as Mahlon's cousin was the "nearest kinsman" with the prior right, and her belief that Boaz was the nearest. Naomi would have known Salmon as the brother of her father-in-law and Boaz, as a child, before her emigration. This "nearest kinsman", cousin to Mahlon, would then be about 21 at the time of the story, old enough for marriage but perhaps not too well dis-

posed towards a woman nearly ten years his senior, and concerned withal as to the possible effect upon his own inheritance.

On the supposition that Elimelech was the eldest son of the unnamed son of Nahshon, any further descendants of Mahlon's generation in that line would be too young for marriage, so that upon the refusal of the only eligible cousin the duty passed from that family line into the line of Salmon. Presumably the older sons of Salmon were already married so that upon Boaz, as the only unmarried son, uncle to Mahlon although of about the same age, devolved the obligation of the *gaal*, the kinsman who should marry the deceased man's widow, and this is what Boaz did do.

Summing up: the famine and Elimelech's migration to Moab was about 45 years after the entry into the land, some 15 years after Joshua's death, and the invasion of Chushan-Rishathaim 5 years later. Ruth and Naomi returned to Bethlehem 16 years after that when Ruth was 28 and Boaz 31. Boaz was the cousin of Elimelech although 25 years younger hence the uncle of Mahlon whilst the unnamed kinsman was Mahlon's cousin. Obed was the first-born son of Boaz and Ruth but could have been born at any time in the ensuing 30 years by which time Naomi, who took him in her arms, need have been no more than 80.

The value of this kind of Biblical deduction resides only in the testimony it offers to the historic accuracy and the interdependence of Bible narratives. If the Book of Ruth was merely a work of fiction or at best a compilation of ancient legends made, as has been claimed, in the days of King David, there would most certainly be points which could not be reconciled with other Bible books written at other times. As it is the narratives can be shown to fit quite reasonably into the framework of Bible history which is only what is to be expected if, as is declared by St. Peter, the compilation of these writings was guided and overruled by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Note on Luke 9.53

"*And they did not receive him, because his face was set to go to Jerusalem*" (Luke 9. 53).

All Palestinians looked alike in features and in dress, in that day, just as to-day, and there was no physical difference between Samaritan and Jew then, just as there is little between Arab and native Israeli to-day. It was the fact that the little band was headed for Jerusalem that betrayed their Jewish nationality. The racial animosity that smouldered between Samaritan and Jew overpowered the proverbial Eastern hospitality which

normally was extended to all travellers at night, and caused them to refuse lodging to the pilgrims. It was not that the Samaritans wished to "speed the travellers on their way". Recognising this hostility, the disciples, imbued, we fear, with the spirit of retaliation, wished to call down fire from heaven to consume them, and so gave opportunity for a reproof which is often needed to-day as much as then: "*Ye know not what spirit ye are of; the Son of Man is come not to destroy men's lives, but to save them*".

THE FIFTIETH PSALM

This is a psalm of judgment, a grand yet solemn anthem declaiming God's purpose to execute all his good pleasure among the sons of men and to make an end of sin. Those—and they are many—who see in this noble psalm nothing more than an expression of Divine displeasure upon the formalism of Israel's worship in Old Testament days, and of condemnation upon the irreverent and impious, fail to grasp its essentially prophetic doctrinal teaching. Asaph was a prophet; we know that from 2 Chron. 29. 30, and in his position as chief of the choral services at the Temple in the days of David he must have spoken, as did all the prophets, of the wonders that remained yet unrevealed in the Plan of God.

The key to the interpretation of the psalm lies in verse 5 *"Gather my saints together unto me, those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice"*. The word "saints" really means, literally, "holy ones" in Old Testament times as well as during this Gospel Age; that is undisputed. There were many faithful souls in every generation of Israel from the days of the wilderness wanderings onward. But this fifth verse with its command, following as it does the previous verses which tell of God arising to judgment, does not fit any historical event in Israel except in a poetic sense. Every time that God arose in judgment upon Israel the nation was scattered, and the "holy ones" were not exempt from the troubles that fell upon their more unfaithful fellows. The greatest judgment of all in the time of Christ resulted in a scattering that has not been remedied yet. Nothing of "gathering" here. It is when we look to the work of this Gospel Age that we find a gathering of saints consequent upon an arising of God to judgment. "And he shall send his angels, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other" (Matt. 24. 31). Whatever meaning the psalm may have borne to Israel in the days when its words floated upon the wings of music ascending from the Temple courts, therefore, it is this prophetic interpretation that has the deepest lesson for us now.

"The mighty God, even the Lord, hath spoken, and called the earth from the rising of the sun unto the going down thereof." (vs. 1).

The scene is set at Pentecost, when God is about to commence his great work. For fourteen centuries He has been bearing with the weakness, the idolatry, the hardness of heart, of his chosen earthly people, the nation to which He had con-

finied himself to the exclusion of all others, and now the end of that order of things had come. "You only have I known of all the families of the earth" He had said, but now He decrees that the word of salvation is to go to all men everywhere without limit of race or colour. "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to the whole creation" Jesus had just commanded his disciples, and here in this opening verse of the psalm, Asaph the prophet has seen the same thing in vision. "From the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my name shall be great among the Gentiles" another prophet was to declare five hundred years later (Mal. 1. 11) and Asaph had but anticipated that splendid declaration. This first verse, then, pictures the call to repentance and dedication of life to God that went out first of all when Peter stood up with the eleven. In a very real sense it was on that day that God called the earth from the rising of the sun to the going down thereof.

"Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined" (vs. 2).

Mount Zion was the site of the king's palace and, until the Temple was erected, the place where the Ark of the Covenant remained. It early came to symbolise the whole city, and this eloquent verse tells of God being manifested in the visible splendour of his presence in his own city. The effulgent radiance of the *Shekinah* glory has come out from the city to be at once a source of enlightenment and strength to his own people and an agency of terror and judgment to the sinners. God has come down to dwell in his own city and his glory is commencing to be manifest upon the earth. "Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the great king" (Psa. 48. 2). That tribute is not yet literally completely true, and cannot be until the Millennial Age when evil has been banished and men are walking in the light of the law of the Lord, but it is in process of becoming true inasmuch that we, the consecrated followers of Jesus, have already seen and rejoice in that Divine light which is shining forth from the spiritual Jerusalem. Men may deride and scorn the idea; like the enemies of Israel in the days of Jeremiah they may "pass by and clap their hands at thee; they hiss and wag their head at the daughter of Jerusalem, saying, 'Is this the city that men call The perfection of beauty, The joy of the whole earth?'" (Lam. 2. 15) but the fire of that

judgment and the light of that knowledge will yet reach all men and all will be compelled to acknowledge that truly there is a God that judgeth in the earth. This shining forth of God from Zion, from Jerusalem, of verse 2, then, well depicts the gradual manifestation of God to men during this Gospel Age, from Pentecost until now. During all that time He has been manifest to the Church by the medium of his Holy Spirit which illuminates and leads and has been manifest to the world through the medium of his Church, his "witnesses" in the earth. The extent to which God has shined into the hearts of the unsanctified during this Age, both for enlightenment and for judgment, is dependent upon the faithfulness of his own sanctified ones in their privilege and responsibility of ambassadorship for Christ. "Now then" says Paul "we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech by us: we pray, in Christ's stead, 'be ye reconciled to God'" (2 Cor. 5: 10).

But although this has been an age of enlightenment, both to Church and world in different ways, and the shining forth out of Zion throughout the age has been one of continuously expanding and brightening day, there is also to be a great blazing forth in judgment at the Age's end. "The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thes. 1: 7). This shining out of Zion, proceeding through the Gospel Age, culminates in a fearful revelation of the *Shekinah* glory against all sin and sinful things and sinful men, just as it did in the wilderness when Korah and his companions defied the living God, and the glory of the Lord went out from the Tabernacle and destroyed them. (Num. 16). "Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence: a fire shall devour before him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about him. He shall call to the heaven from above, and to the earth, that he may judge his people" (vs. 3-4).

This is Armageddon, the rising up of God at the end of the Age to "avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth" (Rev. 6: 10), and to vindicate his own Name and the honour of his plan. "Our God shall come"—can there be any more thrilling, inspiring certainty? Israel looked for him to come in person, descending upon the Mount of Olives in visible shape (Zech. 14: 4) striding the two sides of the riven mountain like some gigantic Colossus. "The Lord my God shall come, and all the holy ones with thee" cries Zechariah at the sight, calling to mind the traditional words ascribed to Enoch the patriarch "Behold the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince (convict) all that are ungodly among

them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him" (Jude 15). That was Israel's expectation, but then Israel in that day knew nothing of Christ. We know, now, that it is the Lord Jesus Christ who comes as the representative of his Father to reign over the Kingdom in his own right, for "his right it is" (Ezek. 21: 27) and that the light of the glory of his appearing is not one that is seen by the natural eyes or that appeals to the natural senses, but one that is evidenced by the signs of the times, the signs of his presence that is none the less real because his person is hidden from our sight just as surely as was the glory of the Father hidden behind the literal *Shekinah* that at times of judgment did manifest itself in the sight of men from within the sanctuary.

The expression "judge his people" can be taken in two ways. It can mean that God has come to judge his people for their own misdeeds; on the other hand, that God has come to judge his people's cause, and mete out retribution to their oppressors. The nature of the next two verses appears to indicate the latter as the sense in which the expression is used here. God is calling to the heavens and the earth to witness that He is now about to vindicate his people's faith and to deliver them—here, in these closing years of this Gospel Age. At Pentecost He called the earth; during the intervening centuries He shined forth from Zion; now at the time of judgment in Armageddon He calls to witness what He is going to do. And this is what He declares, this is the commandment that He gives forth.

"Gather my saints together unto me; those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice. And the heavens shall declare his righteousness; for God is judge himself" (vs. 5-6).

Who are these "saints"? It is not until the ending of the Gospel Age that any of God's holy ones are "gathered". Until then, in all the long centuries of the reign of sin and death, their history has been one of oppression, persecution and scattering. But now comes a time when they are to be "gathered". Is this a gathering in the flesh or must its fulfilment be found only in the general assembly beyond the veil?

The intimate relation of the command to the coming judgment shows that it must relate in the first place to a gathering taking place on earth. The picture is based upon the inauguration of Israel's nationhood with their covenant at Sinai. The devout Israelite, following the words of the Temple service, would turn his thoughts back to Moses and the cry of the people "All that the Lord hath spoken will we do, and be obedient" as the Levites intoned this verse about holy ones

and a covenant by sacrifice. To the Israelites, the Law under which they came at Sinai was a Covenant by sacrifice and they themselves were God's holy ones, a peculiar people, a chosen nation, a royal priesthood. It was as a united people, separated from the nations of earth, that they faced the hardships of the later wilderness experiences in their journey to the Promised Land. That picture points the doctrinal teaching for us in this verse. The "gathering" is the separation of God's consecrated ones from the affairs and interests of earth to serve the provisions of this "covenant by sacrifice". We who are Christ's have entered into a covenant just so surely as did Israel—not a Law Covenant as was theirs, a Covenant of which the criterion is faith rather than works, but nevertheless a covenant demanding sacrifice in even greater degree than did Israel's. Nothing that is worth having in God's great Plan is attainable without sacrifice, renunciation, endurance.

The gathering, then, takes place on earth and it is a visible evidence to men that Divine judgment has commenced. The signs were very evident in Israel's day in the wilderness. From Sinai onwards the Lord marched before them with power and signs and wonders, and the fame thereof travelled far and wide and struck terror into the hearts of heathen nations. So it is to be again; in these last days the gathering of the saints together—to God, not just into one or another sect or fellowship; "Gather my saints together unto me"—has been proceeding. Those of like mind have come together and have found themselves separated from the world. The union between all such saints may not be readily apparent on earth—differences of policy, of outlook, of doctrine, of service, militate against the attainment of full fellowship between all who are the Lord's saints—but it is completely apparent in heaven. And that unity which is recorded in heaven is reflected back to us on earth so that all who are truly Christ's find themselves in heart oneness with each other even although they may abide in different spheres

of normal worship, fellowship or service. There is a "unity of the spirit" which transcends the boundaries of sect or organisation and it is *that* unity which is the fulfilment of this command "Gather my saints together unto me".

So we come to the triumphant climax. The heavens shall declare God's righteousness. Is not that an apt description of the work of the Millennial Age? When this gathering of saints has been completed and consummated in their "change" to spiritual conditions and eternal association with Christ their Lord, the stage is set for the final phase of God's Plan so far as this earth is concerned. Then it will be abundantly demonstrated that God is judge himself. "*Then judgment shall dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness remain in the fruitful field; and the work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever*" (Isa. 32. 16-17). "*Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other; Truth shall spring out of the earth, and righteousness shall look down from heaven*" (Psa. 85. 10-11). This is the glorious outcome of the coming forth of God to judgment, and the devouring fire that went before him will resolve itself into a benignant radiance in the light of which all nations shall come and worship before God, and coming, find the way of peace.

Here the song ends, with a "*Selah*"—an impressive pause in the choral rendering whilst priests and people alike remained silent for a few moments to contemplate the glory of the things about which they had just been singing. When the strain is again taken up, it is on a different subject. There is much in that homily, from verse 7 to the end of Psalm 50, that could afford scope for reflection and instruction to us; but it is the majestic picture of God's purposes in the first six verses, up to that "*Selah*" that should inspire and enthuse us to be more diligent than ever before, that we might be of those who are "gathered together unto him".

ENTERING INTO REST

How many of us have really entered into rest? How many of us have actually realised and put into operation the "*rest that remaineth to the people of God*"? For when we have entered into rest we have ceased from our own works, "*as God did from his*" (Heb. 4. 9-10).

Let us not fall into the erroneous belief that the rest which we have in Christ Jesus involves inactivity. It is rather a "rest in work". We go on

labouring for the fruits of works which all of us, as "trees of righteousness, of the Lord's planting" should be bringing forth, but we also have the "rest" which enables us to cease from our own works of righteousness, because we know that the Lord alone is our righteousness. As we proceed further along the glorious pathway that has opened up to us, we shall come to see that He is our "all in all", the supplier of every need and of our

every virtue, by his "free gift" of grace. We have donned the Robe of Righteousness, and are "covered" by this glorious symbol; we have come, through much tribulation, many vicissitudes and temptations, aye and through many failures and disappointments, to depend entirely upon our Saviour. We come to see, as David saw, that everything we offer in our "consecration" that is of true value or worth is His alone, and we can say, as did David, *"Of thine own hath we given thee."* (1 Chron. 29. 14).

This realisation keeps us humble; it is only through true humility that Christ can work in our hearts. Thus, when we realise how helpless we are of ourselves to achieve salvation, and that we can only trust him to do all for us, trusting in that mighty power that "worketh in us," we find that He can work unimpeded. Not that we do not co-operate with him, for we go on trying to fight the battle against spiritual enemies, but we know that He alone can conquer for us, and He alone is the victor.

Any self-righteousness that creeps in unawares our Captain of Salvation can speedily crush in us, for were He to leave us to ourselves for but a fleeting second, how swiftly should we fall into the old sins and cry out "Lord help me," and we soon find what we are without him. He is never far from us, however, and is gracious to the cry of his "little ones" who trust in him, comes to us in our necessity and lifts us up once more as He did Peter, when he was too impetuous of his own strength, and the waves threatened to overwhelm him. *"O ye of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?"* was the gentle rebuke. Yes, He lets us try our strength often, but He knows that we cannot achieve anything without him, for He himself has said *"Without me ye can do nothing"*. So by many falls and many upliftings we come to realise the Presence of the Divine Guest in our hearts, and, although we are often very ashamed that He should see and hear us as we are, and feel like saying, as Peter said, *"Depart from me, O Lord, for I am a sinful man,"* yet we know that we cannot do without him, and, as all that He is to us, all that He has done for us and is ever doing for us, is borne upon our slow hearts more and more, we shall say

*"O come to my heart, Lord Jesus,
There is room in my heart for Thee."*

As the preciousness and greatness of his "free gift" to each and every one of us is more and more revealed to us, we shall never cease to praise and thank God *"for his unspeakable gift."*

How humbly, then, shall we offer him our all, and say, with David, *"Who am I and what is my people that I should be able to offer so willingly*

after this sort." So by leaning upon our Beloved Bridegroom and Head, we shall be brought safely to our desired haven. Meantime we have, as we see, already entered into rest. For we have now ceased from our own works and are "resting" in the merits of the death and passion of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ—just trusting in him and trying his works to do. Though we fall a thousand times, we shall still get up and go forward because we are "under cover"; only thus shall we see our goal.

"Under the shadow of thy wings will I make my refuge until these calamities be overpast." So David trusted, and he was not ashamed, and we may likewise trust and know that we shall not be ashamed.

Let us, therefore, as St. Paul says, "fear" lest any of us should come short of enjoying this rest that is promised to all who believe. (Heb. 4. 1).

May we endeavour to bring every thought into captivity to Christ, and, above all, let us watch most anxiously lest any thoughts of self-righteousness creep in unawares, pounce on them and cast them out, for we must ever remember that the "free gift" came upon all men unto justification of life. As Nature teaches us that the flowers, shrubs, trees, etc. have each their allotted time of blossoming and fruitage, so likewise shall God's children *"blossom and bud and fill the face of the earth with fruit,"* but, each in their own due time. This will help us to be patient with those who may hinder and obstruct us, and we shall learn at last to love our enemies and pray for those who spitefully use us, for at long last by God's grace continually poured into our hearts, as oil into empty vessels, his love will flow into us, and we shall be enabled to love him and to love one another, as He has given us commandment to do, because we know that He loved us all so much that He gave his life for all the world and that all are his brethren.

"For he that sanctifieth and they that are sanctified are all of one, for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren". As the *"first fruits are holy so also is the lump holy."*

"Blessed is the man whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered" (Ps. 32. 1).

Blessed indeed are we who have entered into rest. Let us do all we can to help other weary wanderers to find that "Rest" which He is waiting to give to all who come to him, as He has given to us, for He longs to bring to happiness and blessedness all his blood bought children.

*"Other refuge have I none,
Hangs my helpless soul on Thee:
Leave, ah leave me not alone,
Still support and comfort me."*

THE PRINCIPLES OF DIVINE DELIVERANCE

"Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them out of their distress . . ."

The noble strains of the 107th Psalm come very readily to the mind as soon as one thinks of Divine intervention. That song of praise is a wonderful rhapsody, with the goodness of God for its theme and the story of faithless Israel as its background. Time after time they left Him and went their way, but just so soon as they manifested sincere repentance and cried unto Him for succour, His ear was open to their plea and He reached down from Heaven to save them.

It is not only in the history of Israel that we discern the principles upon which God acts in saving those who are in sore need. We have the thrilling stories of stalwart heroes of faith, and, too, of men whose faith was not so deeply rooted but who called upon their God when the experiences of life had taught the needed lesson; we have the story of the dispensations and the marks left upon history by the "stately steppings of our God." There is much in the way of material to be explored in the course of our investigation.

It is sometimes suggested that the purpose of Armageddon is to reduce mankind to a condition of utter despair in which they will be ready to accept proffered help from Heaven to restore order and tranquillity upon earth, and that, in the final phase of this same time of trouble, Israel, regathered in unbelief, hard pressed by the nations of the world, will be miraculously delivered by direct intervention of God; that this miracle will open their eyes and that it will produce an immediate national conversion. The conclusions arrived at in this article point to another factor that should be taken into account—stated here as a general principle, it is that *God can only deliver when there is faith and belief*. Before Israel can be physically delivered, they must be nationally converted.

Our key scriptures for this study are Rom. 10, 21 and Heb. 3, 18-19. "*All day long*," declares God, in the former scripture, "*all day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people*." Paul is quoting from the 65th chapter of Isaiah, a chapter in which the prophet shows how impossible it is for God to deal with a people who deliberately turn away. The writer to the Hebrews, in his mournful recapitulation of the shortcomings of Israel, declared sadly "We see that they *could not enter in because of unbelief*." (Heb. 3, 19). As one reads the stirring

story of speedy entrance to the land of milk and honey, and perceives how quickly the veil of unbelief blotted out the fair vision of Canaan, one senses something of the tragedy which overtook this people who failed to realise that the first essential to the receiving of Divine bounty is—faith!

Right at the outset this principle was laid down. Israel in the wilderness stood in great need of deliverance from the native tribes of Canaan. If they were to inherit the land these peoples must be removed. God promised them that they would have no need to fight; He Himself would cast out those great nations, *if Israel would manifest faith and act accordingly* (Exod. 23, 20-28). The long story of war and fighting which characterised Israel's history both before and after they gained access to the Promised Land is a sorry commentary upon the high hopes with which they set forward after the signal overthrow of the Egyptians in the Red Sea. They "stood still" to "see the salvation of God" on that occasion (Exod. 14, 10-31), they had faith to cross Jordan at the time appointed, when the river was held back (Josh. 3, 9-17), and "by faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days" (Heb. 12, 30). Nevertheless the people generally were always hovering on the edge of unbelief (see Num. 14, 10 and compare with verse 31), and apart from these three incidents they were normally in a condition of doubt at best and frank rebellion at worst; their hearts were not right before God and so He could not give them that free and open passage into the land which would have been possible had they taken Him at His word.

The next striking illustration germane to this study is that provided by the story of the Judges. For several centuries after their settlement in Canaan, the children of Israel were ruled by "judges," national heroes who came to the fore in times of crisis and became the means of deliverance. Upon each such occasion the misery and calamity of Israel is said to have been due to their apostasy from God, and at each time, *except one*, we are told that when they realised their undone state, and *cried unto the Lord*, deliverance came; but not before they had thus demonstrated their repentance. Quite soon after their entrance into the land, it is said that "the children of Israel did evil . . . therefore the anger of the Lord was hot . . . and he sold them into the hand of Chushan-rishathaim, king of Mesopotamia . . . and when the children

of Israel cried unto the Lord, the Lord raised up a deliverer . . . Othniel . . ." (Jud. 3, 5-11). So the land had rest forty years, "and the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the Lord . . . (and) served Eglon the king of Moab eighteen years. But when the children of Israel cried unto the Lord, the Lord raised them up a deliverer, Ehud . . ." (Jud. 3, 22-30). This time the land had rest fourscore years, but once again the sad tale was repeated, and after Israel's repentance and once more crying to the Lord, Deborah and Barak were raised up (Jud. 4, 1-26); and after Barak there was Gideon (Jud. 6, 7 & 8); and after Gideon came the time of Jephthah, when Israel "cried unto the Lord, saying, we have sinned against thee, both because we have forsaken our God, and also served Baalim" (Jud. 10, 10); and after Jephthah the most renowned of all the Judges, Samson.

With Samson there was a difference. It was not said of him, as it was said of all the others, that Israel cried unto the Lord, and He raised a deliverer. Israel had groaned under the yoke of the Philistines forty years (Jud. 13, 1), but there is no indication that there was any true repentance or that they had come before God in faith for promised help in time of need. So it is not surprising, perhaps, that Samson, for all his boasted prowess, utterly failed to deliver Israel. He judged Israel twenty years (Jud. 15, 20), but during all that time, as is made clear in the Book of Judges, the Philistine yoke lay heavy on Israel, and at Samson's death Israel was still in bondage. Samson had not wrought any deliverance at all. Surely this is significant. The five judges who went forward on a basis of national repentance brought deliverance. The sixth, in some respects the mightiest of them all, failed to achieve any release; and this was the occasion when the people had failed to "cry unto the Lord."

There are several incidents in the later history of Israel which throw further light upon the operation of this principle. In the days of Samuel the Ark of the Covenant, rashly taken into battle against the Philistines, had been lost to the enemy (I Sam. 4, 17), and after its recovery, in chastened repentant mood, the people of Israel "gathered together to Mizpeh . . . and said there, 'We have sinned against the Lord'" (I Sam. 7, 6). It was in this condition of mind that they heard of the renewed aggression of their enemies, and were afraid, and called upon Samuel "Cease not to cry unto the Lord our God for us, that he will save us out of the hands of the Philistines" (vs. 8). Their newborn, fledgling faith was honoured, and the story tells how the Lord thundered with a great thunder upon the Philistines and discomfited them.

Centuries later the same problem confronted Jehoshaphat king of Judah. The story recounted in

the 20th chapter of 2 Chronicles is eloquent as it describes the complete faith of Judah and Judah's king. "*Ye shall not need to fight in this battle. Stand still, and see the salvation of your God.*" Judah was saved without the necessity of striking a single blow in their own defence. Perhaps some recollection of this story stirred in the mind of king Hezekiah as he went up to the Temple and spread Sennacherib's ultimatum before the Lord—because it was the Lord's business and He was quite able to defend His own people (Isa. chap. 37). Once again a right faith attitude triumphed and the city and people were saved, *because they believed*.

There is one very striking case of personal deliverance recorded in the Old Testament. It is that of Jonah. Whilst in a rebellious frame of mind, deliberately refusing to carry out the Divine commission, he became involved in what seemed to be the prelude to certain death. There was no apparent escape from his terrible plight. Deliverance came at length, but only *after* he had repented and cried to the Lord. Hear his own words "When my soul fainted within me I remembered the Lord; and my prayer came in unto thee, into thine holy temple . . . I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that that I have vowed. Salvation is of the Lord." (Jonah 2, 7-9).

"And the Lord spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon dry land."

It is worthy of note that at times of dispensational changes in the development of the Divine Plan, there have been further instances of the fact that belief and faith are necessary to salvation. At the time of the Flood, when the "world that was" came to an end, deliverance was dependent upon this attitude of heart. Noah was a preacher of righteousness to a world of ungodly men (2 Pet. 2, 5). Quite evidently his message was not believed, there was no repentance and calling upon God, and the day of opportunity passed. The return from the Babylonian captivity was marked by a similar call to repentance, heeded by the few and ignored by the many, and only those who believed undertook the journey and were delivered. "Thus saith the Lord. 'After seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you . . . then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you, and ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with your whole heart . . . and I will bring you again into the place whence I caused you to be carried away captive'" (Jer. 29, 10-14). The inference here is quite definite that restoration is conditional upon repentance, and Ezra 1, 5 and 3, 1 tell how sincere was the new found faith of the returned captives.

That return from Babylonian captivity was a great event in the chosen people's history—but there is a greater one yet to come, but still con-

ditional upon the same requirement—prior conversion. Paul alludes to it when he says of Israel in the latter days “And they also, *if they abide not still in unbelief*, shall be grafted in, for God is able to graff them in again” (Rom. 11, 23). As with the Church of this Gospel Age, so with that earthly people which will be gathered for God’s service at the end of the Age, *God places a premium upon faith*. After all, this is but the principle expounded by Peter at Pentecost when he called upon his countrymen to “repent . . . and be converted, *that your sins may be blotted out*” (Acts 3, 19) and by Paul when he said “*If thou shalt confess . . . and shalt believe . . . thou shalt be saved, for . . . with the mouth confession is made unto salvation*” (Rom. 10, 9-10).

This then is why Jesus declared “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up; that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.” (John 3, 14-15). It was belief, faith, that enabled the dying Israelite in the wilderness to look up to the brazen serpent, held aloft in the sight of all men, and feel new life coursing through his veins as his gaze lighted upon that glittering symbol. So he that would taste of God’s deliverance must first believe and “cry unto the Lord” in faith.

Perhaps this explains why Jesus could do no mighty work in His native district. The people there needed His ministrations just as much as in other parts. His desire and willingness to minister His healing power to them could not have been less than elsewhere. Yet we read “He could there do no mighty work, save that he laid his hands upon a few sick folk and healed them. And he marvelled because of their unbelief” (Mark 6, 5-6). There is only one thing proof against the power of Jesus—unbelief.

Unbelief—unbelief—unbelief. Forever standing as a barrier which must be broken down before there can be deliverance. Mankind in the next Age must believe before they can even make a start upon the way that leads to deliverance—for the mere fact of awakening from death is not deliverance at all; it is but a revivifying and a taking up of human experience at the point where it was left. So the mere gathering of a chosen people into the land of Promise at the Time of the End can achieve nothing in the plans of God unless that people be truly converted and devoted to Him, that in them

and through them He may reveal His power to all nations. It was that kind of regathering surely that Jeremiah saw when he said “They shall come with weeping, and with supplications will I lead them.” (Jer. 31, 9). Zechariah speaks of a great mourning “in that day,” as the “mourning of Hadad-rimmon in the valley of Megiddon” (Zech. 12, 9-11). This mourning of the End Time is over One slain, One Who was pierced, and is an indication of repentance and remorse, and an acceptance of the One Who had been rejected.

The Divine Law respecting this matter was laid down for all time when the Lord spoke with Moses on the Mount. Faithfully did the “meekest man in all the earth” transmit his Lord’s words. The twenty-sixth chapter of Leviticus tells plainly of the blessings that are contingent upon faith, blessings which include deliverance from enemies. It tells also of the woes that come as the result of unbelief, woes that include captivity in the land of the enemy. All through that chapter no hint is given that deliverance can be secured on any other basis than prior faith.

At the first Advent Jewry demonstrated the opposite position. They stood in sore need of deliverance; they ardently desired deliverance; but they were still a faithless and unbelieving generation, and the deliverance they could have had passed them by. “*How often,*” cried Jesus, “*would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathered her chickens under her wings—and ye would not. Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.*” (Matt. 23, 28). “The days shall come,” He said, “when thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee . . . and shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee . . . *because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation*” (Luke 19, 43-44). That time of distress which closed the Jewish Age was a figure of the greater Time of Trouble which closes the Gospel Age. Just as those believers who formed the nucleus of the Christian Church were saved out of the destruction and captivity which befell Jerusalem and its people in A.D. 70, so the “people of faith” at this end of the Age will experience Divine deliverance from their trouble and stand forth revealed as the earthly people who are to carry Divine law to the nations. “For after that, in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God, by the foolishness of preaching, *to save them that believe*” (I Cor. 1, 21).

King Solomon has been called “the wisest fool in Judaism” and the appellation is an apt one. Solomon commenced his reign full of promise, but with all his wisdom he left the kingdom plunged into idolatry, and that was eventually its undoing.

“On the cross Jesus showed that there was another method for a king with ten thousand to meet him that cometh with twenty thousand; he could meet him with none.”

(Rev. Paul Gliddon)

THINKING POINT

*We are getting less brainy
—Or so the doctors think*

The "*British Medical Journal*" some years ago published a thesis the substance of which was that a decline in the level of intelligence is taking place. Observation and tests, it claimed, gave evidence that the mental powers of men and women, compared with previous generations, are deteriorating.

In an age when the researches of scientists and the skill of industrial workers are producing increasingly marvellous triumphs of invention this seems a strange statement to make. One might say, hastily, that every evidence points to constantly increasing intelligence. What is not so readily realised is the fact that these victories of science are due to a very small number of exceptionally brilliant men, and the *British Medical Journal* is taking account of the masses—ordinary men and women who make up the bulk of our nation.

It is suggested by some observers that the widespread inducements to "putting one's thinking out" constitute one cause of such decline in individual intelligence. Organised entertainment — the cinema, the football pools and "the dogs"; radio with its "Brains Trusts" and "Quizzes", its mock discussions in which millions of listeners are skilfully guided toward the conclusion desired by the originators; the use of propaganda and its incitement to "mass thinking"; all this induces a condition of mind in which the individual becomes less and less able to think for himself, more and more susceptible to blind and unreasoning following of any commanding voice that is raised, and in these circumstances fails increasingly in the exercise of his own reasoning powers.

There is another and a more profound reason; the decline in Christian faith and belief—and consequently, of practice. The foundation of all right thinking and the exercise of man's powers for good is in the Bible. Human beings are so constituted that they can only attain their full potentialities by living their lives in God's way, and to the extent that God's way is ignored or defied life is deficient and imperfect, and must eventually come to an end. That is why God says "*The soul that sinneth it shall die*" (Exek. 18. 4) for death, the cessation of life, is the inevitable consequence of refusal to follow the Divine way of life. The current tremen-

dous increase in crime and violence, in cruelty and immorality, in all the ills from which the world of this generation is suffering, is due in large measure to the failure of parents in the last few generations to follow the Christian way themselves and to train up their children in that way. And the result of that failure is now seen, not only in the widespread increase of evil things in the world, not only in the moral and physical degeneracy of man, but in mental degeneration also. The human race is committing slow suicide.

What is the remedy? There is only one reply, and unwelcome as it may be to many, the reply will cost something. The great cry to-day is "something for nothing". More wages, less working hours; more amusement, less responsibility; more self-indulgence, less disinterested service for others—these are the things which men demand. And religion—Christianity—will have none of this. It calls to a pathway of serious, continued endeavour in the spirit of unselfishness and service for others. Jesus "went about doing good". He told his followers to give their lives for their fellows, working always for the establishment of those principles which alone can bring happiness to men. And only when men in the mass accept this way of life and endeavour honestly to put it into practice will the decay be arrested and the level of intelligence begin to rise.

That is the purpose of the coming reign of Christ over the earth—to teach men how so to conduct their lives as to grow up in the Divine likeness and become free from sin. It has been observed by leading archaeologists that all the evidence shows primitive man to have exceeded modern man in intelligence. That is because they lived so much nearer the time when sin first entered and the human race began its downward course into sin and degradation; they had not lost so much of the primeval physical and mental powers as have men to-day. The theory of evolution is belied by the evidence of man's increasing imperfection as we have it before us in our own day and generation. Christ's Kingdom will restore man to the primeval perfection and, with the eradication of sin and sinful tendencies, lift men's minds to a higher degree of intelligence than has ever been known before; and it will bring man into full reconciliation with God and everlasting life.

Joseph L. Lusk



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

BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

Vol. 49, No. 2

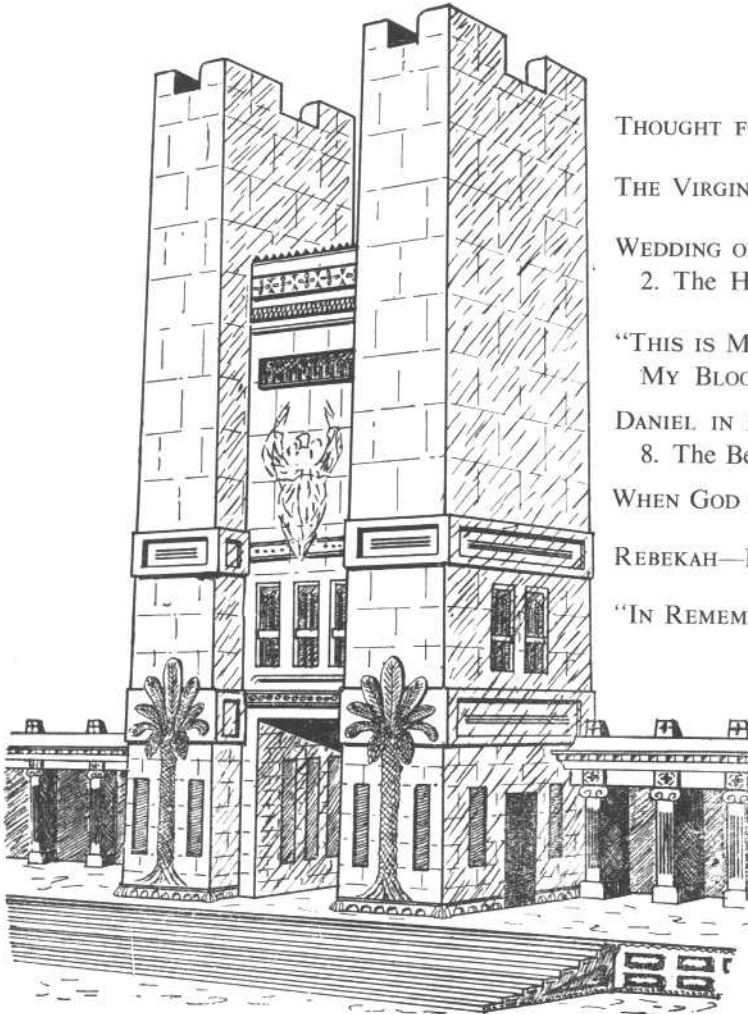
MARCH/APRIL 1972

Published March 1st

Next issue May 1st

CONTENTS

THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH	26
THE VIRGIN BIRTH OF CHRIST	27
WEDDING OF THE AGES	
2. The Heavenly <i>Waakeel</i>	34
"THIS IS MY BODY THIS IS MY BLOOD"	37
DANIEL IN BABYLON	
8. The Beginning of Visions	39
WHEN GOD CALLS	41
REBEKAH—BRIDE OF ISAAC	44
"IN REMEMBRANCE OF ME"	47



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

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

Published by
Bible Fellowship Union
11 Lyncroft Gardens, Hounslow,
Middlesex, England

Bible Study Monthly

FOUNDED 1924

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

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

Communications and donations to Bible Fellowship Union, 11 Lyncroft Gardens, Hounslow, Middlesex, England.
Secretary & Treasurer: B. G. DUMONT (Hounslow) Editorial & Publishing: A. O. HUDSON (Welling)

NOTICES

Change of address

The "Monthly" is about seven weeks in transit to U.S.A. and Canada, and up to ten weeks to other parts of the world outside Europe. It frequently happens that an issue is already on its way when notification of a change of address is received, and may arrive at the old address a couple of months or so after the notification was posted, to the perplexity of the reader concerned. For this reason it is best to advise change of address by air mail, not surface mail, which latter takes seven or more weeks to get here and makes the position that much worse.

Coming conventions

Easter April 1, 2, 3. Warrington 3-day convention in the Masonic Hall, Winmarleigh Street, Warrington, Lancs. Details Mr. F. B. Quennell, 43 Ackers Road, Stockton Heath, Warrington, Lancs.

May 6. One-day convention at Welling, in Congregational Church Hall. Details Mr. A. O. Hudson, 24 Darwin Road, Welling, Kent.

June 10-11. 2-day convention at Windsor. Details Mr. H. Charlton, 43 Halkingcroft, Langley, Slough, Bucks.

The Memorial service

The Memorial date for this year is 28th March.

Thought for the Month

"Ye are holy unto the Lord; the vessels are holy also; and the silver and the gold are a free-will offering unto the Lord God of your fathers" (Ezra 8.28).

Here breathes the spirit of true consecration. The exiles, returning to Judea from Babylon under the leadership of Ezra, came to rebuild their Temple, occupy their ancient land and restore the worship of the true God. It was going to be an arduous work and demand all they had of life and possessions, and it was for God. Freed from the defilements of the aliens they had become holy unto the Lord. But it was entirely of free-will. God will not accept reluctant offerings, neither will He receive the proffered service of one who is not animated by the highest motives of love and self-surrender. It is useless to frighten people into conversion, to persuade them to the foot of the Cross by fear of the consequences if they refuse. "Flee from the wrath to come" is not a Divine principle in the invitation to salvation, and a good many very worthy Christians make a sad mistake in thinking that it is. When John the Baptist uttered those particular trenchant words against the Pharisees he made it clear that their flight

from that wrath was not going to avail them any unless they truly repented and were converted, and that is a very different matter. So with all who come in contact with the Divine call. To "get right with God" just because it is the "done thing", to "accept Jesus" just because that is the gateway to a "happy life" with no more worries and no more frustrations, is of no avail at all in the sight of God. "I beseech you" cries St. Paul in Rom. 12.1 "that ye present your bodies a living offering, holy, acceptable unto God, not conformed to this world, but transformed by the renewing of your mind". In this devotion we, and all that we are and have, are made holy to the Lord, like those brave adventurers of old who journeyed across the desert to give the rest of their lives to the Divine purpose. "Ye are holy unto the Lord"; the first essential is personal devotion, the consecration of the life, of self, to God. "The vessels are holy also"; the second essential is consecration of ability and talents to God. "The silver and the gold are a free-will offering"; the third essential is the consecration of possessions to God. All of this, without reserve, and of free-will, in love and joy and enthusiasm, is what God asks of those who come to Him.

THE VIRGIN BIRTH OF CHRIST

The belief that Jesus of Nazareth was born of a virgin mother without the interposition of a human father was virtually unchallenged in Christian theology and among so-called Christian nations for seventeen centuries. Only during the last two hundred years has it been questioned. Present scepticism on the subject—originally confined to critics of the Christian faith but now unhappily found amongst Christian laymen and penetrating into the ordained ministry, is due to two main reasons. First, there is a reluctance to accept the historicity of any New Testament narrative involving the miraculous. Second, there is an increasing tendency to regard Jesus of Nazareth as a man of the human race, born in the same manner as other men, admittedly a remarkable man, possessed of moral and mental stature above other men and the originator of a code of ethics which has never been surpassed by other men, but no more. His claim to have come to earth from God, as the Son of God, to have existed previously, is quietly passed over, and those who still believe in the "virgin birth" are dubbed old-fashioned, ignorant of the present-day attainments of modern knowledge and modern theology. This position stems from the contemporary idea that one religion is about as good as another and valuable only for the ethical standard it sets, and in addition, although those most closely concerned are quite unaware of the fact, lamentable ignorance concerning the true relationship between God and man and the Divine purpose in the creation of man.

The only authority on the subject of the virgin birth is the New Testament and it is only on the basis of New Testament statements that the fact can be asserted and maintained. If the New Testament is nothing more than the product of a few writers, eye-witnesses or not of the things they recorded, without any guiding or overruling influence from above, then there is scope for human error, fallibility, credibility, and the factual accuracy of their narratives might be open to criticism and question. If, on the contrary, the New Testament, Divinely intended for the instruction and enlightenment of Christians throughout all generations, was so overruled as to its contents, and its writers so guided in their selection, by the Holy Spirit, then it must be accepted as a true statement of fact insofar as its historical narratives are concerned. Failure to do this impugns the work of the

Holy Spirit. This does not demand verbal inspiration of every word or grammatical inflexion in the written book but it does demand that what is stated as having happened, or the general drift of words stated to have been spoken, must be accounted authoritative. The fact that this involves the acceptance of happenings which, because they cannot be explained by natural laws as at present understood, are termed miraculous, is a necessary consequence. It is impossible to separate the miraculous elements in the stories of the birth from the life's ministry and the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and they must all be accepted or rejected together. Since the Christian faith is founded upon the verity of the Resurrection one cannot reject the miraculous without destroying that foundation. "If Christ be not raised" said St. Paul "your faith is vain" (1 Cor. 15.17).

The basic principle relative to human salvation was well enunciated by the Apostle when he wrote to Timothy "This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (1 Tim. 1.15). Jesus said that He came from above, from the presence of the Father with whom He claimed to be in continual communion and union. The pre-existence of Christ prior to his entering this world at Bethlehem is an essential element in the right understanding of the Christian faith, and of the Divine purpose for man, and in fact for any approach to an understanding of the relation between the Father and the Son. He was with God in the beginning, says John at the commencement of his Gospel; Hebrews describes him as "the Son who is the effulgence of God's splendour and the stamp of God's very being, and sustains the universe by his word of power" (Heb. 1.3). "All things were made by him, and without him was not anything made that was made" (Jno. 1.3). No mere man, born to man three quarters of the way through human history as we know it, could be described in such terms. Added to these statements and others like them are the recorded words of Jesus, such as "I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world; again, I leave the world, and go to the Father" (Jno. 16.28); "Before Abraham was born, I am" (Jno. 8.58); and his final impassioned prayer "and now, Father, glorify me in thine own presence with the glory which I had with thee before the world began" (Jno. 17.5).

From that world into this, from the glory of the

spiritual to the limitations of the material, "the Word was made flesh" said John (1.14). The "Word" (Gk. *Logos*) was the expression used by Jewish thinkers to define that personified identity enshrining within himself the wisdom, command, will and purpose of God, through Whom the whole creation was to be brought into being and God made manifest to his creatures. Already supreme in heaven, He now came to earth, but in so doing He took upon himself the limitations of humanity in order truly to be one with them. He laid hold, not of angelic nature, but that of Abraham, i.e. of man, says the writer to the Hebrews (2.16). Perhaps the most vivid description of his entry into man's world is that given by St. Paul in Phil. 2.6-8 "Who, being in God's form... divested himself, taking a bondman's form, having been made in the likeness of men". Scriptures such as these mean something more than the mere appearance on earth of a heavenly being shrouded in a body of flesh whereby to become visible, like the theophanies of the Old Testament or the appearances of angels to men. The Son of God did in truth and fact partake of human nature, become man—as Hebrews has it, "a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death,.... that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man" (2.9), remaining always and completely the Lord from heaven but related now to his earthly environment through the limited compass of an earthly body. "The first man" (Adam) "is of the earth, earthy; the second man" (Christ) "is the Lord from heaven" says Paul (1 Cor. 15.47).

With all this in mind it is logical to expect that the mode of entry of such an one into this world would be other than is normal to mankind. The human processes of birth involve the starting of a new life by means of natural powers conferred on man and handed down from generation to generation. But this is not a case of starting a new life; here a pre-existing life is transferred to an incipient human organism and that is a different thing. And there is another consideration; to be an effective Saviour of mankind Christ must be other than of the sons of Adam. "For when we were yet without strength" says Paul in Rom. 5.6 "in due time Christ died for the ungodly". That word strength means to be powerless, to be too weak to effect the desired end. All men, without exception, are without strength to effect either their own salvation or that of others. There must be One from outside the human race who of himself has that power.

And all this has a profound effect upon the doctrine of the Virgin Birth as it is presented in the narratives of Matthew and Luke.

THE TWO WITNESSES

There are two accounts of the circumstances surrounding the nativity of Jesus, one in the Gospel of Matthew and one in that of Luke. Matthew was one of Jesus' disciples and wrote his Gospel in or about the year 50, some sixteen years after the Crucifixion, and Luke, a companion of St. Paul, less than ten years later. Luke spent some time in Judea with Paul and must have been acquainted with Mary; it is noticeable that Luke's account of the circumstances is written with Mary at the centre, whilst that of Matthew is from the standpoint of Joseph. Matthew would certainly have known Joseph and could have had the story from him. At any rate both accounts were written by men who had been in contact with the people most concerned, and the facts they recorded were matters of personal knowledge and not hearsay. We can rest assured that the details related in these two Gospels came directly from Joseph and Mary themselves, and their trustworthiness is assured by the integrity of these two.

The story opens in Luke's first chapter, verses 27-38. Mary, a maiden of Nazareth, was betrothed to Joseph; the marriage had not yet taken place. To her came an angel of the Lord and although she was at first alarmed at his salutation she accepted his assurance that she had found favour with God and upon her was to be conferred a great honour, that of becoming the mother of the Messiah, the Son of the Highest, the rightful heir to the throne of David. This must have come as wonderful news to Mary, for every pious Jewish girl cherished the hope that she might be the chosen mother of the Messiah. One thing puzzled her. She was not yet married and it had never been suggested or imagined in Israel that the Messiah would be born in any other than the customary manner. "*How can this be*" she asked "*seeing I know not*" (*ginosko*, meaning to be physically intimate with) "*a man?*" It is clear that Mary understood the angel's words to imply that she was to conceive a son unilaterally, without the intervention of a man, and quite naturally she asked how this could come about. Had she interpreted the angel's words to mean that the firstborn son of her approaching marriage was the one intended the question would not have been asked. The angel's response bears this out, for the succeeding verse yields an explanation which should be as satisfactory to enquirers of the Twentieth Century as it was to Mary at the time. She, at any rate, was satisfied. "Behold the handmaid of the Lord" she said "Be it unto me according to thy word".

The angel's explanation expresses a tremendous revelation in remarkably few and simple words.

"The Holy Spirit will come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee; therefore that holy one which is being begotten shall be called Son of God". Because this declaration is so important and because it is intended to explain to Mary the manner in which her conception would be accomplished the actual words have to be examined very critically. The coming of the Holy Spirit upon her would easily be understood; this was traditionally the manner in which the subject individual became a vehicle for the work or purpose of God, something in which man had no place and all that was done was by Divine power. This is confirmed by the succeeding expression "the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee", where "power" is *dunamis*, meaning energy, in this case Divine as contrasted with human energy. Biologically, the male reproductive cell provides the energy which stimulates the female cell into activity and commences the process of growth. In this case, says Luke, that energy came, not from a human father but directly from the Most High. "Overshadow" in the Greek means to envelop either as a cloud casting a shadow or a shining cloud enveloping a person with brightness, and is used in this latter sense in the story of the Transfiguration in all three synoptic Gospels. Mary was, as it were, enveloped by the energising power of the Holy Spirit and by this power the life transferred from heaven which became the "man Christ Jesus" was implanted within her. Mary herself provided the maternal inheritance, the physical cell with its characteristics of heredity constituting the human nature which made Jesus a son of David; the masculine counterpart, the nature and life of the One coming from above, enshrined in a material entity provided by an exercise of Divine power, became one with the waiting incipient human organism, and in that manner "the Word was made flesh". Thus our Lord "took hold of the seed of Abraham".

The A.V. rendering "that holy thing which shall be born of thee" is not very accurate. *Gennomenon* is the present tense of the verb, so that it should be rendered "is being begotten"—or "is being born" as may be required by the context; the word means either. Since Jesus certainly was not being born at the time of this declaration and the moment of conception is usually spoken of as the begetting rather than the birth, the angel's words should properly be rendered "that holy one which is being begotten", i.e. at that particular time. This one expression of itself rules out any participation of Joseph in the fatherhood of Jesus.

This is as far as Luke goes by way of explana-

tion; the story of Jesus' birth, and the coming of the shepherds, and the presentation in the Temple, are all presented in a simple factual manner without further reference to the unique circumstances involved. From that time onward in Luke's narrative the family is pictured as an ordinary family and reference made to "his parents" and "thy father and I" in 2.41,48, in a perfectly ordinary manner. This is how it must have been. To friends and neighbours Jesus would have been accepted as the natural son of Joseph, as He was legally, and consideration for Mary would preclude any talk outside the family of the angelic visit and its associated circumstances, quite apart from the fact that any dissemination of the story would assuredly bring down upon her head the wrath and violence of the priestly authorities, who would certainly take a serious view of the implications involved in any such claim. It is fairly obvious that nothing was generally known of all this until after the death of Jesus and probably after the departure of Mary from Jerusalem to Ephesus where she is believed to have ended her life. Matthew and Luke most likely kept the facts to themselves until they came to write their Gospels later on.

Matthew tells the story from Joseph's standpoint and hardly mentions Mary; the kind of detail he records makes it most likely that he derived his facts from Joseph himself, and this therefore must be considered first hand testimony. Matt. 1.18 tells that after Mary's betrothal but "before they came together" — the Greek word means to co-habit matrimonially—"she was found with child of the Holy Spirit". It does not follow that, in the first shock of the discovery, Joseph believed her explanation, and in fact the narrative goes on to say that he began to consider how he could take the steps, usual in such cases, to annul the marriage contract without causing a public scandal. In this dilemma the angel of the Lord appeared to him and confirmed Mary's story (Matt. 1.20); at this Joseph believed. "Fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she shall bring forth a son...." It is evident that Joseph was a God-fearing man and instructed in the ways of God; he recognised that he had received a Divine revelation and without hesitation he followed the Divine injunction. He "took unto him his wife, and knew her not until she had brought forth her firstborn son" (ch. 1.24-25).

This entire passage, Matt. 1.18-24, can only have originated from Joseph, and it states the position very clearly. During the betrothal period, which normally lasted twelve months, Joseph discovered—or more likely was told by Mary—that

she was an expectant mother. He knew that he himself was not responsible. Contemplating annulment of the prospective marriage, he was dissuaded by intimation from on high that the coming child was not of man, but of God, and destined to become the promised Messiah. Convinced that he was rightly informed he went ahead with the marriage as planned and Mary became his legal wife, but he refrained from matrimonial relations with her until after Jesus had been born. According to the law and custom of the day, he became the legal father of Jesus, but he knew perfectly well that in fact he was not the actual father. That is the plain implication of this narrative. The story is perfectly straightforward and consistent, and supported by all ancient manuscripts with a few variations in certain Latin versions of the Second Century in which there is some suggestion of the paternity of Joseph. But these versions are not consistent with themselves and are fairly certain to have been the result of alterations made by translators from the original Greek.

THE GENEALOGIES

A certain amount of difficulty is posed by the two genealogical trees terminating in Jesus, one in Matthew's Gospel and the other in that of Luke, (Matt. 1.1-16 and Luke 3.23-38) and these need examination, not in full, for that would involve much more than is relevant to the present subject, but to the extent that they describe the natural descent of Jesus. The genealogy in Matthew is that of Joseph and in Luke that of Mary; these two lines coincide in Zerubbabel, prince and governor of Judah at the time of the Restoration from Babylon. From Zerubbabel the line in Matthew goes through Salathiel and the kings of Judah to Solomon and thence David, but in Luke it goes through another and non-royal line to Nathan, Solomon's brother, and so to David. Since the Divine sentence on Jehoniah, the last king of Judah, was that he should die childless and no seed of his would ever rule in Judah it is evident that Salathiel was not his natural son but the result of a marriage under the Levirate law in which the nearest relative became the father of a son who was then legally credited to the childless monarch. Thus Zerubbabel, the grandson of Neariah of the line of Nathan, succeeded to the royal title of Jehoniah the last king of Judah and the kingly line was reckoned to be continued through him, although the monarchy had lapsed. Hence both Joseph and Mary, natural descendants of Nathan, could lay claim to royal pedigree, and it is for this reason that Joseph, legally in the male line from the kings of Judah, and in the eyes of the law the official or legal

father of Jesus, became the channel through which Jesus could claim the succession to David's throne. Actual blood descent from the Judean kings was not essential any more than in the case of Salathiel and Zerubbabel some twenty generations earlier. It is true, however, that in the official records, which according to some authorities were maintained in the Temple, Joseph would have been entered as the father of Jesus.

On this basis Matthew records the matter at the end of his genealogy thus (1.16) "*And Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ*". The "of whom" here is feminine gender in the Greek, referring to Mary, so that although in the preceding fifteen verses the formula is consistently father begat son, this formula ends with Jacob and Joseph; it does not go on to say that Joseph begat Jesus as would be the case if Matthew intended to assert Joseph's paternity. He says that Jesus was born of Mary but he does not say that Joseph was the father.

Some of the Latin versions of later centuries have at this point a variation to the effect that Joseph begat Jesus, but although there has been controversy and argument on this ground there is no real reason for thinking that the original Greek was materially different from the Received Text. An early Syriac version, the Sinai Palimpsest, has it "Joseph, to whom was betrothed Mary the virgin, begat Jesus" but another, the Curetonian Syriac, renders "Jacob begat Joseph, to whom was betrothed Mary the virgin, who begat Jesus". Canon R. H. Charles, a leading early 20th century authority, has concluded that the original Greek text probably was "Jacob begat Joseph, to whom was betrothed the virgin Mary, and she begat Jesus" (more accurately, gave birth to Jesus, since the Greek word here is in the passive voice; when it means "beget" it is normally in the active).

It might be appropriate here to point out that the statement sometimes encountered to the effect that scientists have proved the possibility of virgin birth and can explain the precise manner in which Jesus came into the world is not strictly accurate. It is true that, biologically, a virgin birth is possible among the higher animals and presumably among humans also, and has actually taken place under laboratory conditions with some animals. In such cases, which are very rare, the female cell is "triggered" into action and development without the participation of a male cell and can in theory proceed to full birth so that the offspring has a mother but no father; this is a biological virgin birth. It has to be noted however that such a process can only produce a female child; this is because whereas the father can contribute either male or female sex-determining

chromosomes, the mother can only contribute female ones. This leads to the very important conclusion that the virgin birth of our Lord was not what the biologists mean by a virgin birth and cannot be explained by any discoveries which have been made in this field. There is no escape from the conclusion that whereas Mary was a perfectly normal woman, there was a factor in her conception which was due to the direct and miraculous intervention of God.

The testimony of Luke is to the same effect. He says (Luke 3.23) "*Jesus himself began to be about thirty years of age, being, as was supposed, the son of Joseph, which was the son of Heli*". The word "supposed" here means exactly what it says, that Jesus was generally assumed to be the son of Joseph and this obviously must have been the position. Luke would not have said this had Jesus actually been the son of Joseph. (The same word for "supposed" appears in 1 Cor. 7.26; 1 Tim. 6.5; Matt. 20.10; Luke 2.44; from which texts the meaning can be readily discerned). He then takes the genealogy through Mary's forebears who were the true lineal, or as we would say, blood ancestors of Jesus. The A.V. rather confuses the issue here by using the expression "which was the son of" throughout the genealogy, for which there is no warrant in the Greek, so that the A.V. appears to declare that Joseph was the son of Heli, the father of Mary. In fact the Greek reads like a family tree, "of Heli, of Matthat, of Levi" and so on, and was clearly copied from the family records. The passage is most lucidly rendered "Jesus, about thirty years of age (supposedly the son of Joseph) of Heli, of Matthat" etc. so that Heli his grandfather is marked out as his immediate male forefather, Mary his mother as a woman being omitted, and passing reference made to the popular but incorrect general supposition that Joseph was his father.

Thus the New Testament is consistent in the assertion that Joseph was not the father of Jesus and that Mary conceived, not in the normal physical manner but by virtue of an exercise of Divine power. Matthew and Luke were both aware of these facts; one obtained his information from Joseph and the other from Mary. Apart from any local comment which there may have been at the time of Jesus' birth nothing was known of the circumstances outside the family; the disciples may or may not have known of it from Matthew but in general Jesus was considered the natural son of Joseph and not until the circulation of Matthew and Luke's Gospels, or such preliminary documents as may have formed the foundations of those Gospels, was the truth of

the matter generally known. But from that time onward the virgin birth of Christ became a tenet of the Christian Church.

THE ISAIAH PROPHECY

Some difference of opinion exists as to the relevance of the prediction in Isa. 7.14 to the birth of Jesus. Matthew quotes the verse and cites the event as its fulfilment. "*Now all this was done*" he says "*that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet saying, 'Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel'*" (Matt. 1.22-23). It is a very frequent practice of Matthew to quote Old Testament passages as predicting incidents in his Gospel, and sometimes it is fairly obvious that he is not really claiming his quotations as specific fulfilments but merely illustrative of the incident in question. The controversy over this particular application by Matthew arises from the fact that the Isaiah passage is very difficult to dissociate from its immediate context and fit into a Messianic setting. The birth of the child to the virgin in Isaiah is intimately connected with the political happenings of the day and the immediate relations of Isaiah himself with King Ahaz. It is also argued that the Hebrew *almah* in Isa. 7.14 means equally a virgin or a young woman of marriageable age so that the prophecy does not necessarily demand a virgin birth, and this is true. The Greek Septuagint, though, has *parthenos* in this text, which word means virgin simply and solely, although some 2nd and 3rd century fragmentary versions of the Septuagint have *neanis*, which means young woman. The fact that Matthew uses *parthenos* in his quotation would appear to indicate that this was the accepted rendering in his day (the Septuagint was the version at that time in general use). It is evident that Matthew understood it in this manner and this, at any rate, confirms that he intended to assert the reality of the virgin birth. It is this factor which is of importance; the precise interpretation of Isa. 7.14 is not so relevant. The doctrine of the Virgin Birth rests upon the actual happenings as recorded in the New Testament and not upon the application of Old Testament prophecy.

EARLY CHURCH TESTIMONY

As the Apostolic Age ended and the pastoral care of the Early Church passed into the hands of the Apostles' successors the fact that Jesus was born of a virgin was well understood and accepted. The extant writings of a dozen or more of these men contain many references to the fact, and it is evident that the Gospel narratives were accepted as literally true. Some of them, such as Ignatius,

Bishop of Antioch between A.D. 70-107, were personally acquainted with some of the Apostles and there is no question of gullible men accepting wonderful stories of old founded on tradition and legend; they had actual conversation with the disciples who knew these things to be true, and by such means the truth of the birth of Jesus was impressed upon the growing Church and became a part of its theological heritage. An evidence of this is afforded by what is believed to be the first "Creed" to be formulated, the precursor of the "Apostles Creed", devised by the Church at Rome about 100 A.D. The relevant passage runs "I believe in Jesus Christ who was born of the Holy Spirit and of Mary the Virgin".

The fact that Jesus did not come into the public eye until thirty years of age and that nothing is recorded of his previous life, apart from the circumstances of his birth, has no bearing upon the subject, although the contrary is sometimes suggested. The truth was known to Mary and Joseph, and they imparted it to Luke and Matthew at the least. Mark and John commence their accounts with the beginning of Jesus' ministry at thirty years of age, so that no place for the facts of his birth exists, but that does not mean that they were ignorant of them. The statement in Jno. 1.13 "*Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, but of God*" is normally taken to refer to the "sons of God" of vs. 12 who have experienced the new birth, and this is supported by most manuscripts; in the Second Century however, there was evidently an alternative reading current, for many of the early writers quote this verse in the singular "Who was born" . . . etc. and refer it to Christ, who is the main subject of the chapter. Tertullian, Irenæus, Ignatius, Justin Martyr, Hippolytus, among others, seem to have read the text thus. John's thesis in this chapter would then argue that the Light, the Logos or Word of God, came into the world, and the world did not receive him, but those who did receive him became sons of God. He came miraculously, not begotten in an earthly manner by the will of the flesh or the will of a man, a human husband, but of God. Thus the Word became flesh and we beheld his glory. It has been remarked that had John meant "the will of man" in a generic sense he would have written *anthropon* (as in 2 Pet. 1.21) whereas he actually used the word *andros* which means a particular man or a husband, which strengthens the case for the variant understanding of this text. The Emphatic Diaglott version quotes Dr. Griesbach, the German theologian whose profound knowledge of New Testament origins laid the foundation of modern textual criticism, as supporting this rendering. It might well be, therefore, that despite the

present Received Text on which the A.V. is based, John did indeed reveal his knowledge of the virgin birth when he wrote these words.

St. Paul does not refer to the matter directly although it has been suggested that when in Gal. 4.4 he said "God sent forth his son, made of a woman" he was alluding to Jesus' birth from the woman to the exclusion of the man. The word "made" could equally well be translated "born"; it would seem rather superfluous for St. Paul to describe Jesus as being "made" or "born" from a woman when that is the method by which all come into the world, unless he was thus alluding to the fact that the One he is speaking of came into the world, not as the son of a man and a woman as with other men, but as the Son of God and the son of the woman, alone.

CLAIMED MYTHOLOGICAL PARALLELS

It has frequently been objected that stories of virgin birth are common with the heroes of ancient history and mythology, and that the New Testament statements should be viewed with caution on that account. The fact that such other stories may exist has no bearing on either the truth or falsity of the New Testament; its writers are not likely to have known of their existence, and even if they did the knowledge would have made no difference to their own integrity, added to the overruling of the Holy Spirit, in the composition of their writings. Allusions to such alleged "virgin birth" stories are usually cited quite glibly without much regard to accuracy, and in fact most of them are not claimants to "virgin birth" at all.

The four favourites commonly called upon to do duty in this direction are the stories of Marduk, the god of Babylon, the hero Perseus in Greek mythology, the son of Pharaoh Thothmes IV in the 18th Egyptian dynasty, and Gautama Buddha the founder of the Buddhist religion. It is true that the relevant legends claim all these except Buddha as being sons of the gods, but in no case except that of Perseus do they claim that the mother was a virgin. Marduk, the god of Babylon, was the son of Enki or Ea, the sea-god, and his wife, Nin-ella, goddess of the abyss, but since the Babylonian gods were nothing but "men writ large" there was no suggestion of anything unique in the birth of their son. It is probably the fact that in Babylonian mythology Marduk is called the "Divine Redeemer" and the "firstborn of Ea", and has other qualities and functions which show some similarity to the person and mission of our Lord, that has suggested to some critics looking for "virgin birth" parallels that here is a suitable case; but it is not so in reality and to say that

Marduk was believed to have been born of a virgin has no support in Babylonian or Sumerian mythology.

Perseus in Greek tradition was the son of Zeus the supreme god by Danae, daughter of Acrisius, king of Argos, in Greece. Locked up in a subterranean prison by her father because of a prophecy that he would one day die at the hands of her son, she was visited there by Zeus in the form of a shower of golden rain, and so Perseus was born. He grew up to be a hero and executed many mighty deeds, including the deliverance of the maiden Andromeda from the sea-monster. There were many such stories in the traditions of the Greeks.

An Egyptian inscription tells how Amen-Ra the supreme god appeared to Mut-em-mia, wife of Pharaoh Thothmes IV (second son of the Pharaoh of the Exodus) having incarnated himself in the person of her husband. In consequence the future Pharaoh Amen-hotep III was born. This, of course, is not a question of virgin birth but rather of impersonation. It so happens that Mut-em-mia was not a native Egyptian; she was the daughter of the King of Mitanni, of Indo-Aryan race, and in marrying her Thotmes IV had offended the powerful native priesthood. The fact that later on the son showed some definite un-Egyptian characteristics did nothing to allay their wrath. It might well be that the story of his supernatural fatherhood was invented and offered as an explanation and justification of the factors which had disturbed the worthy priests.

Gautama Buddha was born about 560 B.C. to Suddhodana, ruler of a small Indian state, and his queen Maya. At the age of twenty-nine he left his wife and child and his royal prospects for the life of a wandering philosopher and sage. Although his teachings attracted disciples and adherents, he himself did not set out to found a religion and in fact Buddhism as a religion did not come into existence until long after his death. Something like four centuries later various traditions and legends became consolidated into the

belief that Buddha had appeared fully grown from his mother without the usual preliminaries, but even so there was no suggestion that his mother was a virgin, for she had been married for many years, neither is there any suggestion that God or the powers of heaven were involved. The development of thought which turned Buddhism into a "salvation" religion with Buddha worshipped as a Saviour only came about in the early centuries of the Christian era. The difference between the Buddhist and Christian writings is that in the case of the former the "miraculous" element only appeared some four centuries after the death of the founder; in the latter case it was included in the written records, the Gospels, within a few years of Jesus' death.

The dissimilarities between these stories and that of the birth of Jesus are so great that no reasonable ground exists for asserting that the story of the virgin birth was suggested to Matthew and Luke by their existence, and any similarities of detail are purely coincidental.

* * * *

There the case must rest. When all is said and done, the personal written testimony of Matthew and Luke, contemporary with the people most closely concerned and writing of what they knew to be the facts, is all that matters. The preservation of the records by the overruling power of God for the enlightenment and instruction of succeeding generations through two thousand years is a guarantee of their truth. Because this is a matter in which the powers of heaven, of the spiritual world, are closely involved it cannot be expected that a scientifically rational explanation by which these happenings could be defined in everyday human terms can be found; that in no way invalidates the credibility of the story. When we have gone as far as human intellect can go in trying to understand the mystery of the virgin birth we are still unable to improve upon the triumphant words of the Beloved Apostle; "*the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory of an only Son from the Father*".

"The idea of the consummation of all things given us in the New Testament is never that of our being carried away to a distant heaven, but of a return of the Son of Man to a recreated earth, when the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our God and of his Christ."

(Bishop of Chichester, 1943)

"Great havoc is said to have been occasioned in Eden when man's first sinful parents knew that they were naked, but almost greater havoc seems to have been occasioned right through history through the devil drawing the attention of the righteous to the fact that they were clothed with righteousness.—Rev. Paul Gliddon.

WEDDING OF THE AGES

2. The Heavenly Waakeel

Part 1 described traditional wedding ceremonies and customs in the Holy Land in Biblical days and as they were observed in comparatively recent times; this part draws an analogy with the Call of the Church, the Bride of Christ, and Scripture symbolism connected therewith.

* * * *

Students of the Scriptures see in Eastern marriage customs a deep significance with regard to that mystical class of called out people variously known as the Church, the Body of Christ, the Bride, and the Lamb's wife. All spiritually enlightened will call to mind many sayings of the prophets and Apostles and of the Lord which reveal to them an added meaning. Some of the parables of Jesus can be viewed with greater discernment of the deeper truths. Some special points in these customs are worthy of note as they pertain to the experiences of individual Christians who have been called to a place in this elect, bridal class. The *Waakeel* or matrimonial agent is a wonderful picture of the work of the Holy Spirit sent out by God to seek a bride for his beloved Son. Eliezer's choice, one of great importance in the furtherance of God's purpose with man, was directed by him. Throughout the Gospel Dispensation, God has called and chosen members of the race of man, by means of his own Divine agency, for membership in the royal house through which He intends to bless all families of the earth.

As in the old custom the agent made no personal demonstration, but quickly drew aside the veil from each face for scrutiny, so the Spirit of God silently, unobtrusively draws aside the veil of the flesh, readily reading the mind, discerning the very thoughts and motives, paying no heed to natural protests, but choosing, drawing those possessed of faith, and such qualities as are likely to develop under the tuition to be given through this same agency of the Spirit.

"Man looketh upon the outward appearance but I the Lord read the heart". As Eliezer and the *Waakeel* did not talk of themselves but of their master's wealth and position so the Holy Spirit reveals to each called one the beauties of character of God the Father and of his Son, making known the riches of the heavenly life and inheritance. "Ye see your calling brethren". It could not be seen unless revealed to each indi-

vidual by this faithful and enlightening agency of the Spirit. Others may preach, may talk about the love of God and the gospel of Jesus, but unless the Spirit touches the mind, the hearer remains unmoved and unenlightened. "No man cometh unto the Father but by me", and again, "No man cometh unto Me unless the Father which hath sent me draw him". Here is the agency at work *on the individual, by the Father and through the Son*, for a specific purpose. By the Spirit's agency the love gifts and messages are conveyed; the Scriptures yield unending joy, strength, encouragement and hope to the mind once charmed by the invitation to union with the King of Kings.

Prayer becomes the medium of correspondence by which love is expressed, desired and received. In this interchange of thought the bonds of love and loyalty are deepened, strengthened, and made ever more desirable because it is by prayer that the unseen Bridegroom and the unseen Father are more clearly revealed, understood and loved more truly. By such means the individual heart is allured, won and kept in the care of him "whom not having seen we love, in whom, though ye see him not, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory".

"I have espoused you to one husband that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ". Here is the betrothal covenant made by the Spirit through the inspired apostolic words. Such assurance is more than sweet; it is energising, uplifting. Those who receive it know at once the life-giving effects of this inner conviction. It loosens the tongue to songs of praise and wherever a few of like mind are met together there the wedding songs are sung in anticipation just as they were by the eastern bride and her companions as they got ready the wedding array. As every prospective bride delights to tell of her beloved to whoever will listen, singing his praises, lingering over his name as on a thing of beauty, so these bride members delight to talk of him who is their chief joy. To them there is no sweeter name in heaven or earth than one before whom every knee shall bow and confess him Lord of all.

*"Sweet is the vision of thy face
And kindness o'er thy lips is shed
Lovely art thou and full of grace
And glory beams around thy head".*

The love and joy is mutual. The prophetic Scriptures abound with expressions of love and longing on the part of the heavenly Lover for his espoused partner. Because the love of God is shed abroad in the heart of all this faithful company, with that deep desire to be pleasing and acceptable to him, He sees them as without spot. *"Thou art all fair, my love. There is no spot in thee. Thou hast taken away mine heart with one of thine eyes, with one chain of thy neck. How fair is thy love."* This single-minded devotion wins more than approval. It brings joy to one who emptied himself of his riches, of life itself that she might be made rich and inherit eternity with him.

Alas! that any should prove unfaithful to such a love, that any could become luke-warm, forgetful, taken up, engrossed with any other theme, person or thing, than that of Jesus and his redeeming love. Yet this love which is to endure forever must be tested and tried. Only the choice qualities can stand side by side with the Son of God. These qualities are not those of scholarship, knowledge, natural assets, for not many noble or learned according to worldly estimates have been called. The thing that makes them dear to God is the same quality of unquestioning obedience, loyalty, meekness, unselfish love, willingness to spend and be spent, as were so grandly exemplified in Jesus during his earthly life. It is likeness to these things, affinity, strong desire, earnest striving, faith, hope, love, which will win the coveted position of bridal honours. "Many are called but few are chosen", qualify enough to be chosen. It is the heart and not the head, the life lived, the things done for his sake, that binds the willing soul to the Lord, the one who loves truly, loves the person, character, ways and manners of the loved one. The interests and affairs of that one are followed with devoted interest. Should a cloud of misunderstanding arise, the light of life is temporarily blotted out until complete love and trust are restored. Reconciliation brings with it an overwhelming joy. It is this kind of personal love to Jesus which is the real force behind all genuine Christian living. Devotion to causes, assents to creeds, formulas of religious doctrines, membership of some church, sect, society, or religious cult, does not make a person eligible for the inheritance that cannot fade. "Consider Him" is the appeal of the Spirit, and He can never be considered overmuch or overloved, for his own full measure of love is one that is beyond the grasp of human knowledge or capacity. Human nature is weak, limited, frail, faulty, forgetful. At its best, with its most earnest efforts, its most diligent consideration, its warmest devotion, its deepest desired, it will still fall far short of that love of Jesus which was to man the

sublime expression and revelation of the love of God. Yet there He stands at the apex and centre of all our affairs, and of the entire universe, the King of love, the Ruler of our affairs. He is the pattern, and God intends us to keep looking to Jesus, "the author and finisher of our faith" if we would be "complete in him". Any knowledge which leads to a greater knowledge of the beloved, to a greater desire to imitate him, to share and to express his love in daily living, is the knowledge God wants us to have. Much of the confusion which darkens the world of religious thought is caused by too great a concentration on non-essential or secondary matters, intellectual problems which do not warm the heart. Luke-warm love results, with an easy turning away of the affections to other causes, interests and things, which gradually absorb the mind until the first rapture of love is lost. It is possible, alarmingly so, that the very Book itself, through which comes so much for the longing heart, can become such a bitter bone of contention that love wilts before the onslaughts of argument and the stubborn pride of contenders.

The world is ever ready with its enticing allurements to win away the love of hearts bound to Christ, and the flesh, deceitful and weak, is ever ready to listen to the myriad siren voices calling to other loves, while Satan, that malicious and crafty foe of God and man, is more than ready to destroy the "royal seed" through whose agency his own evil shackles are finally to be broken from the necks of mankind. Error, selfishness and pride, ambition, doubt, despair are some of the dangerous factors which cause love to grow cold while the Bride is making herself ready. Only a sterling, top-quality love will spurn all other inducements, will remain loyal, steadfast and true under every possible condition, enduring all the assaults of time and circumstance with unflinching and unwearied devotion. These are they which have a passion for life more than mere learning, to whom Jesus means life. The desire to be true is not just for the joy of endless association with him, but that of bringing life to a dying race, beset with sin and all its consequences; helpless to deliver themselves from its awful grip. This joy of deliverance took Jesus to the cross; it will urge his true lovers on to faithfulness. It is by love that God purposes to save man, to give life to the race, and it is through the love of Christ and the love of his chosen and faithful Bride that his purpose will be carried out.

The faithful of all centuries since the advent of Jesus have considered themselves so bound in love and service, their lives a period of discipline and tuition, and in close co-operation with the

glorious Christ, a time of testing and preparation for a future life of nobler proportions to be shared with all the faithful in the presence of God the Father. With this authorised picture before us we can look again at the Bride intent upon her preparations.

She is first and foremost radiantly happy. Doubt and mistrust do not cloud her brow, for she rejoices in the certainty, the security of her Bridegroom's love for her, which she not only desires but reciprocates. "My beloved is mine and I am his". She is his treasure. To her he is the "altogether lovely one, the fairest among ten thousand". The Scriptures convey his delight and assurances. The hymns of saints, the music, the prayers, the beauty which has been wrought into sacred edifices, the valiant efforts to follow his example, the triumphs of faith and spirit over the adversities of life, are some of the expressions, some of the proofs of love, given back by hearts wholly given to God and Christ. The love and interest of the Father cannot be excluded from the pact any more than that of the Eastern parent. Indeed it was the parent who arranged and made possible the match. The father was honoured in the son, the bride being as eagerly sought and as lovingly awaited. In the greater marriage it is no less the fact that all has been made possible, supervised, and provided by the richness of the love of God. He it is who awaits with equal joy the presentation before him of the Bride made glorious, "without spot or wrinkle or any such thing".

The eastern provision of a wedding garment for each guest bidden to the marriage teaches a deep truth which cannot be ignored. In the grand event of the marriage of a king's son, the robes are of royal splendour. The beneficence of the king is at once recognised in the bestowal of rich garments upon the bidden guests, which properly fit them for their place at the great banquet, but which they would be unable to provide for themselves. None need be ashamed to walk in the royal house or

minge with the distinguished company while clad in the princely attire of the king's providing. When one, through pride of heart, says in effect, "My own dress is good enough, I will go in my own dress", he is flouting the generosity of the king. When he lays aside the king's gift, appearing in his own attire, he is immediately conspicuous and out of place. He is not choice, either in garment or character. His dress does not grace the royal assembly and his conduct is an affront to the king, the outcome of some deep-rooted pride or self-love. Such vanity and lack of appreciation is swiftly dealt with by the royal officers of the feast. When questioned as to how he got in without the wedding garment which is the passport of entry, the offender is silent, having no legitimate excuse. Not only is he forcibly removed, but restrained until the feast is over so that he cannot again offend either the host or the guests. What a bold and striking picture our Lord used here to teach a searching truth, that of meekness, obedience, and a thankful recognition of God's great condescension to men of low estate, his provision for their lifting up to fellowship with himself, yet maintaining his supremacy; for "no flesh shall glory in his presence".

"Many are called but few are choice". Unbelievable as it may seem, out of the many, only the few are going to be found on the great day clothed upon with the king's robe, the robe of righteousness. Many will come at that day boasting of great and good works done in his name but He does not acknowledge them, for works have no merit by themselves. There must be the complete realisation that the best human talents and endeavours are as nothing in the sight of God, who has given to man in the first place everything that he has or is.

The "Church of the Firstborn" is all choice, beautifully clad in the king's gift according to the king's wish, fitted by him to sit down with him in the kingdom of heaven.

To be continued

THE "FISH" ANAGRAM

What is called the "Fish Scheme" is becoming familiar in many parts of this country. Elderly people or people living alone are given a card bearing a large representation of a fish; in the event of their needing urgent assistance, due perhaps to accident or illness, they are told to put the card in their window where it can be seen by passers-by. The display of the symbol thus summons help and the sponsoring organisation has local representatives who are in touch with sources of specialised assistance.

The impetus behind the scheme is Christian and that is why the fish symbol was chosen. Quite early in the First Century the Greek word for "fish" was recognised as an anagram defining the names, title and office of our Lord and the fish became prominent in Christian art.

The Greek word for fish is IΧΘΥΣ, these five letters being the initials of the words in the expression;
IESOUS XRISTOS THEOV YIOS SOTER
JESUS CHRIST, SON-OF-GOD, SAVIOUR.

"This is my body This is my blood"

We come to the Memorial season again and hear the familiar words repeated, "*This do in remembrance of Me*". Living nearly two thousand years later we must receive these words a little differently from those early disciples who heard them for the first time. They had known our Lord *personally* and the poignant events that closed his earthly life would fill their memories strikingly every time they heard the words uttered. The memory of any incident or happening is much more meaningful to a person who *experienced* it, than to one who merely learned about it from someone else. Memory is a wonderful thing. Some memories give us pleasure and some give us pain. Some serve to lift us up, and some to depress us. To quote partially from the writing of another; "*The power of memory is lasting and influential No man can be solitary who has memory. The poorest of us, if we have memory, is richer than he knows, for by it we can re-produce ourselves, be young even when the limbs are failing, and have all the past belonging to us when the hair is silvery and the eyes are dim. It is a rare and divine endowment*"

At this season of the year when we gather to carry out our Lord's injunction, "*Do this in remembrance of Me*", we remember only what we have been told. Not that it is the less important or real on that score, for we have been brought along a way where we can say with another of time past, "*We have not been persuaded to know Jesus Christ merely because of what we have been told, but we have heard him ourselves and know that this is indeed Jesus the Saviour of the world.*" So faithfully and impressively did the early disciples narrate, for our benefit, their "memories" of our Lord, that we seem to find ourselves within the circle or circuit of their own understanding and memories; brought very close to the actual happenings, so that it means as much to us as it did to them on the first anniversary of our Lord's death—"Do this in remembrance of Me." The delivery of Israel out of Egypt long ago, by the great plagues God used for the purpose, particularly the last when all the first-born in the land perished in one night except those for whom the blood of a slain lamb effected deliverance, was all a picture of the great deliverance of both the church and the world through the sacrifice of Jesus. Firstly, Israel, through the Passover, remembered annually in a special way, their

deliverance from Egyptian bondage. Later, as Jesus effected the greater deliverance, the Passover remembrance was superseded by the Memorial instituted by Jesus—"This do (now) in remembrance of Me".

It is not possible by the mere words of a sermon to prepare anyone properly to observe our Lord's injunction; only Christian *experience* can whet the appetite for such a spiritual observance. If we have not come to know the Lord personally and individually through the great verities of his word, believed in and acted upon, then the Lord's table can provide no satisfying fare, but if we have learned to appreciate the great ransom sacrifice on our behalf, and have additionally entered into the privileges of Divine service as a result, then at the Lord's table we will find communion sweet. Jesus took bread, gave thanks, brake it and gave to the disciples saying, "Take, eat, this represents my body broken for you." Upon what do our minds dwell as we take and eat the bread? Not the wafer in our mouth, but the body that was broken that night—and not merely that night. It was consummated that night, but it had steadily been "broken" for the whole three and a half years of his ministry; "*My flesh I will give for the life of the world*". Next He took the cup and gave thanks and invited his disciples to drink of it also, saying, "This is my blood of the New Covenant which is shed for many for the remission of sins." The bread and the cup, not one alone, but both together, represented the complete sacrifice to atone for the sins of the whole world. The flesh of our Lord was daily put to death. He came not to be ministered unto, but to *minister* and to give his life a ransom for all. He thought not of his own interest, but of the interests of others, and above all, the will of his heavenly Father—"Not my will, but thine, be done."

For as long as it was the will of his Heavenly Father that his body should continue to be broken, his life was preserved. Whole nights spent on the mountains in prayer without physical rest, and days of great privation, often reduced him to great weariness. The powers that be, with tremendous opposition, sought to slay him and remove him from their midst, but until his hour was full come no power that was formed against him could prosper. In the Father's great plan there was a pre-arranged period during which his body should be broken and his flesh expended,

and nothing could interfere, except it be the Son's own choice.

How fatal it would have been for us if he had "looked back".

Said Pilate, "Knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee?" Replied Jesus, "Thou could'st have no power at all except it were given thee from above." We read of him in John 18.4; Jesus therefore, knowing all things that should come upon him, went forth . . . continually offering his body to be broken. While blood flowed through his veins his body would continue to be "broken".

At last in the Father's programme, it was time for blood to flow. "*Jesus, knowing that his hour was come . . .*" He had submitted to his body being broken for three and a half years, but all the time conscious of his Father's protecting care and supervision. Now the consummation of his sacrifice was at hand—"Oh Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me." Before our Lord lay the betrayal, the arrest, the trial with all its mockers and humiliation, then death amid the ignominy of the cross. These physical sufferings alone made an anguish that was terrible to endure. Another element of our Lord's suffering was the falsity of the human hearts about him. There was the traitorous kiss of Judas, the sad denial of Peter, the flight and desertion of the other disciples, the rejection and crucifixion by the people he had come to save. All this he foresaw. Did he know beforehand of the experience when he would no longer be conscious of his Father's protecting care? It would seem it could be safely assumed our Lord had meditated well upon the twenty-second psalm which so fully portrays his earthly sufferings, and the words of the first verse were his expression in the hour of his extremity:—"My God, why hast thou forsaken me." So at last, body broken, flesh expended, and blood spilt, the great sacrifice was complete.

"This do in remembrance of Me." Why?

Is it merely to recall our Saviour's great sacrifice for ourselves and all men, that we may be stimulated to appreciate it anew at this season, the anniversary of its consummation? Undoubtedly that is one purpose. But is it all? Have we not been brought clearly to see, by the aid of the Spirit's power, that those who during this Age accepted Jesus' sacrifice, have been privileged to become members of his body. Does not the Scripture clearly reveal that the Church will one day rule with Christ in his Kingdom? And does it not just as clearly reveal conditions to be fulfilled? If we suffer with him, we will reign with him. "Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink

of?", was the first question asked of one who sought the kingdom position with Christ. "In this world ye shall have tribulation. If they have persecuted Me, they will persecute you also." If during this age any were going to be associated with Jesus, their bodies were going to be broken too. Not that further sacrifice for sin is required, but that we may taste of his experiences—"filling up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ"

None will question that consecration spells service, and Christian service spells "broken bodies",—expended flesh. He that will save his life in this world shall lose it, but he who loses it (expends it in the Divine service made possible through Christ's sacrifice) will find it (in the Kingdom by and by). We are always "*bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus . . .*" (2 Cor. 4.8-10), and like Jesus our Head, as our bodies are being "broken" in the sacrificial way of the cross, we are conscious of our Father's protection—the Christian is immortal until his work on earth is done. It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed (Lam. 3.22). He is wonderfully good to us in all our ways, giving us the strength we need in all the buffeting experiences against the world, the flesh and the devil. "*Far from my home on life's rough way, Oh teach me from my heart to say, Thy will be done*".

Soon, like our Lord and head, our sacrificial life of service will be consummated. While blood flows through our veins may the Heavenly Father keep us faithful to the end. The end is yet before us—we have not yet resisted unto blood . . . No, not yet (Heb. 12.4). But the implication seems clear that we are required to do so, therefore—"Consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be weary and faint in your minds" (Heb. 12.3). This is of the closest relation to the admonition we dwell upon at this season of the year—"Do this in remembrance of Me." By meditating upon and appreciating our Lord's earthly experiences we can find a strength which helps us not to grow weary and faint, but to humbly press on in the Narrow Way. All difficulties can be faced; there is no problem that cannot be solved, by remembering our Lord's earthly experiences and the manner in which He met them. Let a man examine himself as he eats the bread and drinks the cup. Have we elected to follow him faithful unto death? If that is not our desire we eat and drink unworthily. May the remembrance of our Lord at this season be one that lingers with us throughout the year, helping to provide the strength that enables us to win victories, and to be numbered with the overcomers at last who will eat and drink it new with him in the Kingdom.

DANIEL IN BABYLON

The story of a great man's faith

8. The Beginning of Visions

The seventh chapter of Daniel begins what is virtually an independent book — the book of visions. The first six chapters are histories; they relate events that took place during the space of some seventy years from the beginning of Nebuchadnezzar's reign to the beginning of Cyrus' reign—all the time of the first universal empire, that of Babylon. Chapter 7 goes back some seventeen years, to the first year of Belshazzar the last native king of Babylon, and tells of the visions which came to the aged prophet and have been of such surpassing interest to every generation of "watchers" from that day to this.

At this time Daniel was about seventy-four years of age. His old master and friend, King Nebuchadnezzar, had been dead for eleven years. He was no longer chief of the wise men of Babylon; all his official ranks had gone and he lived as a private citizen, almost certainly among his own fellow-exiles in some residential quarter of the city. His only friend at court was probably Queen Nitocris, younger daughter of Nebuchadnezzar, wife of Nabonidus the reigning monarch, and mother of Belshazzar, who this very year had been promoted to joint-rule with his father. The voice of Ezekiel had been silent for twenty-one years so that although he was only Daniel's age, we do not know whether he was alive or dead. So far as the Book of Daniel itself indicates, the prophet was alone, and in solitude recorded for future generations the vivid vision-pictures with which we as prophetic students have become so familiar.

Here then in the first year of Belshazzar Daniel slept and dreamed. In earlier years the purposes of God had been conveyed to the mind of the great king by means of dreams—the dream of the great image, the dream of the great tree, and Daniel had been employed as the agent in making known to the king the meaning of the dreams. From those dreams we have our first understanding of the Divine arrangement of Gentile Times followed by the setting up of the Kingdom of God. Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome; these are the four successive empires, from Nebuchadnezzar's day to our own, succeeded by the incoming and all-conquering Kingdom of God, pictured by the manlike image of gold, silver, copper and iron. The "Seven Times" during which the tree of the dream was to be bound with iron and

copper has been held by many to indicate in symbolic language the duration of those Gentile Times; without embarking on the hazardous seas of chronological speculation it can certainly be admitted that the mystic number 2520, which is the equivalent of symbolic "seven times" is a significant one in the succession of periods which make up human history as it is punctuated by events momentous from the standpoint of the Divine Plan. It cannot be denied that the cycle of 2520 years, from the inception of the "head of gold" empire brings us just about to the present day when it is patent to the most casual observer that the feet of iron are about to collapse into the sea of burning flame and so go into utter destruction, just as is indicated under other symbols in the vision of Daniel 7 which we are now about to examine. We have therefore already a direct connection between the days of Daniel and our own day as the beginning and ending of an epoch in the outworking of God's purposes leading directly to the inauguration of the greatest epoch of all—the Kingdom of God upon earth.

The king's vision was one of human pride and achievement—a colossal image of a man, towering up into the skies. Daniel's dream was of something very different—a manifestation of beast-like forces begotten of chaos, striving together for mastery, and finally disappearing before the superior power of the Lord from Heaven. There are therefore important lessons for all Christians to be learned from the pictures that flickered across the prophet's sleeping mind on that quiet night in ancient Babylon so many thousands of years ago.

Detailed interpretations of the dream, both Historical and Futurist, are legion and there is no intention here of adding to the number. In a treatise which is descriptive of the life of Daniel in Babylon such detailed interpretation of prophecy would not be altogether in place. But because this treatise is a life of Daniel in Babylon something of what it meant to Daniel and his people at that time, is most decidedly in place, and upon that background the prophetic students may, if they will, proceed to elaborate their interpretations.

"I saw in my vision by night", says Daniel, "and, behold, the four winds of heaven strove upon the great sea. And four great beasts came up from

the sea, diverse one from another..." (Ch. 7, v. 1). The account goes on to describe the first beast as like a lion with eagles' wings, rearing up on its hind legs in the endeavour to walk as a man, and, too, having a man's heart. Then came a second, like a bear, in a recumbent position, but with one foreleg flexed as though in the act of getting up. Thirdly, a leopard with four heads and four wings, and finally, a beast so alien to all known animals and so terrible in its aspect that Daniel was hard put to it to find words sufficiently descriptive.

The life of the four beasts was brief. There came a great appearance in the heavens, the setting of celestial thrones and the coming of the Most High for judgment; the arraignment of those beasts before him and their condemnation and destruction in the fiery flame. Then the sequel; the advent of a mighty one, the Son of Man, to receive the kingship of earth and rule over it in a kingdom which should never pass away. Four beasts, born of chaos, doomed to destruction, are succeeded by an everlasting kingdom. Taken in conjunction with the earlier vision of the great image, the application and the meaning almost immediately suggests itself.

Daniel had lived in Babylon for more than fifty years, the greater part of his life. He was thoroughly versed in the history, the mythology, and the folk-lore of the Babylonians. He had been Chief of all their wise men, their priesthoods and their philosophers. It would not be surprising therefore if the "background" of his dream, or as we might say, the "setting", had a distinctly Babylonian flavour. In such a manner the meaning and application of the dream would be much more readily grasped by those devout Jews in Babylon who were to be the immediate recipients of this Divine revelation.

The four winds "strove upon the great sea". That expression goes right back to the beginning of Babylonian mythology. The old stories of creation told of a time before the gods had made man, or the solid earth that was man's home, when all was chaos, a dark and dismal abyss in which the winds and waters raged and howled, and nothing had any shape or form. That chaos was personified by the Babylonians and pictured as a terrible monster named Tiamat. When the time of creation drew near, Bel-Marduk the life-giver, the Son of Ea the God of the sea, came forth with his arrows of light to overcome and slay Tiamat and turn the dark chaos into the ordered earth illumined by the light of the sun, preparatory to creating man upon it. All of which, of course, can be traced back pretty clearly to the original

truth expressed in Genesis, "In the beginning the earth was without form, and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters, and God said 'Let there be light' and there was light." And the subsequent work of creation was carried out by One "without whom was not anything made that was made" the only-begotten Son of God.

The Hebrew word for "deep" in Gen. 1, 1 is "tehom" which is the Hebrew equivalent of "Tiamat" and is directly derived from that Babylonian word.

So Daniel saw these four beast-like creatures emerging from the darkness and confusion of chaos and of evil. They were not from God; they did not have their origin in the heavens; they came from the earth and from the basest elements of the earth, and because they were thus born of chaos they must sooner or later meet the powers of heaven in mortal conflict, and be overthrown. That at least was the first fundamental truth Daniel drew from this vivid dream.

The first beast was like a lion with eagle's wings, a familiar creature to Daniel. There were many such in Babylon. Stone lions with eagles' wings and usually with human heads stood guard at every palace gateway and temple portico. There are two standing at present in the British Museum. Walls, buildings and gateways were adorned with sculptured reliefs of the same creatures. The winged lion was the symbol of Babylon, just as Landseer's lions in Trafalgar Square are the symbols of Britain. Daniel, seeing that creature in his dream, knew at once and without any doubt that he was looking upon the symbol of the world-empire that had been pictured in the "head of gold" of the image—the empire of Babylon.

But this lion was standing, rearing itself up on its hind legs like a man, whereas the winged lions of Babylon are usually pictured standing on all fours or recumbent. That, too, must have suggested something else to Daniel's mind. When the lions or other creatures of Babylonian mythology were pictured as rearing up on two legs it was because they were fighting an enemy. So with the lion of Daniel's dream. It had a man's heart, the sagacity and intelligence of a man—maybe the outstanding soldier whose skill and sagacity established the empire, Nebuchadnezzar—but it was fighting for its life all the time and eventually it went down before its foes.

Daniel saw that happen in the dream. The A.V. is not quite correct. Vs. 4 should read "I beheld till the wings were plucked *wherewith* it was lifted up from the earth..." Daniel lived to see the wings plucked.

The second beast was a bear, a beast alien to Babylonian mythology, for there were never any bears in Babylonia. Bears are creatures of the wooded mountains and the land of the two rivers has no mountains and few trees. Here was an alien power which "raised up itself on one side." That part of the picture would be familiar to Daniel, for the sculptures of Babylon did show animals with one foreleg bent in recumbent position and the other straightened as the beast "rose up to the prey." So, eventually, Persia, the land of mountains and of bears, the silver breast of the image, sprang upon Babylon, Egypt and Lydia, and devoured them, just as the bear in the vision devoured the flesh from the three ribs it carried in its mouth.

Daniel could not have known, by his own unaided knowledge, what was prefigured by the four-winged and four headed leopard, the third beast of his dream. Very possibly though his mind was enlightened by the Holy Spirit, so that in some dim way he was able to see into futurity and sense something of the swiftly-moving armies of Greece which spread the third empire so rapidly over the four quarters of the world, and when it had reached its widest limits at the death of Alexander the Great, became divided into four realms under four heads. It remained for later historians to show how accurately the march of events fitted the circumstances of the dream.

Then came the fourth beast, "dreadful and terrible, and strong exceedingly; and it had great iron teeth... and it had ten horns." This beast was evidently unlike any known earthly animal and its aspect was such as to strike terror into the beholder. This was the beast which figured most prominently in the Divine judgment shortly to come, and with that hint as to its continued existence right up until the time of that judgment it is not surprising that most students think of Rome,

the successor of Greece in world rulership, destined to rule until the Son of Man should come in the glory of his Kingdom and sweep away every vestige of man's rule from the earth. According to Daniel, this beast more than them all was the enemy of God's saints and made war against them; this, said the angel, shall be the fourth kingdom upon earth and shall not only prevail over the saints but shall speak blasphemy against the Most High and prevail during the mystic period of trial and persecution, the time, times and half a time, the twelve hundred and sixty days which always betokens oppression, persecution and testing of the faithful in God. One wonders if this strange and terrible beast which Daniel saw in his vision was in fact the dragon or serpent of Babylon, the mysterious *sirrussu*, whose form is so often seen on the sculptures of that ancient city. That was a creature like nothing known in Nature. The four bronze serpents guarding the gateway of the Temple of Bel-Marduk in Babylon were *sirrussu*. More than anything else that mythical creature symbolised the power of evil and the archangel of evil, the Devil himself, and when in the Scriptures the dragon or the serpent is mentioned it is always this strange and terrible beast that is in mind. From Daniel to Revelation there is the same idea made prominent; the dragon of ancient Babylon is manifest in that great power which for twenty out of the twenty-five centuries of Gentile Times has wielded its crushing iron rule over the nations and persecuted the saints of God.

But this was not the end of the dream. The forces of heaven were moving to judgment and away in the celestial realm the outraged holiness of God was ready now to sweep back into the oblivion of chaos all these beast-like systems which for so long had usurped his domain.

To be continued

WHEN GOD CALLS

A discussion on the call to discipleship

"No man can come to me except the Father which hath sent me draw him". (Jno. 6.44).

At first sight this looks a rather exclusive kind of situation, as though God selects some to receive his bounty on a basis known only to himself, and rejects all others. In fact this is the foundation on which was built the old Calvinistic doctrine of Divine election; a few were pre-destined to heavenly felicity and all the rest equally irrevocably to the torments of hell. Happily very few still view the workings of God in that light even although far too many still restrict the scope of God's purpose for man within far too narrow a

compass. Nevertheless there are several texts such as this one which at first sight appear to forbid the approach of man to God until he receives a Divine call or invitation, and since this stands in direct opposition to the universal appeal of the gospel which is open to all of humankind wherever they are or whoever they may be it demands a little quiet thought.

There certainly have been selective callings of God in the past. Paul was called to be the Apostle to the Gentiles, Mary the mother of Messiah and John the herald of Messiah. All such instances—and there are many in Scripture—rest upon the

particular fitness of the individuals concerned for the duty or commission to be laid upon them; that is why they were thus called. Israel as a nation was definitely selected and called to become a witness to the One God, to manifest his laws and purposes in the sight of all mankind, and ultimately—this part of the calling has not yet materialised into reality—to be a light to the nations, to declare God's salvation to the ends of the earth. The reason for the selection of this particular nation is not immediately apparent—from some points of view that proverbially hard-hearted and stiff-necked people might be said to have been a singularly unfortunate choice—but God makes no mistakes. Some quality in the line of descent from Abraham through Jacob to the twelve tribes must have been present to make this people peculiarly suitable for the Divine purpose; their remarkable survival as an identifiable racial entity through more than three thousand years despite unparalleled attempts at their extermination points to something unusual and, shall we say, indestructible, in their national make-up.

All these callings were to purposes connected with the work of God in the world and none may question the choice of the Almighty when He appoints his agents. In no instance was the eternal destiny of the individuals concerned involved, nor yet the degree of approach to, or communion with, God, achieved by any of them. When it comes to the relation of each one of us to the Most High there is no question of waiting for a "call" before we come to him. The reverse is the case; from earliest times the Father in heaven has been urging and entreating "whosoever will" to come to him in devotion and faith and yield themselves to his will in complete surrender of self. "Turn ye, turn ye, from your evil ways" comes the appeal from the Heavenly Throne to God's wayward children of old "for why will ye die, O house of Israel?" (Ezek. 33.11). A later generation heard the same heart-felt invitation "Come unto me . . . and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11.28). One of the basic principles of Divine revelation is that the salvation of God is freely offered to all who will accept it.

When, then, Jesus said that no man could come to him except the Father draw him, He was stating the profound truth that the power of the Holy Spirit of God was abroad in the earth, actively working in the hearts of any who had the slightest leaning toward him, encouraging, influencing, "drawing", such an one to the Master. "Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me" continued Jesus in the same discourse (Jno. 6.45). He employed a similar theme later on when He said "I, if I be lifted up

from the earth, will draw all men unto me" (Jno. 12.32). Thayer's paraphrase of that declaration is very telling: "I, by my moral, my spiritual, influence will win to myself the hearts of all". The act of coming to Jesus is not just a cold-blooded business transaction or intellectual exercise, inspired by the human mind and put into practice by decision of the human will. It is a process in which the Holy Spirit has a part to play and the man who hears the appeal of the gospel and feels within himself the desire and urge to respond to that appeal becomes immediately a subject of Holy Spirit power, leading him on to the object of his quest. In such a way, it may be, it is true that the journey to the foot of the Cross is made possible only by the enabling power of the Holy Spirit.

The returning prodigal, in the parable of the Prodigal son, took the first step on his return journey to his father's home, but after that his father went out to meet him and hastened the repentant one's progress by his own love and welcome. The same truth is expressed by the writer to the Hebrews when he says "He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Heb. 11.6). The first impulse of faith or belief must be there and then God by the Holy Spirit progressively enlightens the seeker as fast as he is able to receive and bear the Divine light, and in this way draws the seeker to himself.

Something like this would appear to be intended by the Lord's words to his disciples recorded in Matt. 12. 11-15 "*It is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given . . . because they seeing see not, and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand . . . for this peoples' heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them*". All too often this passage is taken to mean that Jesus deliberately veiled his message in "dark sayings" so that the people in general would not be able to understand, whereas the precise opposite is really the case. What Jesus had to say was comprehensible to his own followers, who wanted to hear the message and profit by it, but incomprehensible to those who did not want it and did not want to repent and be converted. This new teaching of love and sacrifice, of service and non-violence, was alien to their way of thinking and they wanted none of it. They knew not their loss; the disciples had chosen the better part and were enlightened thereby. Because of their realisation of need, and their faith

in God, and their decisiveness in accepting the opportunity of discipleship when it was offered, they entered into an enlightenment which the others utterly failed to grasp and did not realise even existed. So it could be said that it was given to the disciples to receive this knowledge whereas to the others it was not given. It is in this sense that the Lord's words in Jno. 6.65 are to be understood: "no man can come unto me except it were given unto him of my Father". The fullest expression of "coming unto me" is the coming "into Christ" which implies the full and unconditional consecration of life and abilities and possessions to the service of God, the being baptised into Christ's death and rising again to walk with him in newness of life, to use the language of Rom. 6. This coming into Christ is the work of the Holy Spirit acting upon the individual's first steps of faith and belief and it is only because that initial faith and belief is there that the Holy Spirit is able thus to act. The Apostle in Rom. 8.28 speaks of those who are "the called according to his purpose"; he is speaking of the Church of this Age, the members of which are called out from the general mass of humanity, that by reason of a consecrated life and utter devotion to God they might be fitted for the task of effecting world conversion in the next Age. It is true that only those thus called can aspire to be of that Church but the point to notice is that the opportunity is there for whosoever manifests the first essentials of belief in God and faith in his promise and desire to serve him. To the one who goes thus far along the way there comes the Divine leading by the Holy Spirit into a deeper understanding of what is offered and what is involved, until at length in full realisation of the meaning of the appeal "My son, give me thine heart" the believer dedicates himself wholly to his Lord. This is the call and those who answer it and enter into this "life in Christ" are the called according to his purpose; the ones to whom the power to "come into Christ" has been given by the Father.

John the Baptist used a similar expression upon one occasion but in a different connection. The third chapter of John's Gospel records an occasion when the Baptist's disciples brought him news of Jesus' increasing ministry and influence, to which John replied "a man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven" (Jno. 3.27). The context shows unmistakably that he referred to Jesus

as the one who had been given a Divine commission to do as He was doing and his ministry would have been fruitless unless it had been given thus from heaven.

There is one text involving a Divine call which is frequently sadly misapplied. Heb. 5.4. has the statement "*No man taketh this honour unto himself but he that is called of God, as was Aaron*". A careful reading of the chapter shows that this has no reference whatever to the Christian calling, termed by Paul the "High Calling of God in Christ Jesus". Here in Heb. 5 the writer is stressing the fact that Christ is constituted the world's Saviour, the world's High Priest, by ordinance of God who said "Thou art my Son, today have I begotten thee", who "so loved the world that He gave his only-begotten son that whosoever believeth on him should not perish but have everlasting life". To illustrate this truth he points out that the High Priests of Israel, of whom Aaron was the first, held office by ordinance of God. No ordinary man could aspire to the office; the succession was laid down by Divine edict. No man could take the honour, only he whose right it was in any generation according to that edict. "*So also Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest*"; it was the Father who conferred upon him the honour and dignity of the office.

It was when Jesus talked like this that "from that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him" (Jno. 6.66). The tragedy is not that God fails to call, but that some who have taken the first steps toward the Saviour of their own volition falter and hang back when the voice of the Spirit sounds in their ears and they begin to perceive what discipleship is going to involve. It is not that God will not call them but rather that they hasten to put themselves into a position where they cannot hear the call, choosing to maintain their standing of faith in Christ as Saviour without accepting the leading of the Spirit into that fuller life in Christ which would constitute them of the community of called ones. Not lost, not castaways, their faith will one day gain them a place in God's purpose but not that for which this Age is primarily intended—the development and completion of the Church of Christ. That is why Jesus said on one occasion "No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the Kingdom of God".

It is not mere eternity which the thoughtful man desires, not even the perpetuity of things as they are; but eternal life worthy of the noble name, and in harmony with his highest nature, in which the

good he aspires after shall be attained, and the evil he deprecates be removed, and the unseen God be beheld with joy and served with undecaying energies.
T. M. Herbert.

REBEKAH — BRIDE OF ISAAC

She could hardly have been more than sixteen at the time, this young girl, verging upon womanhood, whom Ferrar Fenton, with his passion for the English vernacular, describes as "*very beautiful to look upon, a maiden who had no sweetheart*" which in any case is exactly what the Hebrew of Gen. 24.16 implies. Eliezer, steward to Abraham, the wealthiest man in faraway Canaan, followed her lithe walk with his eyes as she moved gracefully towards the well beside which he was standing, her water-jar upon her shoulder. His men, waiting beside their laden camels, watched him as he cogitated within himself whether the Lord was about to make his mission prosperous. He had come four hundred miles into Aram-Naharaim, the Land of the Two Rivers, to find a bride for his master's son Isaac, but his instructions were that the woman chosen must be of Abraham's own relatives, settled here in the land which Abraham had left many years ago, in response to the Divine call, to go to Canaan. Within the next few minutes he was to find that he had been led unerringly directly to the object of his quest.

Rebekah was the grand-daughter of Nahor, Abraham's older brother. From Gen. 22. 20-24 it would appear that only within the immediate past had Abraham known anything of his brother's family. Evidently travellers from the old homeland had brought news that Nahor had fathered a family of twelve sons of whom one, Bethuel, was the father of Rebekah. Since Abraham knew none of these children when he left Haran it must be that the daughter of Bethuel was very young when Eliezer met her. Now as he looked upon her he was reminded again of the importance of his choice. Isaac was the covenant child, the promised "seed" of Abraham from whom was to spring the dedicated nation destined to preserve the knowledge and revelation of God in history, prepare for the coming of Christ, and ultimately become a light to the nations when at last God should turn to evangelise the world in the days of Christ's kingdom. No wonder the steward was cautious as he began to converse with this fresh young girl who might conceivably become involved in so great a destiny.

Rebekah, of course, could have had no such thoughts. Born and brought up in a pastoral community where life was probably remote from the political upheavals that were always in progress,

with little thought of the future save that involved in the growing of crops and the maintenance of flocks and herds, she probably had no knowledge at all of the wider world outside her father's lands. The story of her great-uncle's migration into distant Canaan in obedience to a Divine mandate might well have been known to her but any thought of her own eventual involvement in that same Divine purpose could not have crossed her mind. The enthusiasm with which she received the stranger was prompted purely by the instinct of hospitality which was so deeply engrained a characteristic of Eastern peoples. It was with wonder and possibly a little apprehension therefore that she received Eliezer's gifts. A gold "earring"—more properly, a ring to wear in the nose, a customary feminine adornment in those days—of half a shekel weight, equal to a British gold sovereign, and two bracelets of gold, each containing ten shekels, as much metal as twenty gold sovereigns. Their effective value was much greater than would appear, however, for in that day and land the wages of an ordinary labourer or shepherd amounted only to six shekels a year and a large house could be purchased for seven or eight shekels. No wonder Rebekah ran quickly to her home to tell her family of the intriguing visitor and of what he had said to her.

This is where the story begins to have significance for the Christian. At many times, in many places, by word and by pen, Eliezer's mission and the subsequent marriage of Isaac and Rebekah has been used as an illustration or symbol of the call of the Church and her union with Christ the heavenly Bridegroom. Perhaps former generations derived a greater measure of spiritual satisfaction from this kind of symbolism than does our modern down-to-earth age, but the picture is compelling none the less. Here is Eliezer, the messenger of Abraham, being received into the house of Bethuel the father of Rebekah as a welcome visitor. "*Come in, thou blessed of the Lord; wherefore standest thou without?*" was her brother Laban's welcome. This is the commencement of the Christian call. The Holy Spirit of God goes abroad in the earth seeking "a people for God's name" (Acts. 15.14). Where there is a receptive heart, even although that heart is as yet ignorant of the implications involved in the calling, there the Spirit enters with its gracious invitation: "My son, give me thine heart". Knowing, as we do, that

God is working all the time to bring his erring children back to himself, one can sense a world of meaning in the attitude of Eliezer as he looked upon Rebekah; "and the man wondering at her held his peace, to wit whether the Lord had made his journey prosperous or not" (Gen. 24.21). Will there be a willing response to the Gospel invitation or is the seed destined to fall upon stony ground? Surely God waits, as did that faithful steward of old, to see if the appeal is to be prosperous or not!

In the case of Rebekah, it did prosper. Eliezer told his story to the assembled family, enlarging upon the wealth and prosperity of their kinsman Abraham, and his desire that Isaac his heir should be united with a woman of his own family rather than the more or less idolatrous people of Canaan. He told how God had guided him straight to the household he sought and how therefore he desired to take Rebekah back with him to be Isaac's bride. Having said all, he awaited their decision.

It is here we have evidence that the God whom Abraham served was equally acknowledged in the family of his brother Nahor. "The thing proceedeth from the Lord; we cannot speak unto thee either bad or good" said both Bethuel and Laban. "Behold, Rebekah is before thee; take her, and go, and let her be thy master's son's wife, as the Lord hath spoken" (Gen. 24.50-51). Here, in this house, the leading and the overruling providence of God was recognised and obeyed. They had never seen this man before; they had to accept his word that he was in fact who he said he was. He arrived out of the blue with a cool request that he be allowed to take their young daughter to a land four hundred miles away to marry a man none of them had ever seen and of whose very existence they had until then been ignorant. The name of Abraham they knew as that of Laban's grandfather's brother, but he had gone off into the wilds of Canaan some seventy years previously before any of them were born and they could have been excused if they had demanded some proof that he was in fact still alive. Nevertheless they displayed what can only be accepted as an acute perception of the hand of God in this thing; "the thing proceedeth from the Lord . . . take her, and go".

And Rebekah herself; what of her? To show friendship to a stranger and accept his presents and introduce him into her family was one thing; to trust herself to a stranger and go with him into the trackless wilderness under promise of marriage to a man she had never seen, knowing that she was leaving her own people for ever, was quite another. Not unnaturally her family wanted her to remain with them a year, or at least ten months (the literal meaning of Gen. 24.55) before leaving

for good, but at Eliezer's insistence that he must return with her at once or not at all they referred the matter to Rebekah herself. "We will call the damsel, and enquire at her mouth . . . Wilt thou go with this man? And she said, I will go" (vs. 58). That prompt decision speaks volumes for the character and the faith of this youngster. She evidently shared the conviction of her elders, she too believed that the hand of God was outstretched to lead her into a life of new experiences involving the Divine purpose, and like her illustrious kinsman nearly a century before her own time, she "went out, not knowing whither she went" (Heb. 11.8). Abraham had been called out of Haran to Canaan in just the same fashion, knowing nothing of what awaited him; now his grand-niece received the same call and answered it in the same certainty of faith. So the sixteen-year-old Rebekah, and her chaperon Deborah, and her attendant maids, and Eliezer with his men, and his train of ten camels, set out from Haran to go to Canaan where Abraham and Isaac were waiting.

A wonderful picture of the response to the Call, the act of consecration of life, and all that life holds, to God! "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). Thus does the Psalmist extol the coming of the Bride to the Heavenly Bridegroom, the union of Christ and his Church. He may well have had Rebekah in mind when he penned the words. No one, taking the decision to serve Christ and to belong to Christ, to yield life and powers to his service and to be his unto death, has any idea where or to what that decision is going to lead. Like Rebekah, they go forward in implicit faith, knowing only that God leads.

Nothing is said of the journey. Verse 61 tells of the departure from Haran and vs. 62 records the arrival in Canaan. Of that four hundred miles trek, over difficult mountain terrain for the most part, no account is given. It could not have been easy. The first part, after crossing the Euphrates, lay through the flat fertile lands of Northern Syria but the travellers would soon find themselves traversing the mountains of Lebanon, bleak and cold. Next came the semi-desert of the Hauran, where the sun blazed down from a cloudless sky and dust storms were frequent. Then down into the humid sweltering heat of the Jordan valley and the crossing of that river by one of its numerous fords, and the slow and painful climb up the ravines of the Canaanitish highlands which were afterwards to become Samaria and Judea. Finally

the little caravan made its way into the south country, the Negev, not so desert and waterless as it is today; more of a productive pastureland; and there Isaac was waiting for his bride.

Nothing is said of that journey. It could not but be arduous and trying in the extreme for this young girl and her companions, accustomed as they were to the genial landscape and climate of their homeland. Day after day, for probably four or five weeks, they endured the heat by day and the frost by night, the hazards of brigands and wild animals, the difficulties of travel; but Rebekah, like her descendant Moses, "endured, as seeing him who is invisible" (Heb. 11.27). The depth of her devotion and sincerity of her purpose and fixity of her faith carried her through all the difficulties and oppositions of the way and when at last she reached the goal of her hopes it was to her as the hymn has it "the trials of the road will seem nothing, when we come to the end of the way".

Is that why nothing is said in Genesis about the journey? Is it a hint to us that in the triumph of attainment the difficulties of reaching it are nothing to be regarded, not worth mentioning? Says the Apostle "our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" and again "I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (2 Cor. 4.17; Rom. 8.18). The experiences of life, oftentimes hard, wearisome and even bitter, must of necessity occupy the span of our pilgrim journey between our consecration to God and our attainment of its object in the glory of the "First Resurrection", our ultimate union with Christ, but in the realisation of that consummation all the difficulties of the "way thither" will pass from the mind and be forgotten. So nothing need be said about the journey.

"And Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent, and took Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her" (vs. 67). This is the end of the story in so far as it can be used to picture the progress of the Church in the flesh from the initial Call to the final union which in the Book of Revelation is called the "marriage supper of the Lamb" (Rev. 19.9). In Rebekah's case there would of course have followed the usual wedding feast, in which all of Abraham's considerable establishment of servants, shepherds, herdsmen and land workers would participate. Abraham's farming interests covered an area of Canaan some forty by thirty miles and he must have employed several hundred workers. Rebekah's wedding was probably an event to be long remembered.

Of the events of her married life there is not much recorded save for one major incident. Twenty years later she gave birth to twin sons, Esau and Jacob, Esau being the eldest by a few minutes and therefore in the ordinary way the heir of Isaac and custodian of the Divine birthright. Through Esau it could have been that the promised "seed of blessing" should come. But at the birth it was Divinely revealed to Rebekah that the younger, Jacob, would inherit the birthright and she never forgot that. As the years passed Esau developed into what nowadays would be called an "earthy" character and had no concern for, or faith in, the validity of his birthright. Quite light-heartedly he traded it with Jacob in exchange for a savoury meal of the latter's preparation which took his fancy. Jacob would appear to have been the more reverently minded of the two and in all probability had already been told of the Divine intimation by his mother; nevertheless it seems he took advantage of this opportunity in order to establish his claim to the birthright. The significant, and perhaps rather strange, element in the situation is that whereas Rebekah loved Jacob best, Isaac's preference was for Esau. One would think that Isaac, the child of promise and indocrinated from birth in the intentions of God regarding the succession of the "seed", would have faced up to the fact that Esau was not the type of man suited to that succession and Jacob would much more likely be the Lord's choice, but he did not do so. Isaac doted on Esau, and because of that fact Rebekah, remembering the Lord's word that Jacob was to be the heir, began to plot and scheme a means whereby he might be formally invested with the birthright. The story is well known, how that at her instigation Jacob impersonated Esau before the near-blind Isaac and so obtained the patriarchal blessing which, once bestowed and because it was uttered in the hearing of God, could not be revoked.

Rebekah has been blamed too severely for her part in the transaction. From her point of view she was acting to prevent Isaac going against the will of God; he too must have known of the revelation made to her at the children's birth. The end justified the means, in her view; even this blatant deception of Isaac could be excused on the ground that only thus could the will of the Lord be accomplished. And in all this Rebekah quite failed to realise that the Lord is perfectly capable of carrying out his own designs and needs not the use of questionable artifices by well-meaning assistants in the same. It does seem as if the unquestioning faith which did characterise the youthful Rebekah when first she received the call to leave her own land for a strange new life had

lost something of its intensity and now as a mature woman of round about ninety she was not so certain that the Lord could effect his intentions without a little human scheming to help them along.

Rebekah was, after all, like so many of us, prone to plan and scheme to ensure the welfare or the continuance of the Lord's work when all the time all He wants us to do is diligently to prosecute the interests of that which He has placed in our hands to do, leaving the further development of his work to him. He has powers at his disposal that we wot not of, and the problems which may seem insoluble to us unless we instil into their solution a certain amount of human scheming or effort can be handled by him in the twinkling of an eye and far more effectively than we with our limited insight and even more limited powers could ever hope to do.

The unfortunate Rebekah paid the penalty, for she never saw her much-loved son again. In the face of Esau's justifiable resentment at the deception, and his threats against Jacob's life, she counselled her son to take himself off to her brother's home in Haran for a while until the trouble blew over. "*Flee thou*" she said "*to Laban my brother*

to Haran and tarry with him a few days, until thy brother's fury turn away . . . then will I send, and fetch thee from thence" (Gen. 27.43-45). The "few days" probably meant a short space, a year or two maybe; in any case Esau's resentment was short-lived and he soon forgot all about it; he was not really concerned about the birthright and not the sort to bear a grudge. Whether Rebekah ever did send to tell Jacob it was safe to return we do not know, but in any case her message would have been of no avail, for Jacob himself had been manouevred into a contract with Laban which bound him to Haran for many years, and by the time he did get back to Canaan his mother was dead. It was a rather sad ending to a life that opened so full of promise but at any rate Rebekah did play a very important part in the outworking of the Divine plan and if for seventy years or so she did manifest the degree of faith which is required of all who would be not only called and chosen, but also faithful, we can well imagine that the All-Merciful would be likely to forgive that last lapse, undertaken as it was in the best of intentions. At any rate Rebekah is always remembered and best remembered as the young girl who unhesitatingly accepted the call to become the bride of Isaac and in so doing provided the Christian story with one of its choicest illustrations.

"IN REMEMBRANCE OF ME"

*A meditation on
the first anniversary*

The memorial links us with our brethren in all lands and all times. But in how vastly different circumstances has the sacred feast been observed during the past nineteen hundred years. Consider the first memorial, just a year after its inauguration by our Lord on that night in which He was betrayed. Can we picture the disciples gathering in response to love's request? It was no effort for them to remember him. Their memories were crowded with mental pictures of scenes in which He had been the central figure. The four Gospels put together record only the merest fraction of all that Jesus did and taught and with which they were familiar. How wonderful to be able to visualise our Lord enacting some of those scenes with which the Gospels have made us so familiar, such as the cleansing of the lepers, the restoring of sight to the blind, causing the lame to walk, casting out devils, cleansing the Temple, rebuking the winds and the waves, walking on the sea and even restoring the dead to life. How vivid and tragic must the closing scenes have been to them: the triumphal procession on Palm Sunday followed by the terrible cry of "Crucify Him"; the sad procession from the judgment hall to the place called "Calvary" and the crowning horror when

the three crosses were erected with Jesus in their midst.

As they gathered together for the first memorial each would have specially treasured memories of personal contacts with the Lord. Mary, the Lord's mother, would be able to go furthest back. If every mother's mind is richly stored with precious recollections of her first born, how transcendently more must Mary's have been. Possessing the secret of his birth, with what wonder must she have watched her child's personality unfolding as He grew in wisdom and stature and in favour with God and man. She would recall the wrench when at the age of thirty He left the humble home to take up the work for which He had been born. The parting, however, had been softened by the thought that He had gone to lead the nation, as their Messiah, back to God and to fulfil the angel's words given before his birth. How sorely tried her faith had been by subsequent events. But now she understood the reason for it all and all the wealth of her affection had been transformed into a passion of love as she saw him wounded for her transgressions, bruised for her iniquity and the chastisement of her peace upon him. It was surely with trembling hands and eyes and heart that over-

flowed that she partook of those sacred emblems of that broken body and shed blood that had meant all the world to her.

Those amongst the disciples who could look farthest back were John and Andrew. At the first memorial they would be recalling that first meeting with the Lord on the banks of the Jordan. It had been a meeting never to be forgotten; what a wonderful evening they had spent together. First impressions are lasting and probably all would recall the circumstances in which they had first met the Lord. There was Nathaniel; he would be thinking of how he had been making it a matter of prayer under the fig tree when the Lord gave him that heart-searching glance, spoke those thought-penetrating words and that splendid commendation which he should never forget as long as he lived. Nicodemus too would be there. How he would recall the events of that memorable night when the Lord had spoken to him those wonderful words of life. Little had he realised at the time the meaning of the saying addressed to him. "*Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness even so must the Son of Man be lifted up.*" As he thought of his Lord there on the cross he could now see something of its meaning.

Martha and Mary would also be there with their precious store of personal recollections. How much the Lord had loved them and how frequently had he made their house his home! The sisters could still hear the ringing tones of that voice that woke the dead. And what about Peter and James and John, the three so often singled out by the Lord for occasions of special intercourse with him. How much they would recall of personal contacts. As they partook of the emblems surely their minds would go back to that wondrous vision on the mount of transfiguration when Moses and Elijah had spoken of the decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem. Instances could be multiplied of how the disciples would in the most natural and spontaneous way remember him. To them it would not be so much the Plan of God as the person of Christ that would be uppermost in their minds; not so much the doctrines of the Truth as the personal love of their Lord.

As we look forward to another memorial we cannot but recognise a difference between ourselves and these brethren of whom we have been speaking. Unlike them we have no personal recollection of the Lord as He was in the flesh. Our knowledge of the Man Christ Jesus is second hand, books forming the principal source of our knowledge. God caused the New Testament to be written specially for that larger body of his

brethren whom our Lord referred to as "those also who shall believe on Me through their word." By its aid we can remember him in those incidents portrayed so simply and beautifully in the Gospels, using our sanctified imagination to make the scenes live. As compensation for our lack of first hand knowledge of the human life of our Lord, we have a much more complete knowledge than those first disciples of his resurrection life. The epistles written over a long period give evidence of how gradual was the growth into the fuller knowledge of the person and work of Christ. Even Peter refers to Paul's writings as containing some things hard to be understood. The disciples at the first memorial could look back only over the three and a half years of our Lord's earthly ministry; we can look back over nineteen centuries and see the Lord in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks, watching over his people with patient tender care.

If our knowledge of our Lord in the flesh is of necessity second hand, not so our knowledge of the risen Christ. There is no child of God but has abundant occasion for remembering the Lord in respect of his own personal contacts. While it is true that "*the sands have been washed in the foot-prints of the stranger on Galilee's shore, and the voice that subdued the rough billows is heard in Judea no more*" it is also true that "*Warm, sweet living yet, a present help is He, And faith has still her Olivet and love her Galilee.*" We must all have had personal contacts with the Lord else we have no right to a place at the memorial feast. We have been cleansed from sin; our blind eyes have been opened and our deaf ears unstopped; He has opened our lips that our mouth should show forth His praise; He has given us power to stand erect and walk in his ways; He has quickened us and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ. These and countless other blessings are common to all God's people, yet each has had experiences in connection with them peculiarly his own. The members of the New Creation are not mass produced. The Lord has an individual plan for every individual life. The memorial is an occasion for remembering him with deepest gratitude for all the peculiarly personal expressions of his love.

The next memorial for all we know may be the last. It almost certainly will be the last for some. Let us go forward with this solemn thought in mind, not only looking back to the cup which our Lord drank to the dregs at Calvary and in which we are privileged to share, but also forward to the ineffable joy, which awaits us, of being permitted to drink the wine new with him in the Kingdom of God.



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

BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

Vol. 49, No. 3

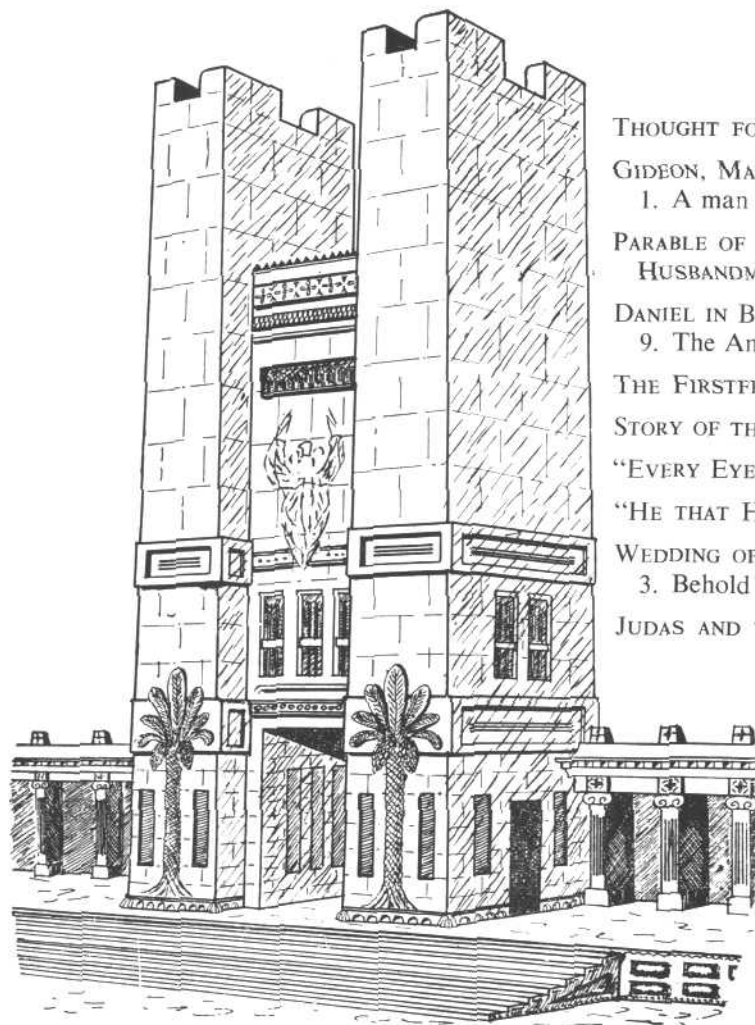
MAY/JUNE 1972

Published May 1st

Next issue July 1st

CONTENTS

THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH	50
GIDEON, MAN OF VALOUR	
1. A man for God's purpose	51
PARABLE OF THE WICKED	
HUSBANDMEN	54
DANIEL IN BABYLON	
9. The Ancient of Days	57
THE FIRSTFRUITS	59
STORY OF THE RESURRECTION	61
"EVERY EYE SHALL SEE HIM"	66
"HE THAT HATH NO SWORD"	68
WEDDING OF THE AGES	
3. Behold the Bridegroom	69
JUDAS AND THE POTTERS FIELD ...	71



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

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

Published by
Bible Fellowship Union
11 Lyncroft Gardens, Hounslow,
Middlesex, England

Bible Study Monthly

FOUNDED 1924

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

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

Communications and donations to Bible Fellowship Union, 11 Lyncroft Gardens, Hounslow, Middlesex, England.
Secretary & Treasurer: B. G. DUMONT (Hounslow) Editorial & Publishing: A. O. HUDSON (Welling)

NOTICES

Portrush convention

It has been decided by the friends in Northern Ireland that the usual annual convention at Portrush will be held this year over the period May 27-29. For details and accommodation write Mr. T. Lang, 31 Hawthorn Terrace, Londonderry, N. Ireland.

Baptismal service

A baptismal service in connection with Windsor Convention is to be held on Sunday, June 11th at the Seventh Day Adventist Church, Albert St., Slough. Will intending participants please write H. Charlton, 43 Halkingcroft, Langley, Slough, Bucks.

Gone from us

Sis. F. Anderson (*Blaby*)

Sis. M. Doe (*Amersham*)

Sis. - Knight (*Slough*)

Sis. E. Spain (*Meopham*)

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

Thought for the Month

"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" (Deut. 32.47).

It is an amazing thing that many who attach supreme importance to an accurate understanding of the laws which govern the particular science or trade which is to be their life's occupation consider the study of Christian doctrine unimportant and its relevance to the Christian life negligible. A student will go through University or a budding doctor walk the hospitals with the object of thoroughly understanding the underlying principles of his chosen vocation but many a youthful Christian—and older ones too—will dismiss real study of the basic doctrines of the Faith as an out-dated survival of old-time piety and contend quite blissfully, and very ignorantly, that so long as he believes in Jesus and enjoys a hymn-singing session he is going to be all right. And of course he is not; Moses knew that when he exhorted Israel, almost with his dying breath, in the words of this text, "Understand the law" he thundered "because it is your life". So it must be with us; the purpose of God in creation, the avenue through which He will eventually bring all the repentant

to Himself, the nature and scope of Divine judgment on sin, the reason why Christ must needs die to make human salvation possible, the object and utility of the permission of evil, all this and much more must be impressed upon our minds if we are going to be of any use in this Age or the next as ambassadors for Christ. There are far too many who do not consider it important what they believe upon such subjects so long as they love the Lord and fellowship with others of like mind, and so they go on through life in an atmosphere of good fellowship and happy faces without giving much heed to the fact that we are surrounded by a despairing world which is rapidly going to pieces and can only be saved by these same good purposes of God. If the Divine intention for us is that we shall stand around the celestial Throne in white robes playing harps or blowing trumpets to all eternity that kind of apprenticeship might be sufficient for the purpose, but that is not His intention. We have in the future life to bring the message of salvation to a great many who have never as yet heard it and we have to get ready for that duty now; without knowledge we shall never do it. Observe, do, this law; because it is your life!

GIDEON, MAN OF VALOUR

I. A man for God's purpose

There is a curiously modern ring about the story of Gideon, the Israeli leader who, with only three hundred men, put an army of one hundred and thirty-five thousand to ignominious flight and afterwards with the aid of a few thousand reinforcements destroyed them utterly. This is a narrative about men possessed not only of grim tenacity in battle for the defence of their fatherland but also of sterling faith that their cause was right and for that reason God would go with them and give them the victory. Gideon was not only a military strategist of high order; he was also a man of the Covenant which God had made with His people at Sinai and he believed with all his heart that he was an instrument of God.

For perhaps a couple of generations Israel had lived more or less at peace since the resounding victory of Barak and Deborah over the Canaanites, recorded in Judges 4 and 5. Now in the sixth chapter it is shown that again all is not well with the nation. Barak and Deborah, and the heroes who had fought with them, were all dead, and the religious enthusiasm engendered by that great deliverance half a century in the past had evaporated; apostasy and Baal-worship was now rife in the land. In consequence, and in accordance with the provisions of the Covenant, Israel's enemies had gained the ascendancy over them. The greater part of the nation was in bondage to the Midianites and had been so for seven years.

This was no ordinary bondage. When in past days Chushan king of Aram-Naharaim, Eglon king of Moab, Jabin king of Hazor, oppressed them for greater or lesser periods the oppression took the form of exaction of tribute, a proportion of their flocks and herds, their crops and their possessions, but their national life was able to continue although impoverished. These Midianites and Amalekites were of different stamp and came with different purpose. They were the nomadic Bedouin hordes of the eastern desert, always on the move, living "off the land", moving on from each temporary abiding place so soon as its natural resources were exhausted to find another. Every year at harvest time they moved westwards to the settled lands of Canaan, pouring across the Jordan in their thousands and setting up their tents in the fertile valley of Esdraelon, from whence they scoured the land as far south as Gaza (Jud. 6.4), taking all the cattle and flocks and all

the harvested crops, leaving the unhappy inhabitants with nothing. And when they had taken all, they moved back to the desert, like the locusts to which they were compared (ch. 6.5). Year after year they did this; because of them Israel was greatly impoverished, and at last they "cried unto the Lord".

They had been told this would happen. At Sinai God had said that if they forsook him, "ye shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it" (Lev. 26.16); now they realised the fulfilment of those words. And in their distress they cried unto the Lord.

God is never slow to respond when the entreaty is mixed with faith. Once again there was a wave of contrition and repentance sweeping over the nation and God was quick to act. The first step was to impress upon the people the heinousness of their sin. He sent them a prophet—his name is unknown for it is not given—who reminded them of the great events of the past, of the deliverance from Egypt and the journey to the Promised Land and the casting out of its inhabitants that they might inherit it, and of their ingratitude in forgetting all this and repudiating their God. "Ye have not obeyed my voice" He told them (Jud. 6.10). But at the same time He was moving to deliver; He had selected his instrument and the angel of the Lord was already on his way to visit Gideon.

Was Gideon himself in fact the unnamed prophet? He was evidently a man of faith and greatly concerned for the vindication of the Divine Name and might well have already won some recognition as one who sought to turn Israel back to the true faith. Be this as it may, it is clear that when Gideon, threshing wheat under cover of the winepress in the endeavour to hide it from the sight of the marauding Midianites, looked up and saw the traveller sitting there under the terebinth tree, he was quite unprepared for what was to follow.

"The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valour" came the stranger's greeting. "Oh my Lord" was Gideon's respectful rejoinder "if the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us? And where be all his miracles which our fathers told us of? . . . Now the Lord hath forsaken us and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites" (ch. 6. 12-13). This is not the language of unbelief;

it is the language of disappointment. The Lord had delivered in the past; of that Gideon was sure, on the authority of his forefathers. Why then did God not deliver now, when the very future existence of the chosen nation seemed threatened? The problem was too great for Gideon, he could only ask "why?", and wait for the Lord to reveal His purpose. And the Lord looked upon him, and knew him for the man of faith and action that he was, and said to him *"Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites. I HAVE SENT THEE!"* (ch. 6.14). To Gideon's protestation that his family was the least in his tribe, and he himself the least in his father's house, there came the reiteration "thou shalt smite the Midianites" and at that Gideon demurred no longer. Like Moses of earlier time, his native humility was overcome by the Divine assurance "I will be with thee"; his faith and courage both were equal to the occasion. Without reservation he put himself into the Lord's hands to be the instrument of salvation.

It is not long before tests come upon those who give themselves to God in this fashion. As it was with Jesus, who went straight from Jordan to the wilderness to be tempted by the Devil, so with the followers of Jesus; the act of dedication of life to Him is followed by some experience or requirement designed to demonstrate just how sincere and steadfast is that dedication. So with Gideon. The first instruction he received was to destroy the altar of Baal and cut down the *Asherah*, the idolatrous fertility symbol, which served the local community, and take the sacred bullocks from the sacerdotal precincts. He was then to build an altar to God and sacrifice all these appendages of Baal worship upon it and so challenge the forces of idolatry in a manner which they dare not ignore and from which he could not retreat. In a very real sense he was to nail his colours to the mast and defy the entire established order of his village.

Now this same chapter states that the children of Israel had already begun to cry to the Lord for deliverance and this implies that a reaction against Baal worship was at least already in progress. It was evidently not yet whole-hearted; the cry of faith going up to Heaven was as yet weak, but it was there. It now needed a resolute figure to stand up and declare himself for the God of Israel, to sound forth the age-old rallying cry "Who is on the Lord's side, who?" rousing the dormant but never entirely obliterated belief in Israel's mission as the people for God's purpose and their invincibility when God was with them which has carried that same people to victory against apparently hopeless odds so many times

in history. Gideon was that man. Without hesitation he carried out the Lord's injunction.

It would seem that his own father Joash was an idolator. The altar of Baal, and the *asherah*, and the sacred bullocks, are all described as being his—apparently on his land and in his custody. Gideon himself must have been in middle age—according to ch. 8.20 he had at least one son grown to manhood at this time—so his father may well have been the patriarch of the village. Nevertheless, with the aid of ten of his servants, the deed was done and when the men of the village arose next morning they found, to their consternation, the remains of their idol god smoking upon another altar that had not been there the day before.

Of course there was anger, and a great deal of shouting, and a fury of consultation on the situation, and finally a deputation to Joash demanding that his son be given up that he might be put to death for the outrage committed against Baal. Evidently the citizens of Ophrah were not numbered among those of Israel who had begun to forsake Baal to serve the living God. It seems though that Joash, at least, began to see the light. He flatly refused his neighbours' demands and taunted them with their zeal for a god who could not save himself. *"Will ye plead for Baal?"* he enquired sarcastically. *"Will ye save him? If he be a god, let him plead for himself since someone hath cast down his altar"*. The extent to which the logic of this argument penetrated is not apparent from the account, but it might be that there was not much time for further discussion, for almost immediately, it would seem, a fresh and much more serious crisis developed. The annual invasion of the Midianites and Amalekites and the children of the east had begun.

The valley of Jezreel—the symbolic site of Armageddon, where all the great battles between Israel, Syria, Egypt and Assyria were fought—lies across the northern half of the land of Israel, from Jordan to the sea. It is about twenty miles long and varies from four to eight miles wide. It forms the natural passage for peoples coming in from the east and heading for Canaan, Judea or Egypt and has been thus used from antiquity. Into this valley came the hosts; as ch. 7.12 says, they *"lay all along the valley like locusts for multitude, and their camels were without number, as the sand by the sea side for multitude"*. Ophrah was about five miles away up in the hills fringing the south side of the valley, so that it would not be long before the news reached Gideon and his fellows. In past times this had been the signal for the whole population to seek hiding places in the caves and ravines of the highlands (see ch. 6.2) with such

food as they could carry, leaving the invaders to plunder their farms and homes of everything movable. But not this time! Gideon too had acquiesced in the general submission in the past; now he was possessed of a new spirit, born of a strength induced by his zeal and courage in the affair of the idols. He had proved himself faithful in a small thing and now the Lord was going to use him in a great thing. And the men who a few hours ago were thirsting for his blood now realised that under his leadership they could strike a blow for freedom which without him they would not have dreamed of attempting.

So *"the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon, and he blew a trumpet, and all Abi-ezer were gathered after him. And he sent messengers throughout all Manasseh, who also was gathered after him; and he sent messengers unto Asher, and unto Zebulun, and unto Naphtali; and they came up to meet them"* (ch.6.34,35). In next to no time the whole of the countryside for miles around was roused; contingents from four of the tribes of Israel, those most closely affected by the invasion, came marching to join him. Gideon found himself at the head of an army of men numbering more than thirty thousand! It is evident though that he was pinning his hopes for victory not upon the military prowess of his followers but upon the power of God. The first thing he did upon finding himself in command of this force was to ask a sign of God that He would indeed deliver Israel. Some might be inclined to consider this request for a sign to indicate a lack of faith but it was not necessarily so; the sign might be more for the encouragement of the men who had rallied to his side and to confirm in their minds the power of the God of Israel. On the other hand it might have been Gideon's desire for assurance that he had correctly interpreted the new power that had possessed him as being in truth the Spirit of the Lord. Was he doing right in accepting the service of these thousands of Israel and was this moment the critical one in which to sally forth to do battle with the enemy? There is an element of sober caution in his approach to the point where he must put his forces to the test, harmonising well with the inflexible conviction that God was with him when at last he went into battle, which speaks, not of weakness of faith or of indecisiveness, but of a deep-rooted determination that he should interpret the Divine leading aright, neither lagging behind that leading nor stepping out in front of it. So he suggested the sign that would convince him, and the Lord responded according to his faith. He set out a fleece of wool on the ground and in the morning although the dew was heavy all around, the fleece

itself was inexplicably dry; again he set it out and asked for the wonder to be reversed and sure enough in the morning the ground was bone dry and the fleece wringing wet. Simple little signs but they told Gideon all that he wanted to know and without further ado he rallied his men and gave the word to march.

They made their way for five miles across the hilltops and halfway down the northern slopes of Mount Gilboa above the waters of Harod. ("Mount Gilead" in ch.7.3 is an early copyist's mistake for Gilboa—Gilead lay on the other side of Jordan). From here they could survey the valley below, some four miles wide with the rising ground of Moreh beyond it (see ch.7.1) and in that valley the camp of the Midianites. And here the Lord stopped him.

There were too many men in Gideon's army. That was the gist of the Lord's message. There was a danger that when the Lord had given the victory they might well take the credit on account of their own numbers; *"lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, Mine own hand hath saved me"* (ch.7.2). The remedy was simple; there was to be a drastic weeding out of the army. First of all Gideon was to make a proclamation throughout all the host bidding every man who was in any way fearful or afraid of the coming battle to return home forthwith. Two-thirds of them promptly packed up and departed; twenty-two thousand went and ten thousand remained. Perhaps the martial ardour which had roused so many of them to militant action as quickly evaporated when they looked down on that valley and saw those hundred and thirty-five thousand muscular Bedouins ready for a fight. Their newly revived faith in God was still very weak and it died a sudden death at that moment. Perhaps Gideon, watching them go, remembered his insistence on a sign from the Lord that he was doing right in initiating this conflict and was glad that he had obtained the assurance. But now the Lord had another word for him.

There were still too many men. Take them down to the waters of Harod, said the Lord, and command them to drink. It must have seemed a risky business, for the stream ran—and still runs—through the valley itself and the enemy camp was only a short distance away on the other side. Nevertheless Gideon obeyed the order, and before long ten thousand men were gathered along its banks. And here the Lord drew Gideon's attention to a singular circumstance. Despite the close proximity of the enemy camp, by far the majority of the men got down on their knees to drink, oblivious to the disadvantage at which they were placed should the enemy decide to launch a sud-

den attack. Three hundred men, and three hundred only, drank with their heads up and their eyes fixed upon the distant scene, drawing up water in their hands and lapping as a dog would lap. Instinctively they were ready for an emergency.

By these three hundred will I deliver, said the Lord. Send the rest back! This must have been the moment when Gideon's faith was tested to the uttermost. Three hundred only against that mighty host? Four hundred and fifty Midianites to each Israelite? Was such a miracle even possible? We have to remember that in Gideon's day there was no precedent for this victory. All past conflicts, whether or not the Lord had been concerned, had seen the participation of Israelite warriors in their thousands. The initial invasion of the land under Joshua, the subsequent victories of Othniel over the Hittites, of Ehud over the Moabites, and Barak over the Canaanites, all were achieved by large and well-equipped forces of men. Now the Lord told Gideon that he was going to disperse what was in all probability by far the largest force Israel had yet to face with

a paltry three hundred men. And as if to challenge his faith the Lord said "*Arise, get thee down unto the host; for I have delivered it into thine hand*".

The upshot of the story shows that God had chosen a fit man. Without hesitation Gideon acted. The use that he made of his three hundred men and the manner in which he routed the enemy, and all that came after, belongs to a succeeding story. There is no break in the narrative at this point; that goes on immediately to tell of Gideon's strategy and attack, but there is the attainment of a definite critical stage at this point. Here, at the waters of Harod, the Lord steps out of the affair, having done all that is necessary for Him to do, and leaves the execution of the matter to Gideon. All the Israelite leader had to do was obey instructions and victory was assured. God had already delivered the Midianites into his hand. The details of that victory, and the events which followed in consequence, and how it affected the life of Gideon and the welfare of Israel in later times, must be the subject of another chapter.

To be continued.

THE PARABLE OF THE WICKED HUSBANDMEN

Matt.
21. 33-44

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

A familiar picture, this. A vineyard, leased by its owner to a group of men who would render him an agreed proportion of the fruits by way of rent. This was a common practice in Israel and

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

So far the little company around Jesus had listened with close attention, as every Eastern crowd will do when a story is being told. Swiftly Jesus threw out the question among them "*When the lord therefore of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen?*" Some of them at least must have had a glimmering of what lay behind this everyday story, but even so, common honesty demanded the obvious and only reply. "*He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other*

husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons." And in so saying they condemned themselves out of their own mouths and gave opportunity for one of the most scathing denunciations ever to fall from the Master's lips.

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

Now the time of the vintage was come. The vineyard had been well planted with good vines, it was furnished with a winepress; there should be a good return for the owner. He had made rich provision for his tenants and could reasonably expect his due. He met instead with disloyalty, ingratitude and rebellion. That is how it was with Israel, not only in the days of Jesus but almost all through their history. Brought out of Egypt by the mighty power of God, constituted a nation at Sinai under the terms of a Covenant which made them not only the chosen people of God but also custodians of a destiny which was to make them a light to the nations to declare God's salvation to the ends of the earth, they nevertheless miserably failed to live up to their calling. When God sent His servants the prophets to recall them to a sense of their duty and their destiny, they ignored and persecuted and slew them. "*Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted?*" demanded Stephen of the

Sanhedrin before which he was on trial for his own life "*and they have slain them which showed before of the coming of the Just One*" (Acts 7.52). "*The Lord hath sent unto you all his servants the prophets, rising early and sending them, but ye have not hearkened, nor inclined your ear to hear*" declared Jeremiah (Jer. 25.4). "*They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tried, were slain with the sword; they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented; they wandered in deserts and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth*". So runs the damning indictment of the writer to the Hebrews (Heb. 11. 37-38). Surely the wicked husbandmen did indeed beat, and stone, and kill the servants sent to them to collect the fruits of the vineyard.

But, said the householder, they will reverence my son—my beloved son, Luke's account of this parable has it (Luke 20.13). So the Son of God came to earth. God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life. He came to his own—but his own received him not. (John 1. 11). They looked upon him and they said "*This is the heir; let us kill him and the inheritance will be ours*". There is a terrible truth underlying those words. The Messiah had come to claim his right, the kingship of the nation, to lead them into the light and life of the Kingdom of Heaven. The entrenched forces of priestly and aristocratic power were determined to preserve the traditional framework of Rabbinic theology which held the nation in bondage. Like the citizens in another parable they said "*We will not have this man to reign over us*", and when they realised that the power he possessed could only have come from above they resolved on the most desperate act of their desperate course—they resolved to get him out of the way by putting him to death. None of the prophets of old, not even Moses whom they professed to obey, had ever come back from the dead to denounce their apostasy. No reason existed to think that this one, even though the most influential of all the prophets, would survive where Moses had failed. "*Let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.*" So it came about then, in Peter's biting words, "*him ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain*".

Now comes judgment. In Matthew's account Jesus makes his listeners pass judgment upon themselves. "*He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard to other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons*" (Matt. 21. 41). There could not be any doubt as to the outcome, either in the story

or in the application. The fearful words of Moses in Leviticus 26 detailing their fate if they apostasised from their covenant with God is enough for that; no man of Israel was ignorant of the prediction, but most men of Israel trusted that by payment of formal lip-service to the name of Moses they could escape the threatened retribution. But now they are brought face to face with reality. There was to be no escape. Sin merited judgment, and judgment must inevitably come. And when they realised that, some must have cried out, as Luke says they did, *"God forbid"*.

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

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

uttermost parts of the earth; that work of witness has progressed ever since and resulted in the development of a nation which has brought and is bringing forth the fruits thereof.

St. Paul puts all this into theological language in Romans 11 when he likens Israel to the unfruitful olive branches which "because of unbelief" were "broken off" and Gentile Christians, being wild olive branches, grafted on in their place. But he goes on to show that the original branches, "if they abide not still in unbelief" shall be grafted in again, "and so all Israel shall be saved". That can only mean that in a then far future day, after God's work with the Christian Church is complete, He will turn again to the once apostate people of Israel and find them in chastened and repentant mood, and so receive them again, that they might, at the last, find a place in the administration of the Divine purpose. So we are presented, at the last, with the picture of the glorified Church of this Age, "changed" to be with Christ, resplendent in the heavens, and purified Israel, waiting before God, both being agents in God's hand for the extension of the knowledge of His glory over the earth just as the waters cover the sea. James saw this vividly when at the memorable conference at Jerusalem which is recorded in Acts 15 he declared that God was first visiting the nations to take out of them a people for His name—the Christian Church;—after that He would rebuild the dwelling place of Jacob—Israel—and re-establish it; all this in order that the residue of men,—all mankind as yet unreconciled to God—might seek after the Lord. Here is world conversion in very truth, to be undertaken and effected after, and not before, the salvation of the Church has been achieved and the purified nation of Israel has been made ready.

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

DANIEL IN BABYLON

The story of a great man's faith

9. The Ancient of Days

"I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of Days did sit." (Ch. 7, vs. 9).

One of the most pregnant sentences in the whole of the Bible! Into those few brief words Daniel infused all the longing and all the hopes and all the faith which had sustained him through so many years. One day God would arise in judgment, and then all for which the righteous had waited would be theirs. The long captivity of man to the dominion of sin and death, his long submission to oppressive evil powers, would be at an end, and the saints of the Most High would possess the kingdom, and rule in equity and justice for ever and ever.

This, the second part of the dream, leaves the actors in the first part still standing on the stage. The four beasts are still there; the fourth, strange and terrible, the latest to rise, dominating the other three certainly, but all four are still there. And now Daniel perceives a gathering tumult in the heavens. The sable curtain of night is lightening; a vivid golden radiance is banishing the blackness. The dark night-clouds turn dimly red and then break out suddenly into blazing cascades of fire, pouring down upon the earth and swelling into a fiery river which threatens to bear away all obstacles in its course. From above that plunging, leaping curtain of light there appears a waving field of white, an army of angels, thousands upon thousands, and ten thousands upon ten thousands, winging their way fast to earth, growing more clear and more perceptible as each second passes. Then the roaring of the thunder, the vivid, searing lightning, and behind those speeding angels a majestic Appearance before which Daniel must have prostrated himself in reverence and awe; he knew well that no man may look upon the face of God, and live. But presently a calm, heaven-sent confidence took hold of him and he looked up to see the Ancient of Days, in all the dignity of kingly power and all the purity of his awful holiness, seated upon his Throne of judgment. The Time of the End had come and the Judge was in his place, the Assizes of Heaven about to begin.

In those first few seconds before the vision passed again into the movement of action Daniel had time to see that there were other, lesser, thrones surrounding that upon which was seated the Supreme Judge, the Ancient of Days. It is not so stated in verse 9, but implied by later

verses, (18 and 22), that those thrones were occupied by "the saints of the Most High" waiting to take their destined place in the whole sequence of activities and events that was to be associated with this imminent judgment. The force of this aspect of the vision is obscured by the usual English meaning of "cast down". *"I beheld till the thrones were cast down"* says the Authorised Version, and it is usually tacitly assumed that Daniel referred to the fall of earthly thrones and kingships at this Time of the End in consequence of Divine judgment. That is not what was intended. The term "cast down" in the original has the significance of being set down or placed firmly in position. This usage appears in the English word "cast" for making solid, firm objects from fluid materials, as in the case of "cast" iron, an object made solid by "casting" from molten metal. The reference here in Daniel 7 is to judicial seats as in Psa. 122. 5, "For there are set thrones of judgment, the thrones of the house of David" and Matt. 19. 28, "Ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." There is no suggestion anywhere in the Scriptures that the angels are assessors in the judgment; in the vision they are attendants upon the Ancient of Days but not occupants of the thrones, and the only reasonable view we can take of the vision is that Daniel saw the "saints of the Most High" seated in the presence of God and ready to play their own destined part in the drama of judgment. That fact should help considerably in placing the time of the fulfilment of the vision.

But as yet the saints on their thrones had no part to play. The focal point of the vision shifted again to the earth, to the earth before the Throne, where stood the four beasts of the vision. The books were opened and the judgment began; the fourth beast, the terrible, unnatural one, was first condemned, and before Daniel's fascinated eyes was slain and its body cast into the blazing river which still cascaded down from the glory of God and ran, a fiery torrent, away into the darkness of oblivion. The other beasts were not slain immediately; they were deprived of their dominion, but "their lives were prolonged for a season and time." Now this expression as it stands can be productive of misunderstanding, as though these three beasts were granted a kind of indefinite lease of life, whereas the truth is the reverse. The word "prolonged" in the Hebrew means to

assign or cut off to a determined length. The expression "season and time" in the A.V. is based on the old English expression "till a time and tide", which was a phrase indicative of a fixed and irrevocable point of time which could by no means be exceeded (hence the English proverb "*Time and tide wait for no man*"). What Daniel tells us in verse 12, therefore, is that the fourth beast was slain at once and the other three, after being deprived of their dominion, sentenced to die at a certain fixed time not stated but already determined in the mind of the Judge.

Again the prophet's eyes turned heavenward. Somehow or other he realised in his dream that now was to come an important event in the sequence of happenings which he was witnessing, for at this juncture (verse 13) he repeats the expression, "*I saw in the night visions*" as though to mark this point with some special indication. Looking back at his words from the standpoint of our later Christian knowledge, the significance of this stage in the symbolism is clear enough, for in lifting up his eyes to heaven, Daniel saw "one like the Son of man" coming "with the clouds of heaven." That expression is so familiar a one to Christians that we immediately think of the Second Advent of our Lord Jesus Christ for the dual purpose of gathering His Church, and setting up the earthly Kingdom which is to be the desire of all nations; and that, not unnaturally, is the interpretation which is usually and immediately placed upon this verse in Daniel 7. The application seems so obvious that several discordant features are often overlooked, and it may come as somewhat of a shock to realise that the usual interpretation is not quite so fitting as is thought.

In the first place the saints are already, in the vision, seated on their thrones of judgment in the presence of the Ancient of Days, observing the execution of judicial sentence upon the four beasts, and this *before* the "Son of Man" appears with the clouds of heaven. In the second place this "Son of Man" coming with the clouds of heaven, does not descend to the earth but is brought into the presence of the Ancient of Days, to receive a royal investiture, and a kingdom. And in the third place—and this is important to a right view of the vision—the expression "the Son of Man" in the A.V. is not a correct rendering of the original. Daniel actually said that he saw "one like a son of man", i.e. one like a human being, in contrast to the Deity above and the beasts below; this man-like being, then ushered into the presence of God and awarded the kingdom of the earth. The translators, reasoning back from their New Testament theology, rendered "*the Son of Man*" instead of "*a son of*

man," forgetting that in Daniel's day the phrase "Son of Man" as applied to the Messiah was completely unknown and could have had no possible meaning.

Daniel, then, saw a man coming with the clouds of heaven, as contrasted with the raging sea which only brought forth beasts. Daniel and his people had no knowledge of the Messiah, no conception of a Son of God who would exercise all power in heaven and earth as the active agent of the Father's purposes. The prevalent understanding of the Kingdom was that God Himself would intervene and destroy evil nations and all evil, and exalt His people Israel. It was for this that Daniel looked and prayed, and in the vision of the Ancient of Days he must have found his expectations fully realised.

This addition to the vision, therefore, this introduction of another being, one like an earthly man and yet coming from heaven, to receive and administer the Kingdom, started a new line of enquiry in Daniel's mind. This was something he had not thought of before. Like others nearly six hundred years later he must have asked himself "Who is this Son of Man?" That is probably the reason for Daniel's admission at the end of the account (vs. 28) "*As for me, Daniel, my cogitations much troubled me . . . but I kept the matter in my heart.*" He began to perceive that there was going to be more in this question of the fulfilment of God's promise to overthrow evil and introduce everlasting righteousness than his studies in the Scriptures had until then revealed to him, and, devoted student that he was, he gave this new development serious thought.

We have the advantage, now, of seeing why the vision entered into this aspect. It was on the basis of this chapter and the picture of the relationship between the "Ancient of Days" who awarded the Kingdom and the "Son of Man" who received the Kingdom that our Lord assumed and used the title "Son of Man". It could have come from no other source and the Jews were aware of that fact. (The use of the same expression in the Book of Ezekiel is not in the same category; the Almighty habitually addressed Ezekiel as "Son of man" in allusion to the fact that he was, in fact, a human being, with no prophetic or symbolic implication whatever. The suggestion sometimes made that in the New Testament the Greek phrase is "*the Son of the man*" referring to Jesus' natural descent from "*the man*", Adam, is based upon misapplication of Greek grammar and does not deserve to be taken seriously.) When Jesus proclaimed himself to be "the Son of Man" all who heard him would instantly connect his claim with the vision of Daniel and understand his words accordingly.

This is very clearly shown when in answer to the High Priest's question at his trial, "Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?", he replied "*I am; and thou shalt see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.*" (Mark 14. 61-62). That was the statement and the claim that sealed his fate; he had declared that he was the One seen by Daniel in the vision.

That the Jews of Daniel's day and immediately afterwards clearly perceived the vision to teach that one who in some manner was associated with men and made like man, yet a heavenly being, would thus stand in the presence of God and receive from His hands the Kingdom, is very evident. The Book of Enoch, written several centuries after Daniel's time, has much to say about the Son of Man and the Ancient of Days and that is a good guide to Jewish thought. The coming of the Son of Man to execute the Divine will in the days of the Kingdom was an accepted part of Jewish theology in the days of Jesus.

We are left, then, with the plain fact that in Daniel the coming of the Son of Man "with the clouds of heaven" takes place *after* the Ancient of Days has pronounced judgment on the beasts and *after* the "people of the saints of the Most High" have taken their places on their thrones to observe the execution of that judgment. As the chapter proceeds, we find that the kingdom, and dominion, is given to the "Son of man" and to the "saints" simultaneously. Both receive the kingdom; both rule and exert authority in association the one with the other.

In the reality it must be accepted therefore that New Testament references to the coming of the Lord in the clouds of heaven (such as Rev. 1, 5; Matt. 16. 64 etc.) must generally refer to a time

after the Church has been gathered and after the kingdoms of this world have fallen and been destroyed. They must refer to the latest and most spectacular phase of the Second Advent, the commencement of the reign of Christ and the Church and His revealing to all mankind, the time that is sometimes spoken of as "the Kingdom in power." The appearance of one like a Son of Man in Daniel's dream symbolises the last event in the series of events which characterise the transition from the kingdoms of this world to the Kingdom of God, the period of the Second Advent.

So the vision ended where all such visions ought to end, in the light and glory of the Kingdom. The four wild and terrible beasts had been destroyed and obliterated; the raging sea had disappeared. As with John in Revelation "there was no more sea". In its place the powers of heaven had taken control of earth and the light and glory of the Son of Man irradiated the whole world and gave promise of the peace and joy that was to be. There is quite a close connection between this vision of Daniel 7 and that later one of the Apostle John in Revelation 19 and 21 in which, after the destruction of the beasts of the earth, the kings and their armies, and the disappearance of the sea, the New Jerusalem comes down to earth with the glory of God and of the Lamb to enlighten it.

There the ancient prophet left the matter. For two more years we hear nothing of him until, in the third year of King Belshazzar, he dreamed again. But this time the dream was not of distant golden days but of things near at hand. The empire of Babylon was nearing its end, and it was meet that Daniel be instructed in the events that were soon to come.

To be continued.

THE FIRSTFRUITS

An Exhortation

"Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures." (Jas. 2.18).

The Word of God reveals that those who are "in Christ", members of his mystical Body, his Temple, are "the firstfruits" of his Redemption, or, as St. Paul describes it, they are "*the Church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven*".

Jesus Christ is himself "*the firstfruits of them that slept*" and "*the firstborn of every creature*". (Col. 1.15). The grave could not hold the Light of the World, the Prince of Glory, "*the image of*

the invisible God". His footstep followers, therefore, those true disciples who keep his Word and seek to do his Will, are the members of the Body of which Christ is the Head. How essential it is to remember that Christ is the Head of the Body and Christ alone. "*For one is your Master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren*" were his own words.

St. Paul had to remind his followers of this, for they were beginning to think too much of other men. He, therefore, had to chide them about causing divisions and setting up one man against another, even telling them that whilst they did

such things they were "*carnal, and walk as men*", and exhorted them "*not to think of men above that which is written, that no one of you be puffed up for one against another*". Let us, therefore, take heed that we look to Christ and him alone as our Lord and Master, and our Head.

St. Paul also showed that there would be some who would endeavour to discourage others from keeping so close to Jesus himself, and not following the traditions of men, but being guided solely by the Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ, which Jesus promised would lead them into all truth. He, therefore, gives these footstep followers the following admonition and encouragement:—

"Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, and not holding the Head from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God." (Col. 2.18.)

In a very powerful and revealing symbolism St. Paul warns his followers to be wary lest they give not God the honour due to him alone, from whom all wisdom comes. In his epistle to Timothy he showed that there would be many "striving for the mastery" who might forget that they could only conquer "in the strength of Jesus Christ" and he warned them that a man would not be crowned "*except he strive lawfully*" (2 Tim. 2. 5.7).

*"Stand in his strength alone,
The arm of flesh will fail you,
Ye dare not trust your own."*

So the old hymn warns us similarly.

St. Paul then shows to whom the victory and the glory and the honour alone belong, saying:—

"The husbandman that laboureth must be first partaker of the fruits."

Jesus said, "*I am the Vine and my Father is the husbandman*"; as in Israel of old the first-fruits were all brought to the Lord, so we, too, who have the "firstfruits of the Spirit" must bring the glory and the honour to him who alone gives the increase of that which He himself has given. As we well know:—

"Every good gift, and every perfect gift, is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness nor shadow of turning."

"Consider what I say" advised St. Paul, "and the Lord give thee understanding in all things".

All, therefore, who are members of his Body—his true Church—are to look to him to bring them to victory "*That we should be to the praise of his glory who first trusted in Christ*" (Eph. 1.12).

"My glory will I not give to another" said God,

and Jeremiah gives us the following wise admonition:—

"Let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord which exercise loving kindness, judgment and righteousness in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord" (Jer. 9.24).

Having taken heed, therefore, to this most essential warning, we have many gracious and glorious promises to these members of "the Church of the First born", most gracious of all, surely being that in the resurrection St. Paul shows that every man shall rise "in his own order". He then proceeds to show that this order is firstly, "Christ the firstfruits, afterwards they that are Christ's at his coming" (1 Cor. 15.33).

These are his elect, his own Body members, whose names are written in heaven. They have believed his Word and claimed his promises, and He has brought them safely to victory. Passed from death unto life, they shall not come into "condemnation" or "judgment" with the judgment of the world.

His power is limitless and his Body members are those of whom it is said "His servants shall serve him" we may be sure that this "service" will be the joyful one of helping their fellow men who had "stumbled at that stumblingstone" for St. Paul assures us that "all Israel shall be saved". His Body members are his statesmen in his Kingdom, of higher or lesser degree according to their position in the Body, of which they form part, and to them (oh joyful and blessed work), will be assigned the power and wisdom of Christ in helping to bring the whole of "the ransomed race" to Christ Jesus, the King of Kings, and Lord of Lords.

Meantime, as St. Paul shows, even we who "*have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body*".

And when the "redemption" of their bodies shall have come, when "*He shall change our vile body that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able to subdue all things unto himself*", then will their work be a true "rest", a "rest in work" for it will be unhindered, unhampered by the limitations of the flesh, and they shall have then entered "into the joy of their Lord".

*Angels! sing on: your faithful watches
keeping,*

*Sing us sweet fragments of the songs above,
Till morning's joy shall end the night of
weeping,*

*And life's long shadows break in endless
love.*

THE STORY OF THE RESURRECTION

Harmony of four narratives

Four accounts of the resurrection of our Lord exist, one in each of the Gospels; it has frequently been said that the apparent discrepancies and contradictions between these narratives renders the strict acceptance of any of them as true history a matter of difficulty. True it is that the ordinary reader can be pardoned for wondering which is correct. Were there one, or two, angels at the scene; one, two, three or four women, and did they come while it was still dark or after sunrise; by whom was the risen Lord first seen; all these and other points emerge in any discussion of the subject.

The purpose of this treatise is to show that there is no inharmony whatever between the narratives once it is realised that they originated from different eyewitnesses. There were at least four women in the party which went to the tomb; with a little care it is not difficult to hazard a conclusion as to whom each of the evangelists went for their information.

John quite obviously related the story as it came from the lips of Mary Magdalene. Nothing whatever is said about the others, only what Mary herself saw, said and did. Mark and Matthew would seem to have had their versions from Mary, the wife of Cleophas and mother of James; she was the one who saw one angel only, and seems to have shared with Mary Magdalene the initiative in all that was done. Mark's own mother Mary was a close friend of these two and the boy—only fourteen years old or so at the time—would have gained his information from his own home circle. Luke's informant, whose account differs again, and who saw two angels in the tomb, could have been one of the other women, either Salome or Joanna, and probably the latter on the strength of the allusion in Luke 24.9.

If then we have individual accounts from these three women, Mary Magdalene, Mary Cleophas, and Joanna, each relating what they personally saw and heard, we have only to put them in parallel columns and fit each portion of each account into its relative place. On this basis, and trying to picture the events against the background of Jerusalem and its environs at the time of the event, the story becomes more understandable. A coherent and properly connected sequence of happenings emerges from the four separate nar-

ratives, each of which seems to have preserved some details omitted by the others.

It is sometimes suggested that the Crucifixion took place, not on Friday, but on Wednesday, and the Resurrection on Saturday night, thus allowing three full days and three nights in the grave. The following combined narrative shows that this hypothesis is not necessary in order to harmonise the varying accounts of the Resurrection. Modern research has established AD33 as the year of the Crucifixion and various competent authorities have calculated that in that year 14 Nisan fell between sunset 2 April to sunset 3 April, and 3 April was a Friday.

In order to facilitate verification of the reconstruction here suggested the relative verses from each Gospel appear at the head of the sections telling of each successive incident. Where one of the Evangelists does not mention a particular incident the word "Nil" appears.

Mt. 27.57-60; *Mk.* 15.42-46; *Lk.* 23.50-54;
Jn. 19.38-42

Jesus died at three o'clock on Friday afternoon. Three hours later, at 6.0 p.m., the sabbath began and all work ceased. Before then His body and those of the others executed with him must, by virtue of the Mosaic Law, be removed from the crosses and buried. Normally the bodies would be disposed of quite unceremoniously but in this instance Joseph of Arimathea went to Pilate and requested permission himself to undertake the burial of Jesus. Joseph, besides being a believer in Jesus, was a wealthy man, high in society and a member of the Sanhedrin, the supreme court of the land. He could evidently get an immediate audience with the Governor where lesser men would have failed. Even so, there was not much time. The distance between Golgotha and Pilate's official quarters when in Jerusalem—the Herodian Palace—is thirteen hundred yards, a good fifteen minutes' walk. Assuming that Joseph already had his plans made, was at the Cross, and left immediately to seek audience with Pilate, it must have been at least 3.30 before he made his request. Then Pilate, surprised that death had taken place so soon, had to send for the centurion who would still be on duty at the scene, so that Joseph could not have received his permission

until well after four o'clock. Then, in company with Nicodemus he returned to Golgotha, took down the body, probably with the assistance of the soldiers on duty, carried it to his own tomb only a few yards away, hastily wrapped it in the linen they had with them, and interred it, finally rolling the stone across the entrance. By the time all this was accomplished it must have been at least 5.30.

Mt. 27.61; *Mk.* 15.47; *Lk.* 23.55-56; *Jn.* Nil

Of the four women who figure prominently in the succeeding events, only two watched the interment, Mary Magdalene and Mary Cleophas. Salome and Joanna were not there and the question naturally arises, where were they? The answer is suggested by Mark 16.1 compared with Luke 23.56. The four intended to embalm the body with fragrant herbs as soon as the Sabbath was over; evidently Salome and Joanna went into the city immediately after Jesus' death to buy the necessary materials while the other two watched the interment. Upon the return of these two not long before six o'clock they would have found their friends busy with the preparation of the spices and joined in until the task was completed, and then, as the account says, "rested the sabbath day according to the commandment".

Mt. 27.62-66; *Mk.* Nil; *Lk.* Nil; *Jn.* Nil

So passed Friday night, quietly. At some time during Saturday, which, besides being the sabbath, was also the first day of the week-long Passover Feast, Pilate had more visitors. This time he found Caiaphas the High Priest and a party of Pharisees waiting to see him. They were afraid that the disciples of Jesus might steal His body from the tomb and then give out that He had risen from the dead as He had foretold; they wanted Pilate to set a guard of soldiers over the tomb for a few days to prevent any such attempt. The Governor, however, was not very amenable; he had probably had enough of the affair by now. He pointed out that they themselves had a force of Temple police under their own control; they could use some of them. "Make it as sure as ye can" he said, probably sarcastically. It might well be that after what Pilate had seen and heard himself he was by no means certain what might happen in and around that tomb in the next few hours. Nevertheless, the priests did as suggested and by Saturday evening at latest a party of Jewish Temple guards occupied the space in front of the tomb, effectively barring access to any who might come. These guards would be tough men, accustomed in the ordinary way to dealing with riots and demonstrations and any kind of threat to the sanctity of

the Temple, and they would take this commission as all in the day's work. There would be a fire, for the night was cold, and so they settled down to spend the dark hours as best they could until dawn...

Mt. 28.2-4; *Mk.* Nil; *Lk.* Nil; *Jn.* Nil

It had been a bright moonlight night, for the moon was at the full, but now at this pre-dawn hour it was hastening to its setting. The tall cypresses rustled eerily in the night breeze. It would be dawn within a few hours; with the coming of day the guards' vigil would be more tolerable. They stretched their cramped limbs and poked the embers of the dying fire into a flicker of flame. It would not do to go to sleep on duty but the riotous events of the previous day had probably kept most of them more than usually in action and it was difficult to avoid nodding off, especially when everything around was so quiet and peaceful...

At that moment came the earthquake. Matthew says it was a "great" earthquake, but even so such events were by no means uncommon in Judea, lying as it does on an earthquake belt with Jerusalem itself built directly over an earth fault, so that this of itself was not calculated to alarm the guards unduly. They were in the open, away from buildings or high rocks, and they knew how to look after themselves in such circumstances. It was the sequel which terrified them out of their wits. While the earth was still shaking a terrible apparition appeared in the skies above them, a mighty celestial being, enwrapped in a glory of blindingly dazzling light, in raiment of glistening white, descending rapidly to where they stood, his radiance illumining the rocks and trees around them and turning the blackness of night into meridian day. They saw him stretch forth his hand and with a touch roll away the stone from the door of the tomb and then seat himself upon that stone in the attitude of a judge about to pass sentence... They knew no more until they came to themselves, how long afterwards they knew not, to find that the angel was there no longer and the radiant glory had departed. The night was dark again and all was quiet—but the door of the tomb stood open and the stone remained rolled to one side, mute testimony to the reality of the scene they had witnessed and which had for a while deprived them of their senses.

They must have examined the tomb, for when they reported to their superiors a little while later it was to apprise them that it was empty. Whatever the nature of the experience which had befallen them the fact was evident that the body

of Jesus was gone and the purpose for which they had been placed there frustrated. No reason existed for remaining at the spot and with the very real fear of that accusing judge returning perhaps to slay them they departed precipitately from the place and made for the city. The Damascus Gate in the city wall was only three hundred yards away, but the gate would not be opened until dawn; nevertheless they would feel safer crouching against its portals waiting for the opening than remaining here with this unknown terror of the night. So they fled from the garden and the rolled-away stone and the empty tomb.

The A.V. rather obscures Matthew's account in ch. 28.2 by making it appear that the earthquake occurred and the glorious angel descended at the time the women arrived at the tomb. In fact the phrase should be rendered "there *had been* a great earthquake". The events of verses 2-4 happened before the women arrived and by the time they appeared on the scene the guards had gone. The women saw no one and spoke to no one until they had entered the tomb so there could have been no celestial visitor seated upon the stone when they arrived. The words rendered "sat upon it", incidentally, have the meaning of a king or a judge taking his official seat for the purpose of pronouncing judgment or ruling as king. Without much doubt the guards interpreted what they saw in that fashion and that fact added to their terror.

Mt. 28.1; *Mk.* 16.3-4; *Lk.* 24.1-2; *Jn.* 24.1

In the meantime the women had been busy. The two Marys with Joanna and Salome had risen from their beds long before dawn and prepared themselves for the journey to the tomb. Where they had spent the night can only be surmised, but it is certain that they were together. Where in all Jerusalem, excited as it was over the death of Jesus, could they have found safety from the priests and a measure of quiet? They were all Galileans and had no homes of their own in the city. Two places, and two only, come to mind; the home of Lazarus and his sisters at Bethany, and the house of Mary the mother of Mark, traditionally the place of the Last Supper and declared by the fixed convictions of the primitive church to have been just outside the southern wall not far from Zion Gate. Of these the last-named was by far the nearest to the city and the tomb, and it would seem most likely that this home became the refuge and gathering place for the women who had followed Jesus, and the scattered disciples when they had recovered from the panic which led them to desert Jesus in Gethsemane.

From this house probably the sorrowful expedition can be pictured as setting out. It was very early; Matthew says "as it began to dawn", Mark and Luke "very early in the morning" and John "early, when it was yet dark". The most direct route would have been straight through the city, in at Zion Gate and out at Damascus Gate, but there would be the danger of being recognised and intercepted, and in any case the gates would not be opened until daylight. More likely, perhaps, that they would skirt the western wall by following the tracks that ran outside the city; the distance between Mary's house and the tomb by this route is a little over a mile and a quarter and the journey would have taken them about half an hour. According to Mark, they actually arrived at the tomb exactly at sunrise so they must have set out when it was quite dark, since the sun rises quite suddenly in the latitude of Judea. By the time they reached the tomb the fear-stricken guards had gone, although they would probably still be awaiting entry to the city at the Damascus Gate only three hundred yards away. Neither was there any fire-clad angel of terrible aspect, no lightning and no earthquake. All that must have been an hour at least, perhaps several hours, earlier, for the women would certainly not have ventured out on their errand in the middle of an earthquake.

Their principal concern as they made their way through the darkness was the removal of the stone which sealed the entrance. "Who shall roll us away the stone?" they queried of one another. Such stones were roughly rounded, about five feet across by a foot or more thick and therefore considerably more than a ton in weight. But that concern was quickly swallowed up by the shock they received when they arrived at the tomb, for by the light of the rising sun they saw that the stone had already been rolled away and the tomb stood open.

Now it is quite certain that the women knew nothing of the setting of the Temple guards; that was not arranged until some time during Saturday and the whole of that day they had been in hiding, waiting for the end of the sabbath before venturing out on their mission. They came to the tomb thinking that they were its first visitors since two of them left it on Friday night. Now they realised they were not the first; someone had been there before them. And the crucial question at this point is: did they enter the tomb and find the angelic occupants within at this juncture? From at least two of the narratives it would appear that this was so, but John's account says that immediately upon finding the stone removed

Mary Magdalene ran to fetch Peter and John, and from her distraught words to those two it is evident that up to that point she at least had seen no angels at all.

Mt. Nil; Mk. Nil; Lk. Nil; Jn. 20.2-10

The truth of the matter would seem to be that upon finding the tomb open the entire party of women were uncertain what to do next. Perhaps they looked into the tomb without entering; Mary at least knew that the body was missing, but if they did look inside there were no angels visible. In this crisis the obvious impulse was to call some of the menfolk. Salome and Mary Cleophas were the mothers of adult sons; they must have been in their fifties. Joanna was the wife of Chuza, steward to King Herod, and that position would hardly have been attained by other than a mature man; she was probably in her fifties also. Mary Magdalene was in her early twenties; she was obviously the one to go. So, as John says, Mary "runneth"—she ran, probably most of the way, back to the house they had left half an hour previously, or to some other place where she knew she could find Peter and John. "They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre" she burst out "and we know not where they have laid him". The two men without further ado set out for the tomb, also running. John got there first but did not enter; he looked in and saw the grave-clothes lying in position; then Peter arrived and went boldly inside. John followed. There was no one inside and all was still and quiet. The three women were still waiting outside, probably had been so doing all the time that Mary had been away, and her absence probably lasted almost an hour. Now she returned, in the wake of Peter and John and stood silently with her companions until the two disciples emerged from the tomb.

The men were perplexed. The body was gone, but where? Perhaps they looked around the garden hopefully as if expecting Jesus to appear, but if so, they were disappointed. Nothing happened. They might have tried to persuade the women that nothing could be gained by remaining and to come away. If they did, they were unsuccessful. The women would not leave. Finally, with perhaps a few backward glances as they went, Peter and John went home.

Mt. Nil; Mk. Nil; Lk. Nil; Jn. 20.11-13

Mary would not go. Unable to bring herself to turn her back upon the empty tomb, she stood just outside the entrance, weeping her grief away. As the paroxysm of emotion subsided a little she stooped down and looked inside, as if hoping

against hope that the body might in some manner miraculously have been returned. And she saw, sitting inside the tomb, one at one end and one at the other, two angels—not the winged cherubs of later Christian art, but two young men clad in white garments. It was her instinct which told her that these were not terrestrial beings, but celestial.

There is an ancient tomb still existing in the vicinity of Golgotha which is reputed to be the one in which our Lord was laid. Whether it be so in fact or not, it is probably very generally identical in construction with the one which was actually used. The entrance is low, and one has to stoop in order to get inside. It gives access to a small space in the nature of an ante-chamber of which one side is formed by a low wall only two feet or so high. On the other side of the wall is the burial chamber proper with rock cut niches for the reception of three bodies. The two angelic visitants were probably sitting on such a low wall when Mary looked in and the ensuing conversation took place. Only John records this part of the story; to their question as to the cause of her grief she responded with her plaint that her Lord had been taken away, she knew not where, and that was all. Nothing was said to her, so far as John's account goes, as was said to the others. If the angels spoke any words of comfort or enlightenment they are not recorded.

Mt. 28.5-7; Mk. 16.5-7; Lk. 24.5-7; Jn. Nil

Now human nature being what it is, the fact that Mary was speaking to someone inside the tomb brought the other three women to her side with a rush. Nothing is said in John's account about Mary actually entering the sepulchre, but it is clear from Mark and Luke that some, at least, of the women did. This must be the point at which they did so. While Mary hovered still at the entrance, the other Mary and Salome and Joanna pushed past and went inside. If the tomb was anything like the one that is known at the site it would be a fairly tight squeeze for three of them in the ante-chamber part; one of them would hardly get past the doorway. This might explain why in Matthew and Mark only one angel is mentioned, and in Luke there are two. If, for example, Joanna is the source of Luke's account and Joanna got in first she might have had the two angels in full view, as had Mary a few moments previously, and if Mary Cleophas is the source of the Matthew and Luke accounts and she was the one in the doorway behind the others she might have seen only the one. What does stand out clearly is the similarity of the angels' words in all three accounts, those of Matthew, Mark and Luke,

even though Matthew omits to mention that the conversation took place inside the tomb. A striking phrase appears in all three in identical terms; "*He is not here; He is risen*". That points to a vivid impression of words heard by them all and never forgotten. Now, for the first time, the women were told to go and tell His disciples, not that the body was gone, for they knew that already, but that He had risen from the dead, and would go before them into Galilee and there they would see him.

Mt. Nil; Mk. 16.9; Lk. Nil; Jn. 20.14-17

In the meantime, and whilst this colloquy was proceeding inside the tomb, Mary, rather crowded out from the centre of things and still weeping, turned round and came face to face with a stranger who had not been there a moment previously. He asked her the same question that the angels had just put to her, and she returned the same answer. Then, in the old familiar voice she knew so well, Jesus uttered the one word "Mary!" and she perceived at once that this was the Lord. Different lineaments, unfamiliar garb, looking like a gardener, but she knew beyond doubt that this was Jesus and He truly had risen from the dead. The conversation between them was probably terminated by the emergence of the other women from the tomb. Mary would almost certainly turn to them in rapture, and the next moment Jesus was not there.

Mt. 28.8; Mk. 16.8; Lk. 24.8; Jn. Nil

The women came out full of their news and commission. Only at this moment had they been told the truth of the matter. "*He is not here; He is risen*!" That solved the problem of the empty tomb; now they were all agog to take the news to the disciples. It is noteworthy that they believed; there were no doubts or queries. The whole perplexing mystery was open and revealed and, like Mary, they were in a state of pure joy. Matthew says they came out "quickly" from the tomb with fear and great joy, Mark that they did so trembling and amazed. That last word is ecstasy in the Greek; it means a state of rapture in which the things seen of the other world are more real to the mind than those of this world. The immensity of the revelation just made to them, and the fact that they had been talking to angelic visitants from the celestial sphere, would account for the fear and trembling, but with it there went also great joy and ecstasy.

Mt. 28.9-10; Mk. Nil; Lk. Nil; Jn. Nil

So the four women, full of their news, set out to find the disciples. But as they went, and probably before they had gone very far, another stranger met them, accosting them with the inten-

sive salutation *Xairete*—"All hail; all is well, rejoice". All these ideas are in the word. And again, without being told, they knew it was the Lord and they worshipped, until He sent them on their way to tell the disciples.

Mt. 28.11; Mk. Nil; Lk. Nil; Jn. Nil

Matthew interjects a remark here which needs a little thought. "Now when they were going" he says, referring to this moment "some of the watch came into the city and showed unto the chief priests all the things that were done". At first sight it might seem that only now did the guards leave the tomb, and so would have been spectators of all the things that had happened, but this is obviously not the case. A little consideration of the time element puts this remark of Matthew in proper perspective. There is one fixed point of time which is beyond dispute: the women left home whilst it was still dark and arrived at the tomb "at sunrise". At that time of year sunrise is 6.0 a.m. all over the world. Mary's hurried run to the disciples and their return must have occupied nearly an hour if they were, in fact, congregated at the house of John Mark's mother, and the rest of the events at the tomb at least another fifteen minutes. The women probably left the tomb with their wonderful news about 7.15. Now the guards, who had gone when the women arrived, would have been waiting for the opening of the city gate at sunrise. They got inside the city soon after 6.0. They had to reach the house of Caiaphas which, according to tradition, was outside the walls on the south. Progress through the crowded city would be slow and they might be naturally reluctant to appear before their masters with the news. The distance was only about a mile but it was probably 6.45 before they reached the High Priest's house. Whether this exalted dignitary was likely to be out of bed so early in the morning may be conjectured, but it might not be unreasonable to expect that they had to wait half an hour for an audience. The literal Greek of Matthew's account is "as they" (the women) "were going away, some of the guard, entering the city, told to the high priests . . ." etc. In other words, the two happenings were more or less simultaneous; the guards were telling their story to Caiaphas at about the same time that the women were setting out to the disciples with theirs.

Mt. Nil; Mk. 16.10-11; Lk. 24.9-11; Jn. 20.18

So, half an hour later, the two Marys, Joanna, and Salome, burst in upon the astonished disciples with the tremendous news of the Resurrection. He was not dead; He had risen, and they all had seen Him and talked with Him. What a sad anticlimax followed their words! "And these words

seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not". Nonsense, the word means in the original. According to Luke there were others gathered together with the eleven, but none of them believed. For the first few hours of that memorable day the knowledge and conviction of the Resurrection was confined to those few warm-hearted and faithful women. None of the menfolk believed.

Mt. Nil; Mk. Nil; Lk. 24.12; Jn. Nil

Luke 24.12 reads as though upon the reception of this news of the Lord having been seen at the tomb, Peter alone rose up and ran to the sepulchre a second time, again noting that the grave clothes were there but seeing nothing, and so departed

wondering. It would be quite in keeping with the known impulsive character of Peter to pay such a second visit on receipt of this new and startling news. Verses 10-12 of this chapter, however, read like an additional explanatory note to the main story. Verse 9 virtually concludes the narrative and it might be that 10-12 were added solely to record the names of the actors in this drama, since in his account proper Luke mentions no names at all, in which case verse 12 is merely a reference to Peter's visit with mention of John's participation omitted. In any case there was still no revelation and no belief. It was not until the evening of the same day that Jesus did manifest Himself first, apparently, to the two on the way to Emmaus, then to Peter and, finally, to the company in Jerusalem. But all that is another story.

"EVERY EYE SHALL SEE HIM" A Bible Study

"Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him; and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him" (Rev. 1.7).

This is a reference to the Second Advent and the revelation of Christ to the world at that Advent. The point at issue is whether that revelation is made through the natural sight or what might be termed spiritual vision or mental sight. In past ages the question did not arise; the prevalent belief that our Lord was resurrected in His fleshly human body led to the logical conclusion that He would return in that same body and hence would be seen of men by natural sight. The more up-to-date view is that our Lord rose from the dead in the glory of His Divinity, a glory that cannot be sensed by natural sight, and the human body buried in Joseph's tomb is not part of his present being. It follows therefore that at his return, unless He "materialises" in human form as He did upon certain occasions between the times of his resurrection and ascension, He is not perceptible to human sight, and the fact of his return must be discerned by other evidences.

It is not sufficient, though, thus to dismiss this Scripture, for the statement here is that "every eye shall see him". Some have pointed out that the word is *opsetai*, which is said to mean the seeing with natural sight, and hence that the text should be taken literally despite the considerations which

have been expressed. Now in fact this word, in its various grammatical constructions, has both uses in the New Testament, to "see" with the physical eyes and to "see" mentally. Since this is a rather important point a few instances of this latter usage are given here in order to establish the matter.

Jno. 3.36 "He that believeth not the Son shall not *see (opsetai)* life".

Luke 3.6 "All flesh shall *see (opsetai)* the salvation of God".

Matt. 27.4 "What is that to us? *See (opsei)* thou to that".

In the Greek O.T. (the Septuagint):

Psa. 49.9 "That he should still live for ever and not *see (opsetai)* corruption".

Zech. 9.5 "Ashkelon shall *see (opsetai)* and be afraid".

And in the Apocrypha:

Baruch 4.24-25 "The neighbours of Zion shall *see (opsontai)* your salvation . . . thine enemy hath persecuted thee but shortly thou shalt *see (opsei)* his destruction".

These instances—there are others—indicate that the word is not used exclusively to mean the seeing by physical sight; it does on occasion indicate seeing with the mental sight and it does not follow, therefore, that the use of *opsetai* in the text concerned teaches that Jesus at His return is neces-

sarily visible to men.

The next thing to consider is the thought in John's mind when he wrote the words. What did *he* mean to convey? What is the understanding that the Holy Spirit sought to impart to us through John's ready pen?

The verse stands by itself; it has no direct connection with either the preceding or the succeeding verses. It is an ecstatic outburst, as it were, on John's part, using the language of the Old Testament. He offers his greeting, a greeting of grace and peace from the Father, the Son and the angelic host, the "seven spirits before the Throne", to extol the One who has both saved us and made us kings and priests. Having concluded this greeting it is as if a new thought strikes him and he exclaims "Behold, he cometh . . .", seeing the ultimate end of what he was about to witness in vision on Patmos. We should take the verse as being, not a bald, sober statement of an expected physical appearance, but a rhapsody of praise for a forthcoming event expressed in familiar Scriptural terms. The words of this verse are repeated from the sayings of Jesus and the utterances of the prophets and it is to those origins that we should turn rightly to understand the text.

The memory immediately in John's mind must have been the reply of Jesus to the High Priest (Matt. 26.64). John was present at that scene (Jno. 18.15) and heard the words; "hereafter ye shall see (*opsontai*) the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power and coming in the clouds of heaven". That was a direct reference to Dan. 7.13 "One like the Son of Man came with the clouds of heaven . . . and there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people should serve him". Now that verse in Daniel, in common with the whole of the chapter, is clearly metaphorical. We do not expect the Most High in the form of a bearded patriarch to set Himself upon a material throne and superintend the burning of a literal ten-horned beast. Neither do we expect that the Lord Jesus will be literally brought before a throne of fire in order to receive His kingdom. John knew all this when he quoted those words in Rev. 1.7 and there was no doubt in his mind as to the reality of that Coming even although he knew himself to be describing it in metaphorical terms.

Perhaps John's thoughts ranged farther back still than the time of Daniel, and recalled the golden visions of Isaiah, in which the same word is used for the same event. "The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see (*opsetai*) it together" (Isa. 40.5); "For they shall see (*opsontai*) eye to eye, when the Lord shall

bring again Zion" (Isa. 52.8). John probably associated with these Scriptures another theme, that upon which the prophet Zechariah dwelt when he said (Zech. 10.10) "they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for an only son". John had already associated that word with a limited fulfilment at the time of the Crucifixion (Jno. 19.47); now he associates it with a greater. Not only would the "watchers", as in Isa. 52.8, see the Lord returning to Zion; not only would "all flesh", all the world, as in Isa. 40.5, see the glory of the Lord revealed; not only would the wicked who had risen up for judgment, as in Daniel 7, see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven, but those who in John's sight were the farthest of all removed from God—"they also which pierced him"—would experience this same realisation of His return for judgment and blessing. None can escape the Coming of the Son of Man. All are to be brought before him that he might separate them as a shepherd divides the sheep from the goats (Matt. 25.32). Just as in Zechariah there is a world-wide mourning for an only son so also in John's ecstasy he foresaw that "all kindreds of the earth shall wail over (not because of) him". The idea is that of mourners wailing over a dead beloved one. The correspondence between Zech. 10.10 and Rev. 1.7 on this point is exact.

It should be clear then that since the "seeing" in the Scriptures which gave John his inspiration for this verse in Revelation is not physical but metaphorical, John is hardly likely to have intended his words to be interpreted to mean physical sight. He knew that the seeing in those texts was with the mental sight and it is reasonable to conclude that in alluding to them he applied the same meaning.

Incidentally, if "they that pierced him" are literally to witness His coming in the clouds of heaven it follows that they must be resurrected before the Second Advent takes place, and this is certainly not the case. The Lord comes, first, admittedly, to raise his faithful ones. After that, and with the Church, He is to be revealed, in some perfectly convincing fashion, to the living world as the world's Saviour. Only after that event, and the manifest establishment of the Messianic kingdom in power, will the General Resurrection commence and "they that pierced him" be awakened from death to stand before the "Great White Throne". They will not, they can not, physically witness his return to this sphere of man, but they will "see" him then in exactly the same way that we, now, see, "eye to eye", the Lord returning to Zion.

"HE THAT HATH NO SWORD"

Short study on a debated text

"He that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one" (Luke 22.36).

Could Jesus have intended his disciples to acquire and carry swords for offensive purposes? The answer is clearly "No". His whole teaching militates against that suggestion. The Christian way is one of peace, and our warfare, as Paul says, is "not with carnal weapons". When before Pilate a few hours later, Jesus said "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, but now is my kingdom not from hence" (i.e., not based upon the principles or methods of this world).

Was the injunction to the end that He might be successfully defended in the Garden, and rescued from those who were coming to arrest him? Again, no! He went there willingly, knowing that He was going to arrest and death. It was for that purpose He had come into the world. When Peter did use his sword in a vain attempt at rescue, Jesus commanded him "Put up thy sword again into its place; for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword."

Could the swords have been recommended for the disciples' own defence in later days? There may be more reason to stop and consider this, in the light of the words of Jesus which led up to the exhortation in question. "When I sent you without purse, and scrip, and shoes, lacked ye anything? And they said, 'Nothing'. Then said he unto them 'But now, he that hath a purse, let him take it, and likewise his scrip; and he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one'". Did this mean that the Divine care that had provided for their wants when they went out two by two to evangelise the villages of Israel was now to be withdrawn and henceforth they must rely upon their own effort for sustenance and safety? If so, this would seem to be a strange reversal of the Divine way, and moreover is not borne out by the disciples' later lives. So far as their history is recorded they were always dependent upon God for their needs. With respect to personal safety there is no indication anywhere that they ever used the sword for defence against human enemies; on the contrary, they were assured that they must be afflicted, persecuted, imprisoned and even in some cases put to death for his Name's sake, and all of

this they were to endure that they might win the promised crown of life. There is no thought of using physical means of defence here.

But the answer must lie in the comparison made by Jesus "When I sent you . . . But now". When they went out as evangelists it was to the comparatively settled and peaceful villages and towns of Judea and Galilee, where they could go from place to place without encountering wild beasts or other wayside perils. At nightfall they would reasonably expect to find refreshment and lodging from their fellow-Jews and go on their way in the morning. That kind of hospitality was a binding custom on all at that time. But after Jesus' death they were to travel to distant lands across waste and desolate country, where food would not be easy to obtain, nor hospitality from those of like mind. A scrip to carry reasonable provision, and a purse to carry the small amount necessary for daily expenses, would be requisite. Wild beasts—wolves, jackals, hyenas, lions, all common in Western Asia outside the inhabited districts—would constitute a menace, and in days when there were no such things as guns, the sword was the only defensive weapon against such. Travellers carried them habitually for such purposes.

It might be, then, that the words of Jesus were intended as an intimation of the mission that lay before them, the scrip, the purse and the sword being cited as symbols of the nature of their future experiences. No longer was their life's work to be a simple pastoral ministry in the homeland of Israel, but a vigorous missionary work, amid unknown peoples and unimagined perils, in strange lands and places, to the uttermost parts of the earth.

"And they said unto him 'Lord, here are two swords'. And he said unto them 'It is enough'". He realised, perhaps, that they had failed to grasp his meaning, and were thinking only in terms of immediate defence from the danger that threatened him at that time. And as far as that was concerned, two swords were enough—enough for him to refuse their aid at the critical moment and drive home for all time the lessons He was trying to teach them. After his death and ascension, perhaps, the disciples realised as they did not realise earlier how woefully they had misunderstood him on that fateful evening.

WEDDING OF THE AGES

3. Behold the Bridegroom

This final section concludes the application of Biblical wedding customs to the Scriptural poetic presentation of the meeting between the Lord and His Church at the time of His Coming.

* * * *

Our Lord's parable of the virgins was simply but forcefully drawn from the marriage customs about him. The virgins seated in readiness, waiting and watching for the arrival of the royal groom, picture the attitude of faithful Christians at the end of the Age of grace or invitation. The lights and music heralding his approach have for long been seen and heard in the multiplying signs of the times which warn of a change in human affairs. It has become fairly obvious to all thinking people that great changes are imminent, that the time clock of the ages approaches what scientists are fond of describing as "zero hour", the midnight hour of the parable when the cry is made "*Behold the Bridegroom, go ye out and meet him*". The watchers who have looked and longed for his coming, straining eyes and ears through the increasing darkness of infidelity, sin and death, have been alerted many times by what seemed the nearness of his arrival, only to have those hopes dashed and recede into the distance, "*The end is not yet; see that ye be not troubled*"; the Lord's words have seemed to come reassuringly out of the gloom and the faithful have settled down again to wait patiently while they carried out the glad task of publishing abroad the good news of impending change.

The Bride waits in readiness. Some of the eager expectancy dies as the night hours wear on towards midnight. There is an undercurrent of murmurs. "*My Lord delayeth his coming*". He only seems to delay. This is the happiest event of the ages, "the day for which creation and all its tribes were made". He, the Lord of life, has waited long for it, expectant, eager, busy with his own preparations, alert to set out on his triumphant mission whenever the Father gave the word, for the times and seasons have ever been, admittedly, in the Father's hand. He comes, not at an appointed hour, for there is no stated hour, but at the hour when everything that had to be done has been done. But he does come. He will come.

*"He comes, for O his yearning heart
No more can bear delay*

*To scenes of pure, unmingled joy,
To bear his bride away."*

When He comes, the darkness of midnight shrouds the land. Though He may not find faith in the earth among the children of Mammon, He will find ready and waiting the mystical Bride, the church which is his Body; that other half, without which the Christ will not function in giving life to the human family. There will be watchers beside the patiently waiting church; religious groups deeply desirous of this great event, believing it to be the only solution to the perils and troubles of mankind, yet themselves not among the chosen, royally attired Bride. Where the faith of many of these watchers has dwindled, worn out with the unexpected long wait or overwhelmed by the deep darkness of infidelity covering society, when their vision is dimmed and their ears are dulled in weariness or indifference, then the cry will sound sharp and clear through the midnight silence, "*Behold the Bridegroom, go ye out and meet him*".

Amid the confusion of minds dazed by slumberous indifference, the acrid smoke of lamps going out for want of attention, the cries, half despairing, "*Give us of your oil, for our lamps are gone out*", and the firm remonstrance of the more vigorous, "*Go buy for yourselves*", the Son of the great King of heaven is at last on the threshold, ready to take to himself his Bride. The ready watchers, the Bride's faithful companions, enter in with him and the door is shut. All the knocking in the world will not gain admission for the tardy souls who have gone on their fruitless errand to find that oil of the Spirit which will enlighten their darkness. The time has gone for oil-buying, for light-bearing. If they stumble back to the door at all in the overwhelming blackness of the hour after midnight, it is only to find themselves forever shut out of the brilliant splendour of the marriage and its joyous supper. When God shuts a door none can open. For upwards of twenty centuries the door has stood open for the free access of the Bride, her friends and the agency of the Spirit. Now the work is all complete. The Bride is ready, the watchers were ready and the Bridegroom is come: they are all together and the door is shut.

"The marriage of the Lamb is come and His bride hath made herself ready." "Blessed are they which are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb."

The birth of our Lord was the most wonderful event in history. Then Divine love came down to dwell with men. His death upon the cross was the most tragic, for there the sin and ignorance of man slew the King of love, nailing him to a cross. His resurrection was the most stupendous event, for there Divine power conquered death, that life in due time might flow again to a dying race. The marriage of this same Jesus, the Lamb of God who took away the sin of the world, will mean that the time has come to put into operation all the benefits obtained by these previous events. It will therefore be the most joyous event in time or eternity.

The whole creation groans and travails in pain together, waiting, though they know it not, for this blessed event, for the revealing, the manifesting, the full showing forth of the glorious new ruling house, through and by whom all the nations are to be blessed with life in fullest measure. The gladness and rejoicing of heaven over this union is past comprehension. Angels have been interested spectators of this drama of the ages, heralding his birth, announcing his resurrection, ministering to his wellbeloved down the centuries, desiring to know more about the plans of their almighty Creator with these people of his choice and care. Now, as this spectacle of a reigning monarch united to a partner chosen from among men, yet qualified in every way to share that high position, emerges from the long chaotic period of man's history, there is to be heard a voice like that of many waters. It is simply as though all the multitudes of all creation joined in a universal anthem of festival rejoicing, singing "*Alleluia: for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice and give honour unto him*". Then He will see of the travail of his soul and begin to be satisfied. His full satisfaction can come only when He hath put all enemies under his feet, when death is finally vanquished and earth is one glorious orb of life, peace, and full harmony with God.

But now, the Church for which he cheerfully endured the cross stands before him, adorned as a bride for her husband. The centre of all eyes at a wedding are the bridal pair, but chiefly the bride. Her beauty of form, her radiance of face, the loveliness of her attire, arrests the attention of the spectators. "*The king's daughter is all glorious within, her clothing is of wrought gold. She shall be brought unto the king in raiment of needlework; with gladness and rejoicing shall they be brought; they shall enter the king's palace.*" (Psa. 45.)

Upon her head rests the crown of life, her dowry, her Father's gift. While she has worked upon the beautiful raiment in her preparations, all

the richness of her apparel is the bridegroom's gift. The Father of mercies is parent of both bride and groom, for does the groom not look upon her as "*My sister, my spouse.*" So the heaven-sent gifts have enriched, beautified, raised up from the lowly stratas of earth those called ones to highest honours. Not thrones, not crowns nor noble titles, but the pure in heart, the meek, the faithful, have won and kept the Divine Lover.

"*So shall the king greatly desire thy beauty, for he is thy Lord and worship thou him.*" As yet her face is veiled, the sword of filial protection is held above her head. The Bridegroom lifts away the shrouding veil, placing it upon his shoulder. The Father lowers the sword, places upon her head the crown, and bride and groom are face to face for the first time with no veil, no distance, no agency between.

*"Face to face with Christ my Saviour
Face to face, what will it be"*

Now the question is answered. They who have been transformed by that Spirit while yet in the flesh now behold him with unveiled face in all his beauty, seeing him as He is and being like him. Could anything in feeling eclipse that first long scrutiny of love, as two of one mind and one heart, look deeply into one another, knowing that they two shall be forever one?

Now the proud titles become the right of the King of Kings. "*The government shall be upon his shoulder and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.*"

The time has come to take his great power and reign, and He will not reign alone, but He will reign forever. "*Of the increase of his government there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth and forever.*" "*He is heir of all things—upholding all things by the word of his power.*"

Not only is he a king forever but also a priest forever, after the order of Melchisedec. Nor will his reign be confined to earth. The whole vast universe is his dominion. He is the great heir of God, the Lord of Worlds, the Potentate of Time, and beside him, chosen out of the earth, stands the greatest miracle of all, the Divine creation of love, formed to share these honours and this companionship for all eternity. "*He that hath the bride is the bridegroom, but the friend of the bridegroom which stands and hears him, greatly rejoices because of the bridegroom's voice. This my joy therefore is fulfilled.*" Those words were spoken by John the herald of Christ, who, with his sense of prophetic mission, recognised, not merely the

world's Saviour in him whom he baptised in the Jordan, but a bridegroom embarked upon the mission of preparing for himself a bride, before going on to complete the salvation of man, with a continuance of government through all worlds and ages.

The long foreseen event is now become reality. The Bride is presented at the throne of God, to the Father, *"faultless and with exceeding joy"*.

"What rush of Alleluias fills all the earth and sky,

What ringing of a thousand harps bespeaks the triumph nigh,

At the Lamb's high feast we sing, praise to our beloved King,

The Lamb's great banquet called to share, clad in royal garments fair

Saints his praises ever sing—Jesus, their triumphant King".

*"Like the sound of many waters
Rolling on through ages long
In a tide of rapture breaking
Hark the mighty choral song,
Alleluia, Alleluia
Let the heavenly portals ring . . .*

* * * *

The heavenly melodies obliterate all memories of the toilsome past, the long night, the weary waiting. It is the morning of joy, soon to overflow to the shadowed world with healing, love and life.

When the Spirit and the bride say Come, then, whosoever will, may come and take of the water of life freely.

"And God shall wipe all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away."

"And He that sat upon the throne said, Behold I make all things new." The End.

JUDAS AND THE POTTER'S FIELD

An apparent discrepancy in the two accounts of Judas' actions after his betrayal of Jesus has often provoked a query. Matthew (ch. 27.3-10) says that immediately after the trial before the High Priest at which Jesus was condemned, and whilst He was being taken to Pilate, Judas repented of his action and took the thirty pieces of silver back to the priests, declaring that he had betrayed an innocent man. Finding them completely indifferent, he threw the money on the floor of the Temple, went away and hanged himself. The priests, reluctant to put the money into the Temple treasury "because it is the price of blood" used it to buy the "potters field" for use as a burying place for "strangers" i.e. non-Jews who happened to die whilst in Jerusalem. Hence it was thereafter called the "field of blood".

Luke, in Acts 1.15-20, records Peter as saying that Judas purchased a field with the thirty pieces of silver, fell headlong therein and his body burst asunder, whence it was called the "field of blood".

Who did purchase the field, Judas or the priests? What was the real origin of its name, "the field of blood", the fact that it was the scene of Judas' tragic death or that it had been purchased with blood money? At first sight it seems that the accounts are contradictory and cannot both be true. As with so many apparently contradictory passages in the Bible, the two accounts can be understood perfectly harmoniously if the entire transaction is reconstructed. The first point to notice is that the priests "covenanted" with Judas for thirty pieces of silver if he would betray Jesus (Matt. 26.14). This implies that he would receive

the money when he had fulfilled his obligation. As soon as Jesus was taken into custody and brought to the High Priest's house where the Sanhedrin was assembled, Judas would be calling upon some appointed official who would pay him his money. This would have been between nine and twelve o'clock at night; by six the next morning the illegal trial was over and Jesus on his way to Pilate. Now it is in the highest degree unlikely that Judas, during those few early morning hours, would find anyone willing to negotiate the sale of a piece of land—and on the eve of the Passover to boot! Whenever Judas agreed to buy the land, it was not that night. But before the second trial began before Pilate, Judas was back with the money. It had been in his possession for less than six hours!

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

carried through and completed before the commencement of the Feast, and that was the day after Passover itself.

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

This is when he went off to buy the field. He could not yet pay over the money for he had not yet been paid. He could however agree the matter with the owner and they would "strike hands" on the bargain, probably with witnesses, as is related of Abraham buying the land from Ephron the Hittite in which to bury his wife. From now on the field belonged to Judas and he was bound to pay the money at the agreed time a few days hence.

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

assumption of sovereignty after He had delivered himself in some spectacular fashion from his captors may well be the solution of the enigma.

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

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

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

Thus viewed, the two accounts are in harmony and every statement in each account fits into its place in one consistent narrative.

Bread of Life

There is a peculiar significance in the selection of *bread* as a symbol of the Lord's body. It is a picture and parable of the self-sacrifice of the Son of God. Before the mature wheat can become bread which strengtheneth man's heart it must leave the stalks that wave in the sunlight and submit itself to the flail or thrasher. It must give up its germinating power and its beauty of form and

must submit to the crushing and grinding of the upper and nether millstones. It must go through the kneading trough and be exposed to the fires of the baking oven. It is through self-sacrifice that the golden wheat becomes bread. In like manner it is through sacrifice that the Son of God becomes the Bread of Life.



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

BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

Vol. 49, No. 4

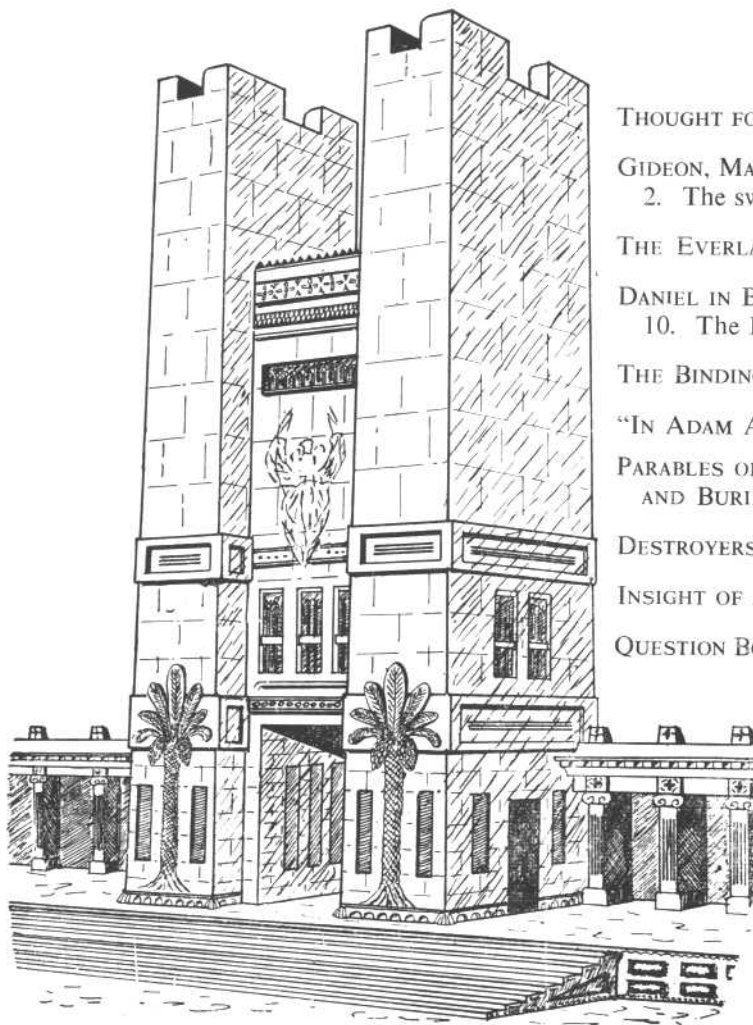
JULY/AUGUST 1972

Published July 1st

Next issue September 1st

CONTENTS

THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH	74
GIDEON, MAN OF VALOUR	
2. The sword of the Lord	75
THE EVERLASTING ARMS	78
DANIEL IN BABYLON	
10. The Beginning of the End ...	81
THE BINDING OF SATAN	84
"IN ADAM ALL DIE"	87
PARABLES OF THE COSTLY PEARL AND BURIED TREASURE	91
DESTROYERS OF THE SANCTUARY ...	93
INSIGHT OF AN INCA MONARCH	95
QUESTION BOX	96



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

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

Published by
Bible Fellowship Union
11 Lyncroft Gardens, Hounslow,
Middlesex, England

Bible Study Monthly

FOUNDED 1924

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

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

Communications and donations to Bible Fellowship Union, 11 Lyncroft Gardens, Hounslow, Middlesex, England.
Secretary & Treasurer: B. G. DUMONT (Hounslow) Editorial & Publishing: A. O. HUDSON (Welling)

NOTICES

New booklet

The treatise, "The Virgin Birth of Christ", which appeared in our March issue is now available as a 24pp booklet. Copies will be supplied upon request upon the same terms as the "Monthly", i.e., at no charge although gifts towards the cost of printing and postage will be sincerely appreciated.

Renewal requests

Overseas readers are reminded that since sea transmission time ranges from five to eight weeks it frequently happens that a readers letter—with or without gift—crosses in the post with a following issue containing a renewal notice. In such case the notice should be ignored.

Thought for the Month

"The Spirit of God hath made me, and the breath of the Almighty hath given me life"

(Job 33.4).

The wisdom of Elihu is at a discount in most quarters nowadays, but that modest yet far-seeing young man of thirty-five centuries ago "had something" which is lacking amongst the so-called wise of to-day's world, especially those of the scientific fraternity who claim to have created life; such claims come up from time to time in the daily press. It would almost seem that even in this modern age God cannot be satisfactorily disposed of until this elusive power of creation has been mastered by man—after which, no doubt, no longer would the "sky be the limit", but all space and all creation, so that man would become like God. Already one biologist has said "If we are able to create new patterns of life never before known, does not this suggest that we may actually be a part of the great creative power in Nature?" A bit premature, maybe. "We" are not yet "able" so "to create". But biologists at Harvard have just succeeded, so they say, in isolating one single gene, the little bits in our bodies which pass on the characteristics we inherit from our ancestors, like blue eyes and bad tempers. So now there is talk of "genetic engineering", which means tinkering about with unborn human beings in the endeavour to improve upon Nature. It is only talk at the

moment, for the subject of the present experiment was only a microbe, and there is a big difference between microbes and men. And behind Nature there is God, who at the first designed both microbes and men, each to occupy a definite place and function in His creation. That man as he is at present stands in need of considerable improvement none can deny, but this is the result of sin, which is an attribute of his moral nature and not of his genes. There is admittedly much that is amiss with human mentality and physique to-day and sore need for healing and restoration to man's primeval perfection, but juggling about with molecules of nitrogen compounds in his body will not achieve it. That is as likely—or more likely—to be used for evil ends as for good, and the net result a menace to man rather than a benefit. Despite the fervent protestations of the experimenters, man just cannot be trusted to use power such as this solely for good. And God has already ordained the process for man's advancement to perfection and that process is called conversion, the giving of oneself loyally and unreservedly to the Lord Jesus Christ and accepting His guidance in all the affairs of life. The Bible depicts the eventual release of men from sin, disease and death in terms, not of a hospital and a kit of surgical tools, but in the breath-taking vision of the Holy Spirit of God poured out upon all flesh for healing and regeneration and salvation.

GIDEON, MAN OF VALOUR

2. The Sword of the Lord

"Arise, get thee down unto the host; for I have delivered it into thine hand."

The stirring command was Gideon's signal to act. From the peaceful life of a country farmer he had emerged, by appointment of the Lord, as the military leader of thirty thousand men eager to deliver their homeland from the invading Midianites. But the Lord had reduced his army to a mere three hundred, telling him that these would be enough to achieve the victory he planned. Now his small force was gathered on the northern slopes of Mount Gilboa overlooking the valley where the enemy was encamped. The nature of his instructions was unusual and the manner in which he was to launch the attack would seem laughable if judged by earthly standards of warfare, but this was the Lord's war and Gideon knew his God well enough to be persuaded that His way was right. The Lord had told him that the victory was as good as accomplished and now gave him the word to advance and, as it were, left the whole issue in his hands.

There was no hesitation; Gideon went immediately into action. He might well have pleaded that his men needed a night's rest before engaging the enemy. They had started out early in the morning (Jud. 7.1) and after their journey to the site of the coming battle had spent the rest of the day eliminating the unwilling and the unready and now it was night (ch. 7.9), probably soon after six o'clock, which is the approximate time of darkness in Israel. The attack took place between ten and eleven the same night (ch. 7.19) and there was much to be done before that. First of all Gideon with his attendant Phurah made a personal reconnaissance of the enemy camp. Overhearing a Midianite recounting his dream and his fellow interpreting it to signify the Midianites' defeat at the hand of Israel, Gideon rightly deduced that the host was at least in a state of apprehension. He could go back to his men elated and summon them to the attack; he did not do so at once. First of all, we are told, *"he worshipped—and returned to the host of Israel"*. In the midst of the enemy, in imminent danger of detection and capture, he nevertheless found time to pause and render thanks to God and doubtless supplication for continued guidance and support. Only then did he make his way back to his own followers and safety.

Now Gideon prepared for battle. The Lord had

given him three hundred men with the assurance that no more were needed; even although the Lord had guaranteed victory it still devolved upon Gideon to make the best possible use of his three hundred men. Whether the subsequent course of action was suggested to him by inspiration of the Holy Spirit and so God-given, or was the outcome of his own strategic ingenuity, we know not, but probably the former. The account says that he divided his forces into three companies of a hundred men each and provided each individual with a trumpet, a torch and an empty pitcher. Where he obtained three hundred pitchers and trumpets at such short notice does not readily appear, but remembering that he had but lately dismissed nearly thirty thousand men who had come from fairly distant parts of the country prepared for a possibly lengthy campaign it may well be that plenty were available in the general camp impedita. What is more important is the fact that no provision seems to have been made for weapons. Certain it is that with a trumpet in one hand, a pitcher in the other, and a torch held somehow, there was not much manoeuvring space for a sword. It is evident that the initial attack at least, devised to put the enemy to flight, was going to be launched without the assistance of the traditional weapons of war and in fact it was this completely different and unexpected technique which accomplished the desired end. There is something here which was echoed in the confident words of the boy David when he faced the giant Philistine Goliath. "Thou comest to me with a sword and with a spear, and with a shield; but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of Hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied".

A hasty instruction to the warriors and the three companies were despatched to their positions. One party of a hundred men was to station itself on the slopes of Mount Moreh to the north of the enemy camp, one on the slopes of Mount Gilboa to the south, and one across the head of the valley to the west. The torches were to be concealed in the pitchers so that no light showed. The Midianites lay in the valley, but they were surrounded on three sides by a handful of men probably well spaced out. The only avenue of escape was to the east, towards Jordan. The narrative itself does not give these geographical details; it tells only of the three companies and that, when stationed according to Gideon's instructions, *"they*

stood every man in his place round about the camp", but it only needs a glance at a large-scale map of the district to see that this clearly was the plan of campaign. So, by ten o'clock, *"the beginning of the middle watch"* (ch. 7.19) all was ready. (Unlike the system in Roman times, ancient Israel had three "watches" in the night, six to ten, ten to two, two to six). The first shift of sentries had gone off duty, doubtless reporting to their successors "a fine night and all's well", oblivious of the silent watchers on the hillsides and the second shift began to make themselves as comfortable as they could, shrouding themselves in their long robes from the night cold and hoping for a swift passing of the next four hours. And Gideon, at the head of his own party—it has been remarked in our own times that Israeli officers in action are always in front of their men and never behind—moved silently towards the outskirts of the Midianite camp *"when they had but newly set the (middle) watch"*....

"The sword of the Lord and Gideon!" The stentorian cry rang out loud and clear in the quietness of the night. In a moment, as the dazed sentries sprang up, the cry was echoed and re-echoed from every side. As the awakened Midianites tumbled out of their tents and began feverishly to collect accoutrements and weapons there came what sounded like the clashing of the arms of a mighty host. Looking up they perceived a myriad points of light on the hillsides around the camp. Gideon's men, following instructions, had dashed their pitchers on the rocks and revealed their torches, at the same time sounding their trumpets and shouting their battle cry. In that dense darkness the twinkling lights, the noise of splintering earthenware and strident blast of trumpets, the shouting of men, must have seemed to the Midianites as though a vast avenging host was converging upon them from all directions, save one. Only toward the east were there no shouts, no trumpets, no lights. And so the entire host, in sudden panic, fled in utter and indescribable confusion that way in an instinctive bid to escape. The River Jordan was only twelve miles away and an easy ford existed there. Once across Jordan they could be measurably safe and on the way to their own land. So they ran, in the darkness of the night, ran as they had never run before, leaving behind them all their property, their tents and possessions, their camels and asses and beasts of burden on which they had expected to carry home the spoils of the raid on Israel's land. Now all these things were left behind to be a spoil for Israel. So they pressed on, looking back from time to time only to see those flickering torches and hear those piercing trumpets as the three hundred pursued them through the valley.

It would seem from ch. 7.22 that in the confusion and the dense darkness the Midianites and Amalekites mistook each other for pursuers and began to fight among themselves, added to which the thousands of Israelites who had been rejected by Gideon at the waters of Harod now joined in the pursuit and assisted in the discomfiture of the fugitives. It is here that a rather strange factor is introduced. According to ch. 7.22 the fleeing hosts most unaccountably turned aside from the direct route across Jordan and made their way towards Abel-meholah, on the Israeli side of Jordan and some twenty miles to the south, thus placing themselves at the mercy of the pursuers. Why they thus failed to cross the river into relative safety at the easiest point is incomprehensible save for one element in the story. Ch. 7.24 says that Gideon sent messengers to the tribe of Ephraim upon the mountains, bidding them come down and hold the fords of Jordan at Beth-barah, the crossing point in question. The narrative reads as if Gideon sent this message after the attack and whilst the flight was in progress, but another glance at the map shows the unlikelihood of this. Long before the messengers could have climbed the twenty miles or so into the mountains, and the Ephraimites had responded by going another twenty miles to the fords, the host would have cleared the dozen miles which lay between them and safety. The probable conclusion is that Gideon had sent his messengers before he attacked the Midianites and the men of Ephraim were already in position when the flight began. The tenses in Hebrew are not so exact as in English and the preterite form which speaks of past time does not always indicate clearly the relation of two past events to each other in a narrative. In this case vs. 24 probably is better rendered in English *"and Gideon had sent messengers"*, i.e. before he advanced to the attack. In consequence the fleeing Midianites found their channel of escape across the Jordan blocked by another force of armed men and so were compelled to turn southward in their search for a way out. They had now roused all Israel against them and were more or less surrounded. Out of that hundred and thirty-five thousand fugitives only fifteen thousand succeeded in getting across the river. The remainder were slain by the now thoroughly aroused Israelite population.

The significance of this apparent outcome of the debacle lies in the demonstration it affords of Gideon's implicit faith in God's promise that He would deliver. Gideon was so sure he would rout the invaders that he stationed the Ephraimites along the river in advance to ensure that they did not get away. He evidently intended to make certain that the Midianites would never invade again.

And they did not. The settled nations, Moab, Ammon, Edom, Syria, do figure in later struggles with Israel but not Midian or the peoples of the East. The victory was complete, and it never needed to be repeated.

But Gideon was not finished yet. He meant to destroy Midian utterly. He pursued the pitiable remnant from Abel-meholah across Jordan to Succoth, from Succoth to Penuel, from Penuel to Karkar, and there he caught up with them. There he "discomfited" the remaining fifteen thousand and slew their chiefs Zebah and Zalmunna. It was a terrible slaughter and probably in great part unnecessary, but this was the spirit of the times and there was the memory of the past seven years of oppression to be avenged.

Such wholesale massacre, however, does involve the question as to what extent the Lord was responsible. Did God in fact command and empower Gideon to embark upon this career of carnage and destruction. The first hasty answer in most minds might well be "yes" on the strength of the angelic visit to Gideon and the Divine assurance that by his instrumentality Israel was to be delivered. A deeper study of the narrative, however, suggests flaws in this conclusion. There were two phases of this conflict; first the putting of the Midianites to flight by the three hundred men, without the use of arms but solely by trumpets, torches and pitchers, and second, the slaughter of the host which was effected, not only by the three hundred but all the other thousands of Israelites who at first had been eliminated from the campaign. It is carefully to be noted that the Lord's instructions were limited entirely to the use of three hundred men with their trumpets and torches, with no mention of other armed force. The remaining thirty-odd thousand were expressly ruled out. These, said the Lord, "*are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel say . . . mine own hand hath saved me*". With the panic flight of the enemy the deliverance was accomplished; had there been no opposing force of Ephraimites at Beth-barah they would have got clean across Jordan and away. They would not have come back that year at any rate. The Lord would have fulfilled his promise to deliver, and that without the use of weapons of war. It is significant that this is as far as the Lord's instructions went; there is nothing said about bringing back the rejected thirty thousand and in fact He did definitely say that He did not want them to participate in the victory. It might well be therefore that this part of the campaign was not of the Lord's command and measurably heedless of His will. Having got the enemy on the run, Israel could

not resist the temptation to finish them off in traditional fashion.

This was always Israel's undoing. At the Exodus God told them they had no need to fight when they entered the Promised Land; He himself would go before them and give them entrance, and He himself would eliminate the inhabitants "by little and little"—evidently by natural decrease—so that they could enter into full occupancy without war. They would not have it that way; they relied rather upon their own warlike propensities and in consequence they spent ten years in savage warfare and even then never really succeeded in completely eliminating the idolatrous inhabitants from the land. The same experience befalls Christians, collectively and individually. The Lord will fight for us if we let him, but if on the contrary we insist upon employing the arm of the flesh He will leave us to do so and experience the consequences. It worked that way with Gideon and his men. That failure to follow the Divine leading implicitly all the time led later to a misappropriation of the spoils of war and that in turn to a new idolatry which, as the old chronicler says regretfully "*became a snare to Gideon and to his house*".

For when those thousands came back to their own land rejoicing in their victory and began the work of sharing out the spoil gathered from the Midianites' abandoned camp, it is evident they had completely forgotten the part God had played in this whole affair and were crediting the outcome to their own valour and power, just as the Lord had foretold in ch. 7.2. "*Rule thou over us*" they said to Gideon "*both thou and thy son, and thy son's son also; for thou hast delivered us from the hand of Midian*" (ch. 8.22). How evident it is that their success had gone to their heads and they were now dreaming of a nation organised on a basis of military strength and governed by a king like the nations around them. Several centuries later Israel was to ask Samuel to make them a king for the same reason and it is not always realised that the first attempt of Israel to choose themselves a king was here in the days of Gideon. So soon after their deliverance were they forgetting the basic principle of their nationhood, that the Lord was their king and they themselves all brethren together. So it has been, sadly, so many times with Christian believers through the centuries, the urge to set up visible leaders who will head a group or company gathered around some particular thesis or ideal, which itself takes on such an importance that the headship and guidance of Christ is forgotten and the power of the Holy Spirit in the community becomes submerged under the more immediate appeal of human power and

policies. "Make us gods to go before us" was the cry of Israel in the wilderness; the cry is still raised and with equally lamentable results.

It is to the honour of Gideon that he flatly declined their offer. *"I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you: the Lord shall rule over you"*. He, at least, knew that the survival of the nation depended on their allegiance to God and the Covenant, and he would not be a party to any innovation which denied that basic principle. He was prepared to remain a military leader, a "judge" in the sense of this term in the Book of Judges—the word really means one who stands up to defend the right and deliver the oppressed and was applied to all the deliverers of Israel from enemy oppression in the period preceding the monarchy—and so classed himself with Joshua, Othniel and others who before him had delivered the nation but accepted no election to high office nor suffered the creation of a hereditary kingly dynasty in Israel. Gideon had been an instrument in the Lord's hands for the deliverance of Israel; he gave all the glory to the Lord and took nothing for himself and with that he was content.

But he made one sad mistake. The final episode

in the story shows how fatally easy it is for even the most ardent and faithful follower of the Lord to be taken off his guard in some perhaps seemingly insignificant thing which mushrooms into a serious breach of the Divine standards or some deep-rooted canker in the life. In Gideon's case it may have seemed quite harmless at the time, just a somewhat irregular means of giving honour to God admittedly not altogether in line with his precepts, but in its effect, as the chronicler says in ch. 8.27, it "became a snare unto Gideon, and to his house."

That story must form the subject of another chapter. It must tell, not of a resounding victory and mighty deliverance wrought in faith and by the power of God, consequent upon careful adherence in the first place to the leading of God, but of an endeavour to do honour to God in a manner not commanded by him and in violation of his ordained arrangements. It reveals how the highest ideals can become polluted by the lowest of standards if they are not fashioned in accordance with the expressed will of God and what could have become the greatest triumph lead at last into deepest tragedy.

To be concluded

THE EVERLASTING ARMS

"The Eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms:" (Deut. 33.27).

Wonderful consolation for the saints of God! How very appropriate and beautiful is the Apostle's reference to our God, as "the God of all comfort, who comforteth us in all our tribulations" (2 Cor. 1, 3.4).

To the "great cloud of witnesses" tested and approved in former ages, God was faithful in giving needed consolation to the end that they should not be discouraged. The stern requirements of the Law, with its inevitable condemnation, did not make up the sum of Divine revelation even in those days before "grace and truth came by Jesus Christ". To Patriarchs and Prophets, and to all who were "Israelites indeed", this word of comforting assurance was spoken—"For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, and with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones". (Isa. 57.15).

The warmth of His love, therefore, could not be hidden entirely from view behind the inflexible demand of a law which said, "This do and thou

shalt live." His character is such that He must and would remember that even those who delighted in his law and trembled at his unalterable Word were but dust, incapable of perfect goodness, because evil was so painfully present with them. As we are privileged to know him today revealed in Christ, so He has always been in character, the same unchangeable God.

The revelation that came with the light of the Gospel, that "God is love," was marvellously anticipated in repeated assurances of that fact given to men and women of other ages "of whom the world was not worthy," who, notwithstanding the impossibility of gaining life through the law, "had this testimony, that they pleased God." Thus it is that we find constant reiterations of this love given to faithful Ancient Worthies long before the Gospel's "exceeding great and precious promises" shed their rays of light upon the path of the Church. To them God gave ample assurance that in all their trials and difficulties He was near with his grace to sustain and his comfort to cheer.

When servants of God's household enjoyed such assurances of his abiding presence and protection as was given to this "great cloud of witnesses,"

how very near then should He seem to the sons of his family now. If to servants He would say, "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you," what tender consolations He must speak to his own spirit-begotten children. If to obedient, loyal servants encouragement was given in the knowledge that "The Eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the Everlasting Arms", what measure of protection and grace will be the present portion of the children of his love? For these, his sons, "some better thing" has been reserved in God's appointment, embracing present privileges and future rewards. Surely then such must be encouraged as they hear this "voice behind" them, testifying to the faithfulness of God. Plainly this voice must give strength as they hear it directing them in the way that they should walk, and establishing their faith in the promised grace sufficient for every time of need; yea, that God "is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think." (Eph. 3.20).

*"How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,
Is laid for your faith in his excellent Word!*

*What more can he say than to you he hath
said?*

You, who unto Jesus for refuge hath fled"

And what more can He say than to us He has said? Could He say more than He has said in giving us so many "exceeding great and precious promises, that by these we might be partakers of the Divine nature"—promises which meet our every experience and need, and promises which can never be broken, for they are the promises of One who cannot lie? These pledges of God, how dependable they are! Behind us lie long centuries of his care over his people, and the testimony of all who have preceded us comes with the assurance that "there hath not failed one word of all his good promises." (1 Kings 8.56). Thousands of years of unfailing faithfulness through every emergency that could test it—and He has been all this to his people, though none have been wholly perfect in their faithfulness to him. What more indeed can He say to us then, than we have in these promises.

It may thrill our hearts to recall the love of Christ for his Church collectively, and to remember that the saints composing that Body are his peculiar charge. But He wants us to realise a more intimate and personal place in that special care He exercises over his own. "He calleth his own sheep by name." This is the picture Jesus gives us of the shepherd's intimacy which He has established with the sheep. What can He mean by this illustration if it be not to teach us that each one of us may enjoy so close and personal a relation-

ship as this? Beyond question He is "a good Shepherd" and by God's appointment He is the "great Shepherd of the sheep"; but more precious still, and best of all is the fact that each one of the true sheep may say "The Lord is my Shepherd". "He is mine, and I am his forever"; his love is an individualising love, and his attentions are blessedly individual and personal too. The attention I individually need is in no danger of being overlooked in his care for all. By his rod and staff I personally am both comforted and corrected. He is my very faithful Shepherd when He leads me beside the quiet waters and into the green pastures, and He is just as faithful and loving when He lays the rod to my back when my feet wander out of the way, or when I follow other voices than his. O how short would have been my enjoyment of those quiet waters and verdant pastures if He had not been a Shepherd of whom I could say, "He restoreth my soul" or, as a better rendering gives it, "He restores me when wandering."

Acknowledging then our need of discipline lest we run to wood-making rather than fruit-bearing, and confessing our repeated failures, we cannot but love him for giving us the corrections we so much need, and especially so when we know that all the while those Everlasting Arms are underneath us. We could not be otherwise than grateful, for "We have had fathers of our flesh who corrected us, and we gave them reverence; shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure, but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness." (Heb. 12.9.10). Underneath all our weaknesses, strong to bear up, loving and wise to chastise and scourge us, constant and unwearied to keep us from being castaways, are the Everlasting Arms. Therefore, "Despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him". (Heb. 12.5).

*Faithful, O Lord, Thy mercies are,
A Rock that cannot move,
A thousand promises declare,
Thy constantly of love.*

And how great is his mercy and compassion! What pains He has taken to make it clear that He is "touched with a feeling of our infirmities." If in contrition of heart we are constantly humiliated by our failures, what then? Just when it would seem that there is defeat and failure, we discover anew that "The eternal God is thy refuge; and underneath are the Everlasting Arms." He has anticipated our well-nigh abandoned hope of being continued in his love. He therefore does not come to us and add to our discouragement by saying,

"What man of you having an hundred sheep, if one of the best and most faithful of them wanders away, will he not go out and search for it until he find it?" Not so, our need is to have One "who can have compassion on the ignorant, and them that are out of the way," and such He has assured us He is. No matter how weak and frail we are, if the heart be true, He abideth faithful, and for us He tells it thus: "What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them (any one of them) doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing.... Likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth" (Luke 15.4.5.7). Truly "the goodness of God leadeth to repentance" and the knowledge of the Everlasting Arms underneath constrains our hearts to more watchful diligence.

But even if we have not wandered so far afield as this, but have remained within the fold, zealously intent on obeying the Shepherd's voice, even then how constantly we are made to realise the debt of love we owe. Dwelling here where faith may rest in his provision for us, what joy there is in remembering that though knowing us as we really are, He loves us just the same. He sees and knows us as we really want to be. No one knows better than He that in attempting to live, we are often spoiling our own work by incongruous temper, or incongruous conduct. We misrepresent ourselves oftener than others misrepresent us. Our foibles, our blemishes of temper, our false steps, help to make our lives an enigma to others. These are tremendous discouragements, silencing discouragements. They sometimes shake courage to its foundations; they fill the heart with bitterness and agitation; they scatter the tender uprisings of holy purpose, and throw us back in confusion and sorrow. We feel that others doubt us, look askance at us, point at us behind our backs, or smile with scepticism over our confession of faith in Jesus Christ and our vows of discipleship. And the sting of this bitterness is in the thought that we are discrediting a deeper selfhood which, beneath these variabilities of temper, these inconsistencies of speech and conduct, these futile attempts at self-expression, is after all the greatest and truest part of us. We know that we are sound at the core; we know that when, through all that shadows of fault and deficiency, Christ's great question, "Lovest thou Me?" searches down into our depths, there is that which gives back the unfaltering answer "Yes". But can we demonstrate this love so that it will be believed? Can we find anywhere a basis for a new beginning in which our confidence, shaken by failure and misunderstanding, can once

more lift itself up into joy? Blessed is he who realises in such an hour that he still has left love's last and greatest refuge, Christ's knowledge of our sincerity; "Thou knowest that I love thee". Whatever my own poor faulty words and ways may say to others, awakening in their minds doubts of my sincerity; whatever the verdicts of others may be concerning me; whatever my own memory holds up before me of inconsistency and error—"Thou knowest that I love Thee".

In every new experience, in every new temptation, in hours of strength, in hours of contrition, still we say to him those same words of the deeper, holier fellowship, "Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I love Thee".

*"Thou knowest, not alone as Lord, all knowing;
As man, our mortal weakness Thou hast proved;
On earth, with purest sympathies o'erflowing,
O Saviour, Thou hast wept and Thou hast loved;*

*And love and sorrow still to Thee may come,
And find a hiding-place, a rest, a home."*

"Thou knowest that I love Thee." That speaks to us of Christ's knowledge of our better selves. Day by day we struggle to explain ourselves, to live intelligibly, to utter the best that is in us. Short successes alternate with swift failures. The very words and deeds by which we would explain ourselves become in our faulty hands like masks and disguises. The unreality of living grows insupportable. Sometimes it seems as if lives were simply stumbling against one another in the dark, so few understand us, so few do we understand. We appear at our worst in perverse hours when we would have shown our best; we talk commonplaces when we would have spoken the very secrets of God; we grieve the life we sought to cheer. We weep with vexation over days that are mere comedies of errors, or deserts of dullness. The eternal, the glorious relief from all this is Christ's knowledge of our better self. Jesus knows. He sees the glorious purpose which by some flash of temper or by some maladroitness we nullified this very morning. He realises and accepts the heaven-soaring prayer which potentially filled our spirit when, under the drowning surge of weariness, we could pant forth but one ejaculation. He measures the celestial idea of living, which, like a city of gold flashes continually before our ambitions, and fails continually before our blundering life. He knows us not only as we are, but as we mean to be.

*"All I could never be,
All men ignored in me
This I was worth to God,
Whose hand the pitcher shaped."*

My beloved Master, "Thou knowest all things".

All power in heaven and earth has been given to thee. Thou knowest the great secrets of the Father's purposes. To thee it has been given to know all the contents of the scroll within and without. But of all thy boundless knowledge this only gives me courage to come to thee, and offer thee this day my faulty life: O blessed Saviour, "Thou knowest that I love thee". Here then is the saint's rest, for here our faith may drop its anchor in the calm sure haven of the comforting assurance that "The Eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the Everlasting Arms".

With such immutable promises to cheer us on our way, how earnestly we should seek to emulate the spirit of David, and vow with him that "Now shall mine head be lifted up above mine enemies round about me; therefore will I offer in his tabernacle sacrifices of joy; I will sing, yea, I will sing praises unto the Lord" (Psa. 27.66). This was the experience of Paul and Silas when their songs of deliverance were sung while as yet their feet were fast in the stocks. Their songs made possible a defeat of the enemy that could never have been accomplished if they had failed in their faith in God. This also was the experience of Israel in one of their memorable battles with the enemy recorded in 2 Chron. 20. King Jehoshaphat had received word of an invasion that at first looked like sure and terrible destruction; a great multitude from beyond the sea. But on going to the Lord in prayer, and confessing, "We have no might against this great company . . . but our eyes are upon Thee", confidence was quickly established. On the morrow they went forth to battle, but how? "He (Jehoshaphat) appointed

singers unto the Lord that should praise the beauty of holiness, as they went out before the army, and to say, Praise the Lord, for his mercy endureth forever. And when they began to sing and to praise, the Lord set ambushments against the children of Ammon, Moab and Mount Seir, which were come against Judah. . . . And they were three days in gathering of the spoil, it was so much." They had more than victory over an enemy driven out before them, they had riches and jewels "more than they could carry away".

There are two songs connected with this battle, one of praise inspired by faith in the presence and power of God when face to face with seeming defeat, the other a song of thanksgiving after the victory had been gained, in acknowledgement of the faithfulness of the One in whom they had trusted. Both of these songs should be in our experience also. Songs in the night are gloriously possible to faithful saints—songs of praise and thanksgiving. Confidence, singing its assurance of victory through Christ, will drive away doubt and fear. We, too, will have our triumphant song by and by in the valley of Berachah (blessing), glorifying God for his faithfulness to us, but it is more precious just now to know that we are singing the first song—praising God, yes, and seeing him set his ambushments against the enemy, and driving him out. Shall we not have both songs in our completed experience? We will indeed, if we constantly remember, in the house of our present pilgrimage, that "The Eternal God is Thy refuge, and underneath are the Everlasting Arms".

From "Peoples Paper and Herald of Christ's Kingdom", Melbourne, Australia; abbreviated.

DANIEL IN BABYLON

10. The Beginning of the End

The story of a great man's faith

It was two years after Daniel's dream of the four world-empires, in the guise of four ravenous wild beasts, that the aged prophet's eyes were opened again. Perhaps it was the quickening tempo of political events around him that sharpened the old man's faculties and enabled him to apply himself more devotedly to the leading of the Spirit. For more than ten years past the name of a military leader, Cyrus of Anshan, descendant of the kings of Elam, had been familiar to him as it was to all dwellers in Babylon. Cyrus with his armies was rapidly bringing all the lands of the Middle East into subjection to the rising power of the Medes, who with the Babylonians had destroyed Assyria

some hundred years previously and in the days of Nebuchadnezzar had ranked as a friendly power to Babylon. Queen Amytis, the wife of Nebuchadnezzar, was herself a princess of Media. But Nebuchadnezzar had been dead now for thirteen years and Queen Amytis was destined to follow him only a year after this particular vision of Daniel, and Cyrus had ambitious designs on Babylon. His army was engaged in the siege of Sardis, capital of Lydia, the only power beside Babylon which remained unsubdued, and Daniel, astute politician that he was, must have known that Babylon's turn could not be much longer delayed.

So it is not surprising that in the eighth chapter

of Daniel we are taken right into the centre of the happenings which were to transfer the sovereignty of the world first from Babylon to Medo-Persia, and then from Medo-Persia to Greece. This vision and this prophecy is one of the easiest in the whole of the Bible to interpret for the reason that its application is given by the revealing angel in terms of the plain names of the countries concerned. The correspondence with history is so marked that there can be no doubt about the matter. The factor that requires a little more thought, and yet is of greater importance than the interpretation, is the question: of what value is this strictly "history-book" prophecy to us? But that question can be looked at after we have considered the vision itself.

According to chap. 8, verse 2, Daniel was "*at Shushan the palace in the province of Elam*". It is fairly obvious from the text that he was there only "in the spirit," not literally. Elam and Babylon were virtually in a state of war at this time and Daniel could hardly have been in the capital city of the enemy. He might very well have been a visitor in his earlier years when the two countries were on friendly terms; official business might well have taken him thither, so that it may not be at all strange to think of him seeing, in his dream, surroundings which were already familiar, and realising, perhaps for the first time, that here was a future stage for later acts of the Divine Plan when Babylon had ceased to be a power in the hands of God. Shushan eventually became the capital city of Persia, and was the home of Queen Esther and the scene of the events narrated in the Book of Esther, some seventy years later on.

The vision itself was a vivid and clear-cut one, easily remembered because of its simplicity and restrained symbolism. A ram, having horns of unequal length, the higher coming up last, was butting its way irresistibly west, north and south—obviously therefore coming from the east—until it stood supreme and none challenged its authority. For a moment Daniel saw it thus, and then beheld a furious he-goat bearing one great horn advancing from the west, charging the ram, casting it to the ground, and stamping upon it. So the he-goat in its turn stood supreme.

Now the great horn was broken and in its place there grew up four smaller horns; but the force and power of the goat was not the same; it was spent. Then there appeared, budding out from one of those horns, a little horn, a little horn which began to wax greater and greater, turning itself toward the east and the south, and towards the land which was always in Daniel's heart, the land of Israel. With that thought the background of the vision changed, and Daniel realised that the horn was some strong power that would arise; he saw that

power reaching up to heaven as though to challenge God in His own domain, and tearing down some of the stars from heaven, and stamping upon them.

Now Daniel was in the land of his desires, standing in the holy city Jerusalem, and beheld the Temple of his longings, rebuilt and purified, the morning and evening sacrifices offered in their due order by the appointed priests according to the law of Moses, the fulfilment of all that he had waited and sought through so many long years. Here, at last, was the answer to his prayers. And he watched until that godless power revealed itself a ruthless despot which led its followers to bring to an end those morning and evening sacrifices, to profane and defile the holy Temple, to destroy and cast down all that was sacred to the One God, and persecute and slay those who maintained their loyalty and their faith.

So the prophet's hopes and short-lived joys were dashed as he saw the fair vision of Zion's glory crumble again into the dust and ashes of a ruined Temple and scattered people, as his fellows in Judea had seen it happen in reality forty years before. But that was all in the past, and God had promised that He would restore Israel and dwell again with them in the Holy place; this vision spoke of the future, and declared the heart-breaking truth that after that restoration had become an accomplished fact and Israel had been delivered from captivity, the forces of evil would again prevail. With what painful intensity must Daniel have listened for the answer to the angel's question (vs. 13), "*For how long shall be the vision concerning the daily sacrifice, and the transgression of desolation, to give both the sanctuary and the host to be trodden under foot?*" For what further long period of time must the desolation of the sanctuary and the oppression of God's people persist, before the final consummation of eternal glory for Israel? It was a gleam of hope; the desolation was not to be for ever; and Daniel listened anxiously for the answer.

"*Unto two thousand and three hundred evening-mornings; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed.*"

Two thousand three hundred omissions of the daily morning and evening offerings of the sacrificial lamb. After that the oppressor's hand would be lifted, the profaned and defiled Temple be ceremonially purified and re-dedicated and then the worship of God be resumed without let or hindrance. That was the message to Daniel and that the end of the vision proper. At that point the revealing angel came forward to explain to Daniel what it was all about.

"*The ram which thou sawest having two horns*

are the kings of Media and Persia." That is a plain, categorical statement admitting of no argument. The higher horn, which came up last, is plainly Persia. Media as an empire came into existence at the death of Sennacherib, king of Assyria, in 711 B.C., when the Medes revolted from Assyrian domination and established themselves as an independent kingdom under Deioces. Persia owed its rise largely to Cyrus more than a hundred and fifty years later, but in fact Persia did not become the acknowledged dominant factor in the Medo-Persian partnership until the time of Darius Hystaspes, the third king after Cyrus. Hence "the higher came up last." Daniel was perfectly familiar with the political set up of the nations in his own day and he would readily grasp the significance of this part of the vision. Next he was brought face to face with something that was still two centuries future, the overthrow of the Persian empire by Greece. "*The rough goat is the king of Grecia; and the great horn that is between the eyes is the first king.*" That king is known in history; he was Alexander the Great, who led the Greeks into Asia round about the year 330 B.C. and subdued every nation in his path to the frontiers of India—and died at Babylon on his return journey a few years later. Thus was the great horn broken, even as the prophecy foretold, and the empire built up by Alexander in those few years was divided between four of his leading generals. "*Now that being broken, whereas four (horns) stood up for it, four kingdoms shall stand up out of the nation, but not in his power.*" Continued strife between contending leaders, ambitious for power, was resolved at last in the formation of four separate kingdoms something like twenty-two years after Alexander's death. Macedonia passed into the control of Cassander; Thrace, to Lysimachus; Syria, Judah, Babylon and Persia, to Seleucus, and Egypt to Ptolemy. Israel was sandwiched between Syria in the north and Egypt in the south and her fortunes were heretofore bound up with these two contending powers. On this basis is built the further prophecies in Daniel picturing warfare between the "king of the north" and the "king of the south."

Up to this point this vision follows and amplifies both Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the great image and Daniel's dream of the four wild beasts, but whereas those dreams only showed the succession of four empires, gold, silver, copper, iron; and lion, bear, leopard, and strange beast, this vision gives certain distinctive details of the second and third empires and distinguishes them by name. In verse 22 of chap. 8 therefore we are brought in history to about the year 300 B.C. by which time the contending factions in the break-up of Alexander's

empire had settled their differences and the four kingdoms were more or less firmly established.

Now the revealing angel ceases to use definite names. The "little horn" which came out of one of the four horns is defined as a fierce king who will arise "in the latter time" of these four kingdoms and will be manifested as an enemy of God and a defiler of the sanctuary, but at the end he "shall be broken without hand," and it is here that possible interpretations vary. The most natural understanding of the expression "*in the latter time of their kingdom*" would appear to be the virtual ending of this four-kingdom set-up and its replacement by the fourth empire of prophecy, Rome, the iron of the image and the strange beast in Daniel's dream. In point of fact three of the kingdoms—Macedonia, Thrace and Egypt—were all absorbed by Rome during the century before the birth of Christ. Of the fourth, Syria and the terrain west of the Euphrates were added to the Roman Empire at the same time but the eastern provinces of the "king of the north"—Assyria, Babylon, Persia,—never did become part of Rome, but merged instead into the not inconsiderable empire of Parthia, the one great power Rome never did subdue. Parthia in turn disappeared before the Saracen armies early in the Christian era. It would seem therefore that the "little horn" in the "latter time of their kingdom" (the four-kingdom quartette), must have arisen during that century or so during which Rome was pressing inexorably upon them.

If this be conceded, there is not much doubt that Antiochus Epiphanes, the greatest oppressor of the Jews ever known, who ruled Syria and Judah round about the year 170 B.C., is the "fierce king" to whom the angel referred. Prophetic writers have described his conduct in such detail that there is no need to repeat it here; the Jews themselves have never been in any doubt as to his place in this prophecy. Antiochus launched a furious persecution against Jewish worship; he plundered the Temple and desecrated it by offering a sow upon the Brasen Altar; this was the defilement from which the sanctuary was later to be cleansed. Plenty of calculations exist interpreting the two thousand three hundred days as the literal number of days—about three and a half years—during which the Temple was to lie defiled. It is a fact that the cleansing and re-dedication of the Temple by Judas Maccabeus in 165 B.C. was approximately three and a half years after its defilement in 168 B.C. The two thousand three hundred "evening-mornings"—repetitions of the evening and morning sacrifice—is equal to eleven hundred and fifty literal days, and this was approximately, but only approximately, the interval between defilement and cleansing. So far as can

be discovered from the histories of the period, the actual time was about eleven hundred and ninety-two days.

That is the natural and most obvious interpretation, carrying the prophetic thread to within two centuries of the First Advent, and no farther. Other systems of interpretation identify the "little horn" with Rome, with the irruption of the Turkish power from Central Asia, with Mahomet and the Moslem religion, with the Papacy, and so on. These presentations will not be examined here. Suffice it that Daniel perceived from this vision the probably very unwelcome truth that even though Israel be delivered from the power of Babylon and Jerusalem be restored, the days of Israel's darkness were not ended; trouble and distress were yet to be their lot because of renewed unfaithfulness and apostasy. The end of all evil and the time of the kingdom were still a long way off.

The realisation came slowly. Even yet Daniel was not permitted to perceive the detail of wars and rumours of wars which were to fill the long Gospel Age and terminate in a time of trouble which had not been since there was a nation. That was reserved for his final vision, the one that is recorded in his tenth to twelfth chapters, and that vision was vouchsafed him something like fifteen years after the one we are now considering. Slowly, throughout the whole of his long life, Daniel was brought to realise that the ways of God, sure and unchangeable though they be, require for their accomplishment what seems, to the mind of man, long and sometimes weary terms of years. One little human life is a very short span in the vast time-scale of the Creator's outworking purpose.

Perhaps that is the real lesson for us in Daniel chapter 8. Whether the little horn is descriptive of Antiochus or Mahomet, or of both; whether the mystic 2300 represents literal days or symbolic years, or only evenings and mornings, half-days, is all of very little consequence compared with the

great central truth embedded in this chapter. The downfall of the Gentile powers which oppressed Old Testament Israel, the return of the captives to Jerusalem, the rebuilding of their Temple and their city, would not of itself abolish evil and bring in everlasting righteousness. Righteous zeal and true worship would flourish again, but it would flag and fade. Apostasy and iniquity would certainly return, and with it the distress and oppression which under Israel's covenant was the logical and inevitable consequence. Again must the rod of the Lord be wielded, and whether that rod be Antiochus the scourge of Israel or Mahomet the scourge of Christendom matters little, for the principle is the same. Both Daniel's people and all the world must needs wait for two great things, both of which are necessary to bring in the golden age for which Daniel longed. One is the First Advent and the other the Second Advent. In visions yet to come Daniel was destined to see each of those great events pictured, and only with both of them accomplished facts did he at last see the glad vision of resurrection.

So it must be with us. We have been privileged, as Daniel was never privileged, to realise the work of the First Advent in the past and completed. We are privileged to know that we live in the days of the Second Advent but we do not see the work of that Advent completed—in fact it is scarcely begun. Like Daniel, we still do not know "how long." Blessed are we if, again like Daniel, we rest firm in our conviction that, though it tarry, "it will surely come, it will not tarry." Even though, still like Daniel, we are destined first to "rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days." Daniel died in Babylon without ever seeing that for which his heart had waited his whole life long; we, like so many of our forebears in the past, may have to do the same. Happy we if, notwithstanding that, we are found steadfast in faith until the end.

To be continued

THE BINDING OF SATAN

"And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the abyss, and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that ancient serpent, which is the devil, Satan, and bound him a thousand years, and cast him into the abyss, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more"

(Rev. 20: 1-3)

This 20th chapter of Revelation pictures the

work of the Millennial Age, when the Lord Christ is the acknowledged ruler of this earth and all its peoples are to be made fully conversant with the Divine standards of life and enjoy the opportunity to make their momentous choice, for good or evil, for life or death. The decision is to be a personal one, and none will be able to say that powers of evil from outside have hindered or thwarted their desire to be converted and find reconciliation with

God. In that Age a man will die only for his own sin, only because, with full knowledge and ability to choose and practice that which is right in God's sight, he nevertheless elects to remain evil for the love of it. Hence this picture in these few verses, drawn to delineate the suppression of the power of external evil so that it can no longer adversely influence or affect men against their will. In that Age it is to be true that *"they shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain"* (Isa. 65.25) In order to accomplish that end it is obvious that the Devil himself, the Archangel of all evil, must be deprived of his power to instil evil and sin into the hearts and actions of men, and this essential preliminary to the work of the Millennial Age logically introduces this 20th chapter.

The literal personality of the Devil is not always accepted nowadays; many feel that the Scripture references to Satan and Satanic power can be well understood as allusions to the presence and influence of evil in an abstract sense over humanity. There is no doubt, however, that the New Testament writers believed in Satan as a powerful celestial being in a state of open rebellion against God, directly responsible for the introduction of evil into the world at the beginning, for its promotion and development throughout human history, by Divine permission, and destined for ultimate destruction when it has been abundantly demonstrated that he remains unrepentant and unregenerate to the last. It is true that Origen in the 2nd century claimed that not only all mankind, but eventually the Devil himself, will succumb to the drawing power of Christ and so become reconciled and attain eternal life, but it cannot be denied that at least three of the inspired writers—John, Isaiah and Ezekiel—foresee the irrevocable extinction of the personal Satan with the passing of evil from Divine creation and any exposition of Revelation 20 can only be on the basis that a personal being is referred to, and he is, and will be until his end, incorrigibly and persistently evil.

The background is this world at that time during the course of the Second Advent when the Lord Christ, having already resurrected His Church to be associated with him in his Millennial work, has broken the power of those of earth's forces which have stood in opposition to his assumption of power. Included in these forces are all those institutions of men which are in themselves evil and have oppressed the sons of men. Under symbols of the "beast", the "false prophet", the "kings of the earth", in chapter 19, these are pictured as drawn up in battle array to contend with the Rider on the White Horse from heaven—the Lord Christ in martial guise—and they all are defeated and destroyed, their destruction being symbolised by

the fiery lake. Only the dragon remains, and this 20th chapter identifies this dragon of Revelation with the serpent of Eden and Satan the destroyer, thus completing the identification. The lesser evil powers having been dealt with, and the time having come for the resurrection of all the dead to experience the call to conversion and life of the new Age, it remains to deal with Satan so that the last hindering influence is removed. Hence the angel descending from heaven with a great chain in his hand is another representation of our Lord at his Second Advent, specifically as respects that aspect which has to do with the restraint of the Evil One.

This "binding of Satan", that he should "deceive the nations no more", presupposes that he has possessed and exercised the power to deceive men and instil evil thoughts and influences into their minds during the present and past spans of human history and this supposition is confirmed by our Lord's reference to him as the "prince of this world" and Paul's "the god of this world". (Jno. 14:30; 2 Cor. 4:4). It is this power and freedom which will be taken from Satan throughout the whole period of the Millennium and this constitutes his "binding". His personal freedom of movement, so to speak, will not be limited any more than will be the personal freedom of evilly disposed men on earth during that Age, but he will be powerless to reach men's minds in any way. This same prohibition will of course apply to men themselves; none will be prevented from thinking evil thoughts or harbouring evil desires and intentions, but the power to inflict evil or harm, physical, mental or moral, upon others, will be lost. We do not know how Divine power will be exercised here in a fashion of which we have little, if any, conception today, but it will be true that although a man may formulate an intention to do evil to another he will find himself physically and mentally unable to put that intention into effect. That restraint will operate throughout the Millennial Age.

A glance at daily events shows that the binding of Satan has not yet taken place and is not yet even in progress. The powers of evil have greater control today in earth's affairs than at any past time. Many of the devices and acts of certain classes of men are characterised by a cold-blooded ferocity and disregard for human suffering which can quite literally be said to be devil-inspired. The fearful experiences through which so many of earth's peoples must pass today are evidences that the archangel of evil is still the god of this world and that his subjects still render him service. The entire setting of the passage which tells of this "binding" indicates that it takes place concurrently

with the outward assumption of authority by the Lord Christ in the sight of all mankind, when the law of the Lord goes forth from Zion and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem (Isa. 2.3) and after the power and influence of all earthly evil institutions and forces has been broken and destroyed. That point in history will be the true commencement of the Millennium.

The vision of Revelation 12, depicting a conflict between Michael the archangel and the dragon, culminating in the dragon being expelled from heaven and thrown down to earth, is sometimes claimed to be connected with the "binding of Satan" but this is not so. In Rev. 12 the dragon, after being dealt with by Michael, is in no sense bound, but very much alive and active, and remains so to the end of the chapter. The interpretation of this particular symbolic presentation has to be sought in the realm of past history, of the relation and inter-action between, first, Judaism, from which came Christ the man-child, and Roman paganism, and second, Roman paganism and the emerging organised Christian power which ultimately overthrew and succeeded paganism. It certainly does not apply to any aspect of the Second Advent.

God is omnipotent. *"He spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast"* (Psa. 33.9) His ends are achieved by means of orderly development, and He permits the continuance of evil up to a pre-determined limit for a wise purpose, yet when His time to act against evil and evil-doers has come, none can resist his will. He brought the evil of the antediluvian world to an end without calling upon the help of Noah. He destroyed the Cities of the Plain without any assistance from Lot. When the hosts of evil converge upon the Holy Land in the last great day of this Age it will be God himself, alone, who will act. As it was in the days of Jehoshaphat and the Moabites *"Ye shall not need to fight in this battle—for the battle is not yours, but God's"* (2 Chron. 20.15-47), so with the binding of Satan. Divine power will operate from heaven to end, in one moment of time, every scrap of power and influence Satan may possess over man and spirit.

One may begin to wonder at this point just what is the attitude of Satan himself to all this. How does he regard this already well-publicised picture of his approaching doom? After a very successful career of crime, what, if any, preparation is he likely to make to resist any threat to the continuance of his present activities? What, if any, resistance can he offer to the omnipotent power of God? Is there any likelihood that Origen was right after all, and that eventually the Devil will abandon his evil ways and embrace righteousness? In the face

of the positive statements of Scripture above referred to this would not seem likely. What perhaps is more probable is that in fact Satan, a fallen being separated from God by millenniums of sin, does not really believe in his heart that the threatened fate will ever materialise. The position is much the same with many of mankind. Men today, in general, do not really believe in God. They have lost their knowledge of him, and with that any vital belief in his power or interest in them. "If there is a God, He either does not care or has no power to put right things that are wrong in this world!" That sentiment fairly expresses the considered judgment of the natural man who has been separated from God by sin from the beginning. Yet in that beginning man knew God, walked with God, talked with God; that is clear from the Genesis story. The difference has been effected by sin. It is reasonable to think that the same principle can hold good in the case of Satan. He also had the privilege of knowing God, walking with him, talking with him, and appreciating his power. He embraced sin, and since nothing that is of sin can stand in the Divine Presence, he too from that moment must have been banished, separated from God just as truly as was Adam. Would it be surprising, therefore, if Satan, blinded by his own sin, concludes that after all this time God is evidently unable to complete his designs, and that sin can continue indefinitely on its apparently successful course?

If this hypothesis be well founded, the great enemy of man will continue busily with his plans, waging war against all that is holy and true and lovely upon earth, unbelieving until the hour has struck. In the heyday of his dominion, attendant angels carrying out his dark orders, the cry of his suffering prisoners going up to heaven, his power will vanish as one snaps off the electric light. Suddenly he will find himself bereft of power, of influence, of servants, of an empire—alone. Too late, he will realise that the omnipotence of God has waited for this moment, and that his long course of rebellion against his Creator, with all its terrible consequences for mankind, has ended.

Can one picture that lonely spirit through all the thousand years of earth's jubilee? Free to roam through the vast spaces of God's creation, free to observe, to meditate, to scheme, but powerless to affect or influence in any way the mind or the heart of the weakest or humblest of God's creatures. Seeing all, hearing all, unable to interfere, the seal of Divine authority marks him out and sets him apart like Cain, an outcast, an exile, one upon whom is the judgment of God. He may translate himself out of our material universe into that spiritual sphere which is beyond the scope of

human sense or understanding, and wander through the celestial land as alone and remote from the presence of God as when he presided over earth's destinies. He may come back into our world of time and space to find the thousand years of restitution still in progress, but wherever he goes and whatever he does, Satan will be bound, altogether unable to interfere further in the plans of God for his creation.

Of his being "loosed out of his prison" at the end of the thousand years, as stated in Rev. 20:7, it is necessary to speak guardedly, for this is the only Scriptural reference to this aspect of the subject and the words are vague and obscure. It is difficult to think that any of humanity, after all the experience with good that they have had under the Millennial reign, would again fall for Satan's

blandishments. Perhaps it is intended as an opportunity for him to demonstrate whether, after all that he has seen, he may yet, at the eleventh hour, repent of his evil deeds. If the prophetic Scriptures are to be taken literally, there is no repentance, no turning again, nothing but an irrevocable determination to fight against God. Perhaps, even then, he does not really believe that "the wages of sin is death". Once, a long time ago, in the beginning, he deceived Eve, saying "ye shall not surely die"; can it be that at the end he even deceives himself? At any rate, if that should be his determination, in the face of all that he knows of the goodness and love of God, then there can be only one possible sequel. *"I will bring thee to ashes upon the earth . . . and never shalt thou be any more."*

(Ezek 28: 18-19.)

ONE JOT OR TITTLE

"One jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled" (Matt. 5:18).

In these words Jesus endorsed the immutability of the Mosaic Law until the time came for its supersession by the higher Law of Christianity. The Rabbis insisted that not one word or letter of the Law could be changed; Jesus went further, to jot and tittle. The smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet is "Yod" or "Jot", almost like an overgrown English comma. About eight of the letters possessed a minute mark at the top like a tiny crown; this was known as the horn or "tittle". Thus Jesus referred to the tiniest distinguishing marks

in Hebrew writing; not one of these marks, He said, would fail until the Law had achieved its purpose. That purpose was accomplished when Christ, the greater than Moses, was finally rejected by the nation and put to death by them, and the calling of God went instead to the Gentile nations. At that point Christ *"took it"* (the Law) *"out of the way, nailing it to his cross"* (Col. 2, 14).

Both words are preserved to this day in the English language to indicate anything small or insignificant; the derived word "tittle-tattle", meaning idle or small talk, comes from the same source.

"IN ADAM ALL DIE"

A study concerning sin

The "doctrine of original sin" is discounted in many quarters today partly because of the apparent injustice of condemning the whole human race for something done by one man many thousands of years ago, but principally, it must be feared, because it is becoming fashionable to think of "sin" as an aspect of the incomplete development of man at the present stage of evolution, a defect which will be remedied as evolution proceeds. The idea that man once existed in a state of perfection without sin, that sin is an intrusion into God's creation and will be removed through the means that God has provided, is dismissed as visionary and impractical. Nevertheless the Bible position is just that and it is not possible to view the history of God's dealings with man in proper perspective unless it is accepted. Two important passages, the

third chapter of Genesis and the fifth chapter of Romans, lay down the principles of this matter; Moses and Paul are equally definite on those principles and it is to their words that reference needs to be made to understand the subject.

"By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men" (Rom. 5:12) is the basic foundation, laid by St. Paul. He refers, of course, to the story of Eden and the Fall in Genesis 3. The parallels which he draws between Adam the first man, who brought death to mankind, and Christ the "second Adam" who brings life, are so exact that it cannot be disputed Paul believed the whole human race is descended from one original pair, that the first man Adam was a real historical character, that he was the individual through whom sin and evil first

afflicted mankind. The whole of Romans 5 insists upon this; all men without exception are born subject to death and must eventually end their lives by returning to the dust. *"Death reigned . . . even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression . . . through the offence of one many be dead . . . By one man's offence death reigned . . . By the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation . . . By one man's disobedience many were made sinners . . . since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead . . . as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive"* (Rom. 5, 14-19, 1 Cor. 15.21-22). This kind of language bears only one interpretation. By the action of the first man the entire human race has become involved in sin and death and all the evils from which humanity has suffered and still suffers.

Since the Most High is the Author of good and not of evil, since He will not tolerate the persistence of evil as a permanent element, since He is a God of love as well as of power, it follows that this condition of things can only be of transient duration and will one day pass away. In the meantime there are two questions which cry out for answer. First, how can the justice and love of God be squared with this apparent ruthless and callous infliction of evil upon an entire race of beings in consequence of the act of one? Secondly, how was it that the sin of Adam produced so terrible a result upon his offspring? Granted that in fulfilment of the Divine decree Adam must die because of his sin, why must his children share in that death instead of living in their turn in a state of primitive purity before God, and only undergo the same sentence if they also should be guilty of the same sin?

The second question must needs be answered before the first. It is usually assumed that the first human pair, created sinless and perfect, capable of living for ever in union with God and perfection of human nature, became immediately physically subnormal upon account of their sin and thereafter were capable of producing only physically subnormal, dying children. Succeeding generations thus became progressively weaker in physique and intellect and met an increasingly early death. Now whilst this is measurably true, it is not the whole story nor even the most vital part of the story. The clue to the truth of the matter is found in our Lord's insistence that man, dying creature that he is, can receive by faith in Him and reconciliation with God a life that transcends all the power and effects of evil and ensures for him entry into the infinite future and a never-ending place in the purposes of God. That life is known in the New Testament as *"aionian"* or *"eternal"* life—the Greek

"aionian" has the meaning of superlatively enduring as to both quality and time—so that *"eternal life"* stands in supreme contrast to the only life which man now knows, which is limited and subnormal both in quality and time. This quality of eternal life is what Adam and Eve possessed before they sinned, a vital, enduring life which linked them closely with God, the source of all life. That link ensured continuity of life and the full exploitation of all the potentialities of their being so long as they remained loyal to their Creator and in full accord with him. Since to Adam was given the power to transmit life to his offspring it follows that had they remained in that happy state their children also would have been born into a condition of enduring life, and death would have been unknown.

Tragically, this did not transpire. Adam sinned, and from the moment of his sin the link was severed. No longer did he receive enduring life from the sustaining power of God. No longer was he a son of God. No longer did he possess *aionian*, eternal, life. His bodily frame was animated now only by the same kind of life as the animal creation around him, dependent on the continued survival of the fleshly body and destined to perish with that body. Hence the Divine sentence in Gen. 3.19 *"Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return"*. It is true, of course, that the life which pervades all creation comes from God, whether it be that of animals and birds and fishes, or trees and vegetation and algae. But this is not *"eternal"* life; it is a life whose only object is the animation of a material organism which has a part to play in the creative scheme for a limited time. When its work is done the organism returns to dust and its life is no more. Of all terrestrial living things, man alone is destined for eternal life and constituted so that he can appreciate and lay hold of eternal life; man alone has the kind of intelligence which gives him power consciously to choose between loyalty, obedience, and disloyalty, disobedience; to co-operate with God in the continued progress of his creation or deliberately to set himself as a discordant element in that creation.

This latter is what Adam did. He consciously and knowingly, in full knowledge of what he was doing, cut himself off from God in a deliberate act of rebellion. The precise nature of his sin is not relevant at the moment—the story of the tree of good and evil may well enshrine some heinous act involving a very definite decision and act of rebellion—but the effect was that the channel through which eternal life came to him from God was interrupted. From that moment he was, like the animals around him, a living, breathing creature dependent entirely on his bodily organism and

doomed to perish when that organism came to an end. This was the only kind of life therefore that he could pass on to his posterity. They also, to this day, have been born into the world possessing only subnormal life which itself ends in death, and had God not provided the means whereby any man so born can, if he will, acquire the gift of eternal life, he must die and remain dead as does the brute beast.

This, then, is why the entire human race is involved in the sin of Adam and shares in his condemnation. There was no alternative. The first human pair had all the potentialities within themselves to bring into existence the entire human race in its fulness and to the limits already foreseen and planned by God. That the first pair took a wrong decision at the very commencement in the exercise of their Divinely bestowed power of free choice was tragic indeed, but it was not by the ordering of God. Rather was it in flagrant defiance of His counsel. He could not be expected to alter the constitution of his creation nor to abrogate his fundamental laws in order to avoid the consequences, and therefore it must be that men thereafter be born dying, into a dying world.

Had it been that God was either powerless or heedless in the face of this situation there would indeed be difficulty in answering the other question, but that is not the case. God is both all-powerful and all-loving and his power and love are alike equal to the need. The damage done in Eden can and will be rectified; by the means which God has ordained it will eventually be possible for any and every man, all men if they so desire, to be recovered from the state of animal life which is all they have known heretofore, and enter into possession of that eternal life which brings them into living union with God and assures them of a perpetual place in his creation. In the meantime the racial experience with evil and death will in itself prove to be of inestimable value as a concrete example of the consequences of sin. It will satisfy all men that "*righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people*" (Prov. 14.34.) And the fact that many of past generations have gone into death, in consequence of this Adamic condemnation, in partial or total ignorance of the means by which eternal life can be gained, will not thwart God's intention to save all who can possibly be persuaded to turn "*from dead works to serve the living God*". (Heb. 9.14) The purpose of the Messianic Age under the reign of Christ upon earth is for the reconciliation to God of "whosoever will", (Rev. 22.17) All who have died in Adam are to be made alive in Christ (1 Cor. 15.22) and in that awakening to conscious life under that beneficent administration find the opportunity

which was denied them formerly. Although all men die because of their forefather's transgression, none are in hopeless case on that account and at the end it will be only because of his own sin, his own deliberate transgression, not that of another, that any man, of whatever generation or period of history, will miss the goal of eternal life. It was a proverb in Ezekiel's day that "*the fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge*" but this, said the Most High, is not going to be true in the outcome. The man who eats sour grapes, his teeth are they that shall be set on edge. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father; the soul that sinneth, that is the soul that shall die (Ezek. 18.4-20).

It is noticeable that according to St. Paul and in all Scriptural references to the subject the tragic effects of the Fall—death, weakness, tendency to sin—have all been said to have come upon mankind in consequence of the transgression of Adam, not that of Eve. Now this could be considered strange when it is remembered that in the story it was Eve who took the initiative in rebellion, Adam only yielding to the same at her instigation. It is constantly stressed that by the man, not by the woman, sin entered the world. Paul, writing to Timothy (1 Tim. 2.13-14) says "*Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived*" (wholly deceived, according to the Alex. Mss) "*was in the transgression*" which almost seems as if he allows some mitigating circumstance in the case of the woman. There is, of course, no indication in the Genesis story that the Divine prohibition came to Eve other than through her husband and her plea in extenuation that "*the serpent beguiled me, and I did eat*" (Gen. 3.13) was not rebutted. She was told that her life henceforth was to be one of pain and trouble, but the formal sentence of death, of return to the dust, was pronounced upon Adam and not upon Eve. This of course does not mean that Eve did not share in the sentence. She, too, had sinned, had therefore broken the link with God and lost her possession of "eternal" life as had her husband, and must therefore go into death as did he. But it does mean that the transmission of the dying state, of human imperfection, of tendency to sin, was from Adam and not from Eve, and this is exactly what the Scriptures consistently declare.

The origin of life is still a mystery to biologists. There is in fact considerable difference of opinion among the experts as to how life should be defined. All living organisms are built up from masses of microscopic bits of living matter called "cells"—in the case of a human being about sixty million millions of them—of many different kinds each having a specific function in the body. But the life

principle which resides in a living human being and gives him consciousness and intelligence and the ability to know and worship God is something vitally different from the life force which animates those cells and allows them to grow and reproduce themselves. A man can be dead, his life ended, without hope of renewed life save by a resurrection dependent upon Divine power, but biologists can remove some of the cells from his dead body and find them still living; under laboratory conditions they could go on living for a long time. It is true that many scientists believe that the conscious, intelligent life to which we are accustomed did evolve naturally from unconscious but living cells following the evolution of those living cells from non-living chemical constituents of the primitive earth, but this is only a supposition following the general arguments of the evolution thesis and there is no evidence, nor indeed can be, that such a thing did or could happen. All that we know—all that any man knows—is that a single living male cell possessing the mysterious power of commencing an intelligent human life comes into contact with a single living female cell; that female cell begins to multiply itself into many cells, taking on the form and functions of a human body. But the life force which animates those individual cells and causes their multiplication is one thing; the distinctive conscious intelligent human life which constitutes the resultant creature a man is quite another. Lions and tigers and horses and dogs are all made up from the same kinds of cells as are human beings, and by the same process, but no other sentient creature of all the countless varieties which inhabit the earth is able to pass on to its offspring that unique kind of intelligent life which is the prerogative of mankind. When all the chemistry, so to speak, of the human body and its functions has been thoroughly explored and completely understood, there still remains this aspect independent of all physical considerations, the ultimate source and nature of the life which each generation passes on to its successor. And we know that this is because God invested Adam, the creature He had made from the elements of the earth, with life direct from Himself and gave Adam the power to pass that life on to his descendants. Thus it would appear that life is passed on by the father and not by the mother. The latter provides the initial cell which ultimately becomes the new being but it is the father who quickens it into life. This is why the Scriptures affirm that man's present imperfect and subnormal life is due to Adam and not to Eve. The cells multiplying and assuming bodily form, the chromosomes and their genes which are the physical transmitters of nature and characteristics, all formed from proteins and sugars and so on, are capable, by continual replenishment and replace-

ments, of sustaining the organism to all eternity if the life which powers it is Divine eternal life, but are doomed to early failure and death if that quality of life is absent. Adamic life is subnormal, not eternal, on account of the rupture of the link with God which occurred at the time of the Fall. The moment after the crucial act Adam's bodily organism was virtually as healthy and perfect as the moment before, but he was already a dying creature; eternal life was lost. According to the Genesis narrative it took nearly a thousand years for his fleshly organism to come to its end, but he died eventually.

It is an important principle therefore that the transmission of "Adamic imperfection" to Adam's posterity is not due to physical imperfection of the initial cells—although as time progressed the physical stamina of the human race has steadily deteriorated—but to the deficiency of Adam's life. It may be no exaggeration to say that all that father Adam has been able to pass on to his children is what may be termed animal life, a life that is purely dependent upon the well-being of the body and comes to an end when the body is worn out. Something like this was pointed out many years ago by C. T. Russell in *"The Atonement"* (1899) when he said that a perfect father would beget perfect children even if the mother were imperfect, but conversely that the children of an imperfect father would themselves share his imperfection even if the mother were perfect. The same principle applies in the case of our Lord's humanity, born of an earthly mother. Because His life was from above, and not, like other men, derived through an earthly father from Adam, He was, despite his participation in human nature through his mother Mary, truly born "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners." He "laid hold" of Adam's nature, but there was nothing in him of Adam's life. Thus it was the "seed of the woman", and not of the man, which in Gen. 3:15 was promised should eventually "bruise the serpent's head".

Another truth which emerges from all this, one more especially related to man's future rather than his past, is that the possession and enjoyment of everlasting life under sinless conditions—the promise made to all who come into union with Christ in the Messianic Age—is not merely a question of a righteous mind in a perfect body in an ideal environment, but rather the state enjoyed by a living being animated by Divinely given and sustained eternal life, consequent upon spiritual union with God in Christ. This is the ultimate ideal; this will be the condition enjoyed by all who ultimately recover from the disabilities of the present, imposed upon them by the sin of our first father, and enter into the glorious liberty of the sons of God.

It is important to say or do
over again, or repeatedly.

The Parable of the Costly Pearl and the Buried Treasure

Matt. 13. 44-46

Two of the shortest recorded parables, together occupying only three verses! Their teaching and intent are identical, the one being merely a reiteration of the other, against a different background. One wonders why they are so brief; surely Jesus must have rounded out his stories in much more comprehensive form than is here written down; perhaps their very brevity as recorded is intended to emphasise one plain, clear-cut truth without the distracting effect of side issues.

The Kingdom of Heaven, He said, is like a treasure buried in a field and discovered by a man, who promptly goes away and realises on his assets in order to raise the capital necessary to buy the field. We need not stop to reflect upon the morality of the man's action; Jesus used stories based upon real life to illustrate his teachings, and this is how many men would behave under such circumstances. In any case we are entitled to assume that the then owner of the field was not the man who put the treasure there, and a good argument could be put up for the discoverer's right to the treasure. The whole point is that he saw something in that field which other men, including the owner, did not see, and he was prepared to sacrifice all that he possessed in order to acquire it.

The other story concerns the world of trade. A merchant man, in the market for valuable pearls, found one that was superb and excellent above all that he had seen or heard of before. Such was his professional appreciation of the technical merits of this particular pearl, such his estimate of the commercial possibilities inherent in its possession, that he did not hesitate to invest the whole of his financial resources in this one single pearl, and count himself a happy man to have obtained it.

The very brevity of these two parables creates some small difficulty in being at all dogmatic as to their intended application. The fact that they point to the giving up of all things in order to obtain a much to be desired end is plain; but two very obvious and definite interpretations at once suggest themselves. Our Lord Jesus Christ gave up all in order to "seek and to save that which was lost", and however much one may question the intrinsic value of this sin-sick and dying human race which He came to save, it is not possible to deny that He saw something in man which He regarded as of value and suffered even the death of the cross in order to obtain it. We also, Christians who have

set to our seal that God is true, and on that basis have given ourselves to the Lord Christ, we also have found a treasure which involves the willing and eager selling of all that we have, that we might obtain that treasure.

Perhaps the parables are intended to bear both interpretations. "As He is, so are we in this world" (1 John 4. 17). It is quite in accord with the economy of the Scriptures to have one passage serve more than one purpose. The known fact that many of the prophetic passages have two applications, one to the generation to which they were spoken and another to the great climax at the end of human rulership and the establishment of the Kingdom of God upon earth, is a case in point. The value to us of these two parables is doubled if we see in them, first, a picture of our Lord renouncing his Heavenly glory and coming to earth to save man, and second, a picture of every man who answers the call to surrender and gives up all else that he may win Christ.

The two parables certainly take us deeply into the realms of Christian theology. There were certain heresies in the days of the Early Church, to some extent still persisting to-day, which taught that Christ had no pre-existence before his advent upon earth, that He first knew life in the same way as other men by being born a man of Adamic generation; only after his death was He exalted to the Father's right hand. Had such indeed been the case, then Christ gave up nothing and "sold" nothing in order to redeem man. In fact He had nothing wherewith He could redeem man, for as the Psalmist says of all men and any man "None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him" (Psa. 49. 7. The understanding of the Apostle Paul was to the contrary; writing to the Philippians he gives evidence of very clear vision. "Christ Jesus, who, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that . . . every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2. 5-11 RSV). The Revised Standard Version is quoted here because

It is meant to say or do over again, or repeatedly

it expresses so much more accurately St. Paul's meaning than does the Authorised Version, which, it has for years been admitted, presents a very poor rendering at this place. The definition in human terms of the relationship between the Father and the Son, and the Divinity and humanity of Jesus Christ, has always been a difficulty, as witness the theological wrangles on this subject throughout the Christian era; but this passage in Philippians taken side by side with the two parables under discussion do at least demonstrate very clearly that the One who "IN the beginning . . . with God" (John 1. 1) partaker of the Divine glory, divested himself completely of that superlative state, and, again in the simple language of John "was made flesh and dwelt among us". "The Son of Man" He said himself "is come to seek and to save that which was lost" and in his coming He gave evidence that in lost humanity, degraded and sinful and rebellious though they be, there is something worth saving, something that to him is as treasure hid in a field, needing only to be dug up and cleansed; a pearl of great price, needing only to have its lost lustre restored and be set in a frame of beauty suited to its intrinsic merit. One of the great lessons we Christians have to learn—and sometimes it is very difficult to learn—is that God has faith in the possibilities of man and will yet have that faith vindicated in the emergence of a sinless undying world in which all that is of sin and rebellion will have passed away. "Are there few that be saved?" asked the disciples of Jesus. He gave them to understand that those who eventually attain to joint-heirship with himself (Rom. 8. 17) will indeed be a "little flock" because of the stringent conditions of the calling; outside of that there is the greater call the fruits of which yield the picture of multitudes coming to God and all the ends of the earth turning to him, when the ransomed of the Lord will return and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away. (Isa. 35. 10; Rev. 21. 3-5). The old theology declared that the few, the very few, would pass the Divine scrutiny and be admitted to heaven; the vast majority of God's intelligent creatures would be rejected as wastage and pass into the hopeless eternity of hell. God is not so inefficient a workman as that! He will work continuously and patiently with each refractory individual until it has become abundantly clear that by no means whatever can that individual be truly and sincerely converted to live for, and give loyalty and allegiance to, the Saviour Christ. Only then will He let go and leave the sinner to the wages of sin—death.

So the purpose of God will be achieved in a triumphant and gloriously successful ending to the

mission of One who sold all that He had to win mankind for himself. What of the other application of the parable?

Perhaps the best avenue of approach is through the Apostle Paul's words, again in Philippians, expressing his own attitude of heart to his calling "Whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in Him". (Phil. 3. 7-9 RSV). Here is expressed the utter devotion to God and God's service which is demanded of every believer who would come "into Christ". There is a world of difference between the one who believes in Christ and his message and endeavours to live in conformity with it, and the one who not only thus believes but comes to Christ in full surrender and dedication of life, possessions, abilities, all, to his service as He shall direct. Only these latter will at the end "reign with Christ" (Rev. 20, 4) and be associated with him in the direction of the mighty evangelical work of world conversion which is to characterise the coming era of Christ's reign, when human power and kingdoms have passed away. It is only "if we suffer with him" now that "we shall reign with him" then. That word suffering does not mean wholly nor even primarily the idea of physical pain as so many believe; it means endurance. He that "endures to the end, the same shall be saved" whether the endurance be in the realm of physical ill-health, literal persecution, or the insidious wearing-down processes of the world, the flesh, and the devil battling against our faith. So the Kingdom of Heaven in this aspect consists of those who have "forsaken all, and followed thee" and in consequence, "in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory", will be associated with him in that glorious reign (Matt. 19. 28). The "regeneration" is the time of giving new life, the Millennial reign of the Lord Jesus Christ at his Second Advent. It is not without significance that Jesus' words above quoted were spoken at the time the rich young ruler "went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions". Here was one who came in sight of the buried treasure, the costly pearl, but he was not prepared to sell all that he had to obtain the coveted possession. And he went away a disappointed and unhappy man.

In that lies the lesson. We have the opportunity of giving ourselves in full surrender to God, without reserve or condition, to be used in his service as He may direct. Home service, foreign service, prominence, obscurity; it may be any of these, or a combination of them as life goes on. We do not

know. We only know that God calls us, again in the language of the great Apostle (Rom. 12. 1) to "present your bodies a living sacrifice, acceptable unto God, your reasonable service. And be not

conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind". In so doing we shall be following the example of One who himself sold all that he had, and bought that field".

COLD OR HOT

"To the church of the Laodiceans write, I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot; I would thou wert cold or hot" (Rev. 3.14-15).

Salter, travelling through Turkey a few years ago, visited Laodicea (*"Introducing Turkey"* 1961). From before the First Advent, he says, Laodicea was the principal market in the Roman world for the exchange of western and oriental monies, retaining its importance in banking business and

remaining "rich and increased with goods" until the time of the Crusades. Near the town there is a hundred feet high cliff down which a hot mineralised stream flows into a pool, built more than two thousand years ago, where the water, at a temperature of 99 deg. F, was a place of resort for the cure of various ailments. But often there is snow on the surrounding ground. Here possibly is the source of the allusion in Rev. 3.

DESTROYERS OF THE SANCTUARY

"A man was famous according as he had lifted up axes upon the thick trees; but now they break down the carved work thereof at once with axes and hammers." (Psa. 74. 5-6).

This sublime lament might well have been composed in Babylon at the time of the captivity. It seems clearly to refer to the destruction of Solomon's Temple. There is no event in Israel's earlier history which the words can fit. The Psalmist laments the destruction of the Divine Sanctuary by fire, its profanation by pagan symbols, and concludes on the despairing note, "we see not our signs; there is no more any prophet; neither is there among us any that knowest how long". Looking around him at the ruined house of prayer and calling to mind its former glories, he breaks out into the bitter reflection just quoted. In the days when this Temple was built men achieved honour and glory by virtue of their labours upon the great cedars and stately olives which were cut down and shaped to their uses in this house; but now fame and reward is to him who leads his comrades in the work of destruction. "Ichabod" has been written over the portals and the glory has departed.

What would have been the thoughts of those men who hewed the timbers for the Temple, had they known that in generations to come their work would become the prey of the invader, suffering total destruction at the hands of God's enemies? 1 Kings 5 tells of King Solomon writing to his friend Hiram, King of Tyre, who had jurisdiction over the forests of Lebanon, "Command thou that they hew me cedar trees out of Lebanon . . . So

Hiram gave Solomon cedar trees and fir trees according to his desire . . . and Solomon had threescore and ten thousand that bare burdens, and fourscore thousand in the mountains . . . so they prepared timber and stones to build the house". What a mighty work this must have been, this felling and transporting of cedars and firs of Lebanon to Jerusalem that the House of God might be built!

1 Kings 6 tells of the building and how these precious timbers were utilised. "He built the walls of the house within with boards of cedar, both the floor of the house, and the walls of the ceiling; and he covered them on the inside with wood, and covered the floor of the house with planks of fir . . . and the cedar of the house within was carved with knops and open flowers; there was no stone seen . . . and within the oracle he made two cherubims of olive tree, each ten cubits (about eighteen feet) high . . . and he overlaid the cherubims with gold; and he carved all the walls of the house round about with carved figures of cherubims and palm trees and open flowers, within and without . . . And for the entering of the oracle he made doors of olive tree . . . and he carved upon them carvings of cherubims and palm trees and open flowers; and covered them with gold fitted upon the carved work" (vss. 15-35).

This was the carved work which these later despoilers attacked with their axes and hammers. Caring nothing for the labours of those who in times gone by had given their lives' best endeavours to creating these beautiful things for the glory of God, they wantonly destroyed that which they

had neither capacity to create nor ability to appreciate, and the world was the poorer for their action.

Here is a parable suited to our own day. So far as the honour and worship of God is concerned, and the ready acceptance of the principles of the Gospel in the world's daily life, this is a time of frustration and disappointment. Those who are old enough to have known better and more rewarding times of Christian activity and fellowship tend to lament the bygone days when men were famous according as they had lifted up axes upon the thick trees—the foundation principles of the Faith and of the Word of God. Entering for a moment into the world of metaphor, we remember how they brought them unto Zion with songs and rejoicing, and shaped them into walls and floors and ceilings for the house of prayer that was being built. We recall with a tightening of the heart strings how the carved work was put into place and an edifice of worship, of fellowship and of service prepared into which many who could not find soul satisfaction in the formalism and traditions of past ages could enter, and rejoice in a new and wider vision of the Divine purpose for mankind. More than one Christian leader with insight deeper than his fellows has acted as did Solomon and taken the initiative in pointing the way to a more intense consecration of heart and life to God under the impetus of such increasing light of the Plan of God and the evangelistic work which went with it. The simple gladness and fervent zeal of those earlier days is traditional among many who now, toward the end of their earthly course, remember those former glories. One thinks of the floor of fir, a symbol of everlasting life because of its evergreen nature. Here is the ground on which we stand. As we enter this temple we enter upon eternal life. "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." "Whosoever believeth on me hath everlasting life, and I will raise him up at the last day." Upon every side, the enclosing walls of cedar, a wood which according to Lev. 14 was one of the constituents in the ceremonial cleansing of leprosy, and leprosy is a symbol of sin. So, in our temple, there is that all around which cleanses from sin. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit." The doors into the sanctuary, made of olive wood, suggest thoughts of the "way in" to God's purposes and to communion with Him—access by Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared . . . but God hath revealed them to us by his Spirit." So do the olive

wood doors swing open, revealing to us somewhat of the glories which lie beyond.

What now of the carved cherubim, mystic figures which so often have been pointed to as symbols of the four attributes of God, His Wisdom, Justice, Love and Power standing revealed in all their beauty and magnificence? Here they remain, alternating with the carved palm trees, speaking of the righteous man who shall flourish like a palm tree (Psa. 92. 12-14) in his growth to the full stature of a man in Christ (Eph. 4. 11-13). Between the cherubim and the palm trees, above and around, wrought into a score of graceful patterns, the open flowers—probably lilies and pomegranates—fit symbols of the many precious promises of the Word; all flowers, all "open" for our enjoyment, means of the bringing forth of "much fruit". A picture of our coming to know God in the cherubim; of our growth in grace and Christ-likeness in the palm-trees; and our reception of the precious promises and the bringing forth of much fruit in the open flowers. And this is the "carved work" which unthinking ones in our own day set out to break down with axes and with hammers!

Make no mistake about it. The picture is very exact. In their heedless zeal many have done grave harm to the cause they espouse and disservice to the Lord they love. Some have set out to shatter the faith of others in fondly-held beliefs—often in matters of little or no importance, on the plea of "walking in the light" and in the endeavour to substitute other and allegedly better conclusions. All too often the new belief is no nearer to ultimate truth, sometimes a good deal farther away from it, and some devoted disciple's joy and faith in his belief has been taken away to no purpose. Let us consider carefully what we are about before we apply our own little hammer to the carved work of the Temple!

To adorn and extend the Temple is not the same thing as breaking down the structure already erected by men of faith in times gone by. It is always our privilege and responsibility to bring forth out of the storehouse "things new and old" for the household of faith according to our ability. Every generation between Solomon and the Captivity did something to increase the beauty and majesty of the Temple at Jerusalem. Rich and poor, young and old, made their contributions according to their means, and the building which was eventually destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar's soldiers was at that time in every respect more impressive and glorious than it was at King Solomon's ceremony of dedication. So must we ever be zealous to add to the edifice of the truth which we have inherited, but always with remembrance of the purpose for which truth is given to

us, "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" (Eph. 4. 12). We need to add our contributions with care, that they may be helpful, encouraging, spiritually uplifting, to those to whom we minister, and not on the contrary deprive them of the confidence and faith which formerly they enjoyed.

"But surely", says the iconoclast (which word means "destroyer of idols"), "if a belief is error, it is better to expose it, whatever the consequences. Error never sanctifies; truth alone sanctifies".

How often is that old tag repeated! and none of us has ever yet attained the full truth. Like Paul, we know only in part, and cannot hope to know in full until we are beyond the Veil. *Whatever truth we hold, it must be to some extent tinged with "error"—to some extent an inaccurate definition of that truth. Our aim and object should be constantly to advance to an increasingly accurate understanding of the truth.*

"Well, that is what I mean", says the iconoclast.

Unfortunately, that is not what he really means. If he was honest with himself he would admit that what he really means is something like this: "I am convinced that this particular view of this particular subject is truth. *Therefore*, any other view of it must be error. *Therefore*, anyone holding a view different from mine must be in error. *Therefore*, since error does not sanctify, I must first destroy their faith in their belief, and then, if possible, get them to accept my own", and so saying, he picks up his axe and hammer and goes out to destroy some carved work.

Many years ago a man of deep insight penned

these words:

*"A bending staff I would not break,
A feeble faith I would not shake,
Nor even rudely pluck away
The error which some truth may stay,
Whose sudden loss might leave without
A shield against the shafts of doubt."*

How plain it is that the whole purpose of our insight into Scriptural doctrine and prophecy is that we might encourage and build up one another therewith. Unless it fulfils this function it is useless. Unless our knowledge is used to edification we are better off without the knowledge. Yet it is very, very true that "Where there is no vision, the people perish". "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge" (Prov. 29, 18, Hos. 4.6). *We do well, therefore, to hold in grateful remembrance the labours of those who in past time lifted up axes upon the thick trees, and treasure the carved work they set up in the sanctuary. Even if some of it is becoming a little antique, not in accord with the best modern taste, it is good to recognise that it still gives joy to some, a joy that is taken away if we unceremoniously destroy it with our axes and hammers. We shall find at least one chapel in the sanctuary where we can make our own contribution to the carved work and add to the total store of the treasures wherewith God is honoured.*

Christians are the inheritors of a rich tradition. Other men have laboured, and we have entered in to their labours. In the spirit of One Who made us members of Himself, members who do not all have the same office, let us seek not our own, but each others' good. Let us be careful and reverent in the use of the revelation which our God has given to us. So shall we be his disciples.

INSIGHT OF AN INCA MONARCH

The Inca Empire of Peru, one of the most extreme autocratic States the world has known, subsisted from the 11th to the 15th centuries and was destroyed by the Spaniards who came after Columbus. The Peruvians were worshippers of the Sun and the Emperor was, to the people, the living embodiment of the Sun-god. Even so, the fact that there must be a power greater than the Sun, a God above all gods, was apparently not unknown to them. It is related of the Inca emperor Huayna Capac, last but one in the succession, that whilst officiating at a ceremony in honour of the Sun, he asked his High Priest two questions. The first, whether any man in his kingdom would dare to order him, the Emperor, to leave his throne

every morning and take a day-long journey, to which the High Priest replied that no man would so dare. The second, if he ordered one of his most powerful nobles to take a long and dangerous journey to another land, would he obey. He would obey to the death, said the Priest. The Sun, rejoined the Emperor, runs across the sky every day without cessation. If he were truly the ruler of all things, he would stop sometimes and rest when he so wished. Since he does not, there must be a more powerful God whose orders he obeys. How foolish, then, to entrust our lives and the life of our country to the Sun.

One is reminded of the Jewish tradition concerning Abraham, when he was still living in Ur

of the Chaldees, the city of the Moon-god. Abraham's forebears were idolators, worshippers of the Moon. The story is that he looked upon the brightest star and thought that here was the god he must worship, but the moon rose and dimmed the star, so he gave his reverence to the moon. But the moon set and was followed by the rising of the sun and in that greater radiance he was sure he had found the God he sought. But at the end of the day the sun set also. Then Abraham realised that all these visible things were but examples of the creative power of God and behind them, invisible to his eyes, there was the supreme controlling power of all things. And he bowed his

head and worshipped.

The Inca Emperor must have been a man like Abraham but it was not given to him to hear the Divine call as it was to Abraham. When he did come into contact with the claims of Christ he found them advanced by a rabble of bloodthirsty ruffians eager for gold and loot and he turned shudderingly away. A day will come when he will stand before the Great White Throne and hear in all its purity the gospel of which those Spaniards knew so little, and he nothing at all, and come at last to understand, as did Abraham, the majesty and the love of the one whom Abraham served the rest of his days, the "Most High God".

THE QUESTION BOX

Q. Why the difference between Matt. 13.14-15 and Isa. 6.9-10? In the one case Jesus said that the peoples' hearts are hardened, their ears deaf and they have closed their eyes lest they should see and hear His message and repent. In the Isaiah passage, which Jesus was quoting, the prophet was told to make the peoples' hearts hard, and their ears heavy, and to close their eyes, so that they could not see and hear and be converted.

* * * *

A. The correct rendering of the Isaiah passage is in the Septuagint and here it corresponds exactly with the words Jesus used. It is probable that the Massoretic, upon which the A.V. is based, followed a variant or corrupt reading which either was not extant in Jesus' time, or was ignored by Him as not conveying the correct sense. It should be quite obvious that the Lord would never commission Isaiah to go out to the people with the deliberate purpose of closing their eyes and ears to the message and making it impossible for them to repent. Jesus said that His message was in parables, dark sayings, so far as the people generally were concerned, because their hearts had become hardened and their ears and their eyes they had closed, in order that they would not have to face up to the responsibility of accepting or rejecting the challenge. If they were truly converted, God would heal them, but they refused to stand in the position where the call to repent could reach them. So they were not healed, not because the Lord wanted to keep them in ignorance but because they themselves refused to face up to the reality of His call.

The point to notice is that these men had not definitely rejected Christ. They had not taken a stand for evil or elected to take the side of the Evil One. They simply refused to take a decision for the one or the other. They knew, from their religious training and background from childhood upwards, that whenever there is repentance, no matter how late in the day, God will receive the repentant one. But repentance and conversion imply obligations and a change of conduct; they knew that too, and they did not want to face up to the implications. Therefore they closed their eyes and ears to the message so that they would not be as it were convinced against their will and so brought to repentance.

They will not be able thus to avoid the issue forever. In the coming Millennial Age when Christ rules in righteousness every man will be brought face to face with the issues of good and evil, of life and death, and must make his choice, for that is the final Age of the Day of Grace and after that time has passed God will have dealt with the problem of evil. "Choose ye this day whom ye will serve" will be the demand then, as it was in the days of Elijah on a much smaller scale. The blindness of many in Jesus' day was as much due to ignorance and fear as anything else, and God is not going to let them go into the darkness before He has exerted His full powers of persuasion; almost certainly the majority at least of those who were so obdurate in that past day will see the light and listen to the message that then will go out with power, and convert, and be healed.



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

BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

Vol. 49, No. 5

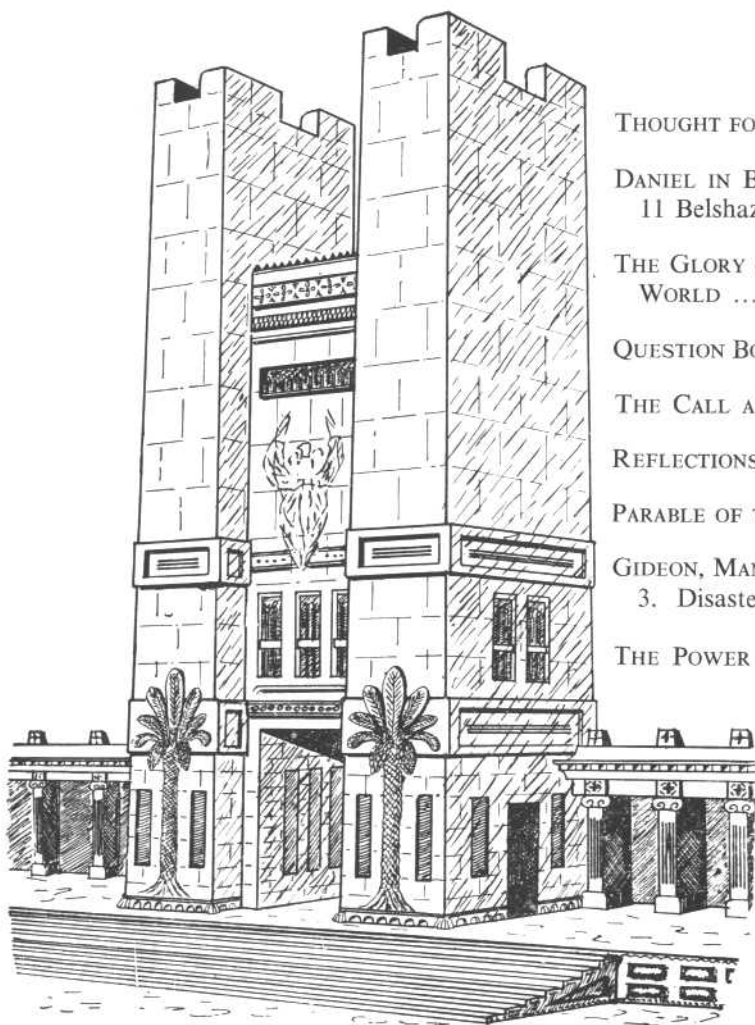
SEPT./OCT. 1972

Published September 1st

Next issue November 1st

CONTENTS

THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH	98
DANIEL IN BABYLON	
11 Belshazzar's Feast	99
THE GLORY OF THE CELESTIAL WORLD	103
QUESTION BOX	106
THE CALL AND DESTINY OF ISRAEL	107
REFLECTIONS ON FAITH	111
PARABLE OF THE WINESKINS	112
GIDEON, MAN OF VALOUR	
3. Disaster at the Last	115
THE POWER OF HIS RESURRECTION	118



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

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

Published by
Bible Fellowship Union
11 Lyncroft Gardens, Hounslow,
Middlesex, England

Bible Study Monthly

FOUNDED 1924

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

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

Communications and donations to Bible Fellowship Union, 11 Lyncroft Gardens, Hounslow, Middlesex, England.
Secretary & Treasurer: B. G. DUMONT (Hounslow) Editorial & Publishing: A. O. HUDSON (Welling)

Thought for the Month

"Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" (Amos 3.3).

With failure of the current endeavour for organic Anglican/Methodist union comment and discussion on the question of Christian unity is again in the forefront. Since in such schemes there is always a dissident minority which secedes to form an independent body the net result of a successful merger appears generally to be one "official" denomination plus two seceding ones, so that where two formerly existed there now are three. Not quite what the sponsors of unity intended! But what else can be expected? In every Christian group there are those who hold the principles upon which the group was founded as vital to their faith and fellowship and will not accept the compromising of those principles for the sake of an enlarged communion. Throughout the centuries the Christian community has divided and sub-divided into more and more sections and although on the one hand such schisms are to be deplored, yet on the other hand it is doubtful if the progress that has been made in the development and understanding of the Christian faith would have been made had those sections never existed. Every secession and every reformation has had the effect of illuminating more brightly some one or other aspect of the Faith and has led to greater spirituality and awareness of God. The error into which so many fall is that of supposing that the organic unity of the visible Church under the aegis of some great controlling synod is synonymous with that unity of the Spirit between Christians which is the hall-mark of the members of Christ's Church, when in fact it is nothing of the kind. The New Testament tells us very plainly that the names of those who are Christ's are written in heaven, not on the membership roll of a denomination; that the Head of the Church is Christ, not an impressive array of dignitaries sitting in session in some imposing building. True,

order in the Church is necessary, and St. Paul, again, tells us that God has set apostles, evangelists, pastors, teachers, in the Church, for the work of the ministry and the edifying of the Body of Christ, till we come, in the unity of the faith, and knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity in Christ. There is plenty therefore for these dignitaries to do but it does not necessarily have to be done under the banner of what the world, looking on, sees as something suspiciously like the mergers and take-over operations so familiar in the commercial world of to-day. Many of the most momentous happenings, the greatest and most far-reaching movements, in Christian history have been initiated and led by humble and obscure men, working on a shoe-string as the saying goes, but inspired and empowered by the Holy Spirit of God. And it is always true that *"except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it"*.

The only unity worth striving for is that which our Lord had in mind when He prayed *"that they may be one, as we are"*. That unity has always existed between all who are indeed Christ's irrespective of denominational affiliation; these alone will be recognised when He gathers His own. Only one thing will serve the interests of the Kingdom: the daily Press, cynical as ever, pointed to that in remarking acidly that now this particular attempt had failed perhaps the churches would get down to their real mission of preaching the Gospel.

Gone from us

Bro. C. Barratt (Leicester)
Bro. J. E. Gregory (Blandford)
Sis. J. M. Poole (Lincoln)
Bro. W. R. Walton (Coventry).

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

DANIEL IN BABYLON

The story of a great man's faith

II. Belshazzar's Feast

The Feast of Belshazzar is one of the best-known incidents of Scripture to the man in the street. This pagan orgy, interrupted at its height by the mysterious fingers of doom writing their dread sentence on the wall of the banquet hall, presaging utter disaster soon to come, has gripped the imagination of men in every age and in every land to which the story has penetrated. To such an extent is this true that the expression "the writing on the wall" has passed into a popular proverb, and nowadays many men use it habitually to describe the foreshadowing of events soon and certain to come perhaps without even knowing from what source the expression is derived.

The seventeenth year of the reign of Nabonidus and the twelfth year of his son Belshazzar's joint reign with him was destined to see the end of the Babylonian empire, the "head of gold" of Nebuchadnezzar's dream. The armies of Cyrus had been abroad in the land for six years past and were now fast closing in on the doomed city. Nearly two centuries previously the prophet Isaiah had foreseen this day and spoken of this man by name. *"Thus saith the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him . . . I have raised him up in righteousness, and I will direct all his ways; he shall build my city, and he shall let go my captives . . . he is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure . . ."* (Isa. 44, 28 and 45, 1-13).

Although, in the days of Babylon, Persia was still an obscure province in the powerful empire of Media and owed allegiance to the kings of the Medes, yet for twenty years before Babylon's fall Cyrus the Persian had been steadily making himself the most powerful figure in the kingdom and by his military prowess had become in fact if not in name, the virtual ruler of Media. The second year of Belshazzar, when Daniel saw the vision of the two-horned ram, the greater horn coming up last, representing the kings of Media and Persia, commenced only a few months after Cyrus had waged successful war against Astyages the king of Media. Although Cyrus left a semblance of royalty to the defeated monarch, he was the real ruler from then on. As time passed, the victories of Cyrus reduced every country except Babylon to subjection, and the young king Belshazzar was left increasingly to guard the city of Babylon whilst his

father Nabonidus led his armies in the field against the Persian invader.

Daniel lived in the city during this period but evidently no longer held any kind of official Court office or rank. He was merely a private citizen. Belshazzar, not more than twenty years of age at his accession, was surrounded by an entirely different class of advisers. Historians describe him as weak, dissolute and licentious, and the story of the feast bears out that description. Daniel, comparing this youth's character with that of his grandfather Nebuchadnezzar, probably realised that even from the natural viewpoint the kingly dynasty of Babylon had had its day and could not stand for much longer against the disciplined energy of the invaders. Knowing how the outcome had already been prophesied by both Isaiah and Jeremiah in past years, and revealed to himself in more recent times, he must have waited calmly for the inevitable climax.

That climax came in the year 538 B.C. The Babylonian troops in the field were defeated and Nabonidus besieged in Borsippa, fourteen miles from Babylon. One of Cyrus' generals, Gubaru, marched swiftly to Babylon and laid siege to the city. And at that crucial time in the fortunes of the empire Belshazzar the king chose to hold a State banquet.

"Belshazzar the king made a great feast to a thousand of his lords, and drank wine before the thousand. Belshazzar, whilst he tasted the wine, commanded to bring the golden and silver vessels which his father (grandfather) Nebuchadnezzar had taken out of the temple which was in Jerusalem; that the king and his princes, his wives, and his concubines, might drink therein . . . they drank wine, and praised the gods of gold, of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone." (Ch 5, v. 1-4).

Small wonder that Babylon fell so easily, when the man to whom had been entrusted its defence so dissipated the crucial hours. The enormous main hall of the royal palace shone with a blaze of light, the scintillating radiance from its many lamps illuminating the sculptured walls and the rich hangings. At the long tables sat the many guests, the nobility and gentry of Babylon, careless of the future, intent only on indulging themselves to the full in the encouragement offered them by the gay youth who was their king. Up on

the dais, at the richest table of them all, sat Belshazzar himself with his Court favourites and his wives and concubines, leading the revels into ever wilder scenes of excess and debauchery. In a final gesture of profanity he ordered the sacred vessels of the Temple of Jerusalem to be brought before him, to be defiled by liquor drunk to the honour of the false gods of Babylon.

The order given, the feast proceeded. The Temple of Bel-Marduk, the god of Babylon, in which those vessels had been placed by Nebuchadnezzar sixty years before, was nearly a mile from the palace and the messengers might well have had some difficulty in persuading the custodian priests to surrender their treasures. It might have been an hour later that they returned with their burden, an hour during which the silent, relentless Median soldiers steadily continued surrounding the city.

So the cups and flagons which once had ministered to the worship of God in his own Temple at Jerusalem were set out in that godless assembly and made the instruments of a wild orgy in which every false god known to the Babylonians—and they were many—was praised and venerated. The chaste craftsmanship which had been consecrated to the touch of holy priestly fingers became sullied now by the grasp of hands steeped in every kind of vice and immorality. And Heaven, looking down, uttered its decree: "This is the end."

"In the same hour came forth fingers of a man's hand, and wrote against the lampstand on the plaster of the wall of the king's palace; and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote." (Vs. 5).

The exactitude of Scripture is a constant marvel to the reverent mind. The remains of the Great Hall of the Royal Palace of Babylon are still there for anyone to inspect—ruined walls about four feet high enclosing a room a hundred and fifty feet long by fifty feet wide, the floor covered with the rubble and broken brickwork of the ruined building just as it has lain there for thousands of years—and mingled with the rubble there are pieces of white plaster, plaster which once covered those walls, the plaster mentioned in this verse, upon which those mysterious fingers wrote that fateful message. All who were present at that feast have long since returned to their dust; the empire which was theirs is no more; the glory that was Babylon has utterly passed away; but the white plaster upon which the cryptic message appeared that night in the year 538 B.C. lies still under the ruins, mute witness to the integrity and accuracy of the narrative we are following.

What deathly hush must have silenced that riotous assembly as the eyes of all present followed the king's terrified gaze to the point high up on

the wall where those fingers from another world deliberately traced their message. The brightly burning lamps cast the full brilliancy of their light upon the spot; this was no optical illusion, no trick of shadow and flickering flame. This was reality; there really was something up there, inscribing words of mysterious import. What could it mean? What strange intervention of the gods was this? Faces that a few moments ago had been flushed with wine now took on an unnatural pallor. Women who had been impudently flaunting their charms now drew their robes tightly around them and shivered. And still the hand wrote on.

"MENE; MENE; TEKEL; U-PHARSIN". The strange inscription stood revealed in its entirety. The hand was gone, but the characters remained, incised deeply into the plaster, written in the wedge-shaped cuneiform characters of Babylon. "Numbered; Numbered; Weighed; Divided." The words themselves were simple, everyday words; it was the circumstances of their appearance which affected the superstitious pagan king so that his *"countenance was changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his loins were loosed, and his knees smote one against another."* Perhaps, at last, he began to recall the stories he had been told of the marvelous happenings that had taken place in the days of his royal grandfather, when the Most High God intervened to save his servants from the fiery furnace, and made the proud king like unto a beast, and restored him again a chastened man. Perhaps, too late, he thought of the Median army outside the city, and of his own father in their power. He looked again at the mystic writing, and shivered.

The customary routine was put into operation. Before long, that motley assembly, the astrologers, the wise men, the soothsayers, were all trooping into the hall to go through the familiar rigmarole. This particular problem should have been well within their province; the explanation of a few words that no one else present could understand would normally have been easy work for these gentlemen. But on this occasion the usual glib exposition was not forthcoming. Verse 8 says that "they could not read the writing," but this can hardly mean that they failed to comprehend a few Babylonian words written in Aramaic. Their normal educational level would have been quite equal to that. What is more likely the meaning of the phrase is that they could "make no sense" of the words themselves and, feeling that there was something behind this occurrence beyond their own understanding, preferred to have nothing to do with the matter. And that put King

Belshazzar into a greater panic than he was in before.

It would seem that the hubbub and confusion into which the feast had degenerated came to the ears of the queen, and she made it her business to come in person to the banqueting hall (verse 10). This queen was the wife of Nabonidus, who was the true king at the time, their son Belshazzar having been associated with his father twelve years earlier and given the title of joint king. Nitocris was the younger daughter of Nebuchadnezzar, and it was by reason of her marriage to Nabonidus, who was not of royal blood, that the latter became king. In the days of her childhood she would of course have been closely acquainted with Daniel, some fifteen years her senior, as he attended on her royal father, and the glowing eulogy of Daniel's wisdom and understanding which is accredited to her in verses 11 and 12 indicates that Nitocris had by no means lost her esteem and respect for her father's one-time Chief Minister.

Belshazzar eagerly accepted his mother's advice, and Daniel was summoned to the palace. For more than twenty years he had been out of public life, and by now was evidently quite unknown at Court. This much is evident by the form of the king's greeting to Daniel when the aged prophet—now about eighty-four years of age—at length entered his presence. The first panic had probably subsided, but there would certainly be considerable anxiety mingled with the interest with which the assembled company looked upon this grave and dignified man of God, now standing in their midst.

Did Daniel's mind go back to that other scene in this same hall, nearly forty years earlier, when it had been his stern duty to proclaim the imminent judgment of God upon a previous king of Babylon, to interpret Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the tree, followed by his royal master's seven years of madness? But that judgment had been lifted and the king restored to his former glory. This time there would be no restoration; the disease was incurable; this was the end. The hour of doom had struck, and Babylon must surely fall.

The king offered honours to Daniel if he could interpret the writing; he should be "the third ruler in the kingdom" (verse 16). This is another unwitting testimony to the accuracy of the narrative, for Nabonidus was first and Belshazzar second in the kingdom, so that to be the third was the highest honour Belshazzar could offer. Quietly and respectfully Daniel indicated that he did not need gifts and rewards as inducement; he would, unconditionally, make known the interpretation. But before doing so, Daniel had something else to say.

"O thou king, the most high God gave Nebuchadnezzar thy father (grandfather) a kingdom, and majesty, and glory, and honour . . ." In measured tones the prophet recapitulated the glory and power that had come to King Nebuchadnezzar, and then told how that when his heart was lifted up in pride, he was deposed, and driven from among men and made to dwell with the beasts, until he learned his lesson and knew that the Most High is the ruler of men and disposer of the affairs of nations. Then came the tremendous accusation *"and thou, O Belshazzar, hast not humbled thine heart, though thou knewest all this . . ."* There was no excuse of ignorance; Daniel found no redeeming feature in the position. The king was guilty, and it remained but to pass sentence. It is significant that when Daniel interpreted the dream of the tree to Nebuchadnezzar he put in a plea for repentance and change of conduct; *"it may be a lengthening of thy tranquillity"*; but to Belshazzar he addressed no word of hope or advice. He knew that the Divine decree had gone forth and could not be recalled, and he spoke in the light of that knowledge.

Now he turned to the mystic words, still showing up sharp and clear in the lamplight. He needed no supernatural guidance to understand their import and he did not have to retire to prayer to ask for the interpretation. Daniel's vision of the four world empires pictured by four wild beasts was twelve years in the past and during all those twelve years he had seen the enemy pressing more and more heavily upon Babylon. He knew the inherent weakness and corruption of Babylon and that Nabonidus, a rather indecisive man of over eighty years of age, and Belshazzar, a weak and dissolute monarch, were totally incapable of defending the empire against the active and warlike Cyrus. He knew that the enemy troops were outside the city, and the mysterious words glowed with meaning as he looked upon them.

MENE—measured. *"God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it."* The word in Babylonian commercial usage meant to measure an article and cut it off to a determined length or size, or to measure out an agreed sum of money to conclude a bargain. Here, on this fateful night, the empire of Babylon, the "head of gold" of the image, had run its full length and was to be cut off without compunction.

TEKEL—weighed. *"Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting."* A personal word to the king, that. Daniel had only to look around him at the evidences of the orgy which had been so abruptly interrupted, and reflect that this man should by right have been actively engaged in the

defence of his city, to find the right words which fitted this part of the inscription.

PERES. Most readers are puzzled by the appearance of "peres" as the fourth word in vs. 28 when in vs. 25 it is given as "upharsin." The explanation is that "peres" is the singular form of the word of which "pharsin" is the plural. The "U" in front of "pharsin" is the conjunction "and", so that the inscription literally read *"Numbered, Weighed and Divided."* The word "peres" means "division" and the plural form "pharsin" by a play on similar sounding words could be made to sound like the word for "Persians." Hence Daniel was able to say on the basis of this word *"Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians."*

It was probably pure superstition which led Belshazzar immediately to honour his pledge to make Daniel the third ruler in the kingdom. He had flouted and dishonoured the Most High God and now that very God had caused this message to be sent him, this message of immediate and irretrievable disaster. Perhaps if he honoured the prophet of that God and restored him to the position he had occupied in the days of Babylon's glory, when all nations rendered submission and tribute, the threatened disaster might even yet be averted. It might be that something of that nature was in the king's mind. We do not know. We only know that even while these things were being done and said in that brightly lit magnificent palace, the warriors of Media and Persia had gained access to the city in the darkness and were making their way through the streets, ruthlessly beating down such feeble resistance as was being offered by the citizens.

It is said by some scholars that the Hebrew expression in vs. 30, *"In that night was Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans slain"* does not demand that his death occurred on the same night as the feast, but only that it was at a time not too far remote. On the other hand, Herodotus and other

historians declare that Babylon was captured at a time when the city was given over to feasting, and that Gubaru, the general who actually captured the city—for Cyrus was some distance away at the time—made his way to the palace and slew the king with many of his courtiers. It is very probable therefore that after Daniel had retired from the banqueting hall, and the company had begun to disperse, a swarm of armed men burst in and the last scene of the drama was played out to the end.

It was a long time before Babylon perished altogether. Daniel was yet to serve first a Median and then a Persian king for a few brief years before he was in his turn gathered to his fathers. He was yet to have the joy of seeing his countrymen leave for Judea to restore their native land. Some twenty years later, long after Daniel's death, Babylon made a final bid for independence under Belshazzar's younger brother, named Nebuchadnezzar after his illustrious grandfather, but Darius Hystaspes the Persian king laid siege to the city and this time destroyed the towering walls which had been the city's pride and confidence. Thus were fulfilled the words of Jeremiah, *"The broad walls of Babylon shall be utterly broken, and her high gates shall be burned with fire."* (Jer. 51, 58). The river Euphrates changed its course and silted up, and the sea-going merchant vessels could no longer reach the city; two centuries later Seleucus the Greek king built his new city of Seleucia on the Tigris and the commercial importance of Babylon vanished; the citizens gradually drifted away to other homes and by the second century of the Christian era the great city which had called itself "the lady of kingdoms" was reduced to a barren waste of derelict and decaying buildings, the homes of jackals and owls.

"How is the hammer of the whole earth cut asunder and broken; how is Babylon become a desolation among the nations."

To be continued

We do not all need the same things at the same time. Our needs are different in youth, in middle age, and in advancing years. Someone has pointed out that one reason why God is referred to continually in the Old Testament as the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, is in order to illustrate that He is the God of every succeeding generation and the Friend of every age. This indeed is gloriously true, and we may well rejoice in it.

It is not mere eternity which the thoughtful man desires, not even the perpetuity of things as they are; but eternal life worthy of the noble name, and in harmony with his highest nature, in which the good he aspires after shall be attained, and the evil he deplores be removed, and the unseen God be beheld with joy and served with undecaying energies.

T. M. Herbert.

THE GLORY OF THE CELESTIAL WORLD

The clearest insight into the nature of the celestial world that the Scriptures afford is that contained in chapter 15 of First Corinthians, the primary object of which is to make plain the doctrine of the resurrection. In this chapter St. Paul reveals how clearly he perceived the distinction between the earthly and the heavenly worlds, between human and spiritual nature. This is a distinction which is not always understood as it should be even today but it is an important one in the approach to a modern understanding of the Christian faith.

It may be well at the outset to take a look at the various terms which the Apostle uses in this chapter—several words appertaining to the earthly world and several more to the heavenly. First of all stand the good old English words earthly and heavenly (vss. 47-49) the meaning of which is clear. Two worlds, two orders of being and of life, two spheres of habitation; the one in which we live, perceived by and known to us, the other beyond the scope of our senses, the place of Divine government and the home of an order of intelligent beings whom we call the angels. The second pair of terms is "terrestrial" and "celestial" (vs. 40) which are merely the Latin words for earthly and heavenly respectively. These words refer to the respective worlds or, to use an increasingly familiar term of today, the environments. The third pair is "natural" and "spiritual", and these have reference more to the living organisms or creatures which inhabit these environments. "Natural" is the translation of a Greek word which refers to the physical or animal man; "spiritual", by contrast, that which appertains to living beings in the celestial world or that aspect of man's nature which is directed toward or sustained by the powers of the celestial world. Thus a natural or animal being belongs to the terrestrial world and a spiritual being to the celestial world. A further point to notice is that terrestrial creatures—whether men or animals—possess bodies built up from the materials of which the terrestrial creation is composed. Adam was "made of the dust of the ground". Thus such creatures can only exist within the terrestrial sphere, which is why Paul says in this chapter (vs 50) that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God. Those who do attain the celestial sphere do so by a change of nature which invests them with new and celestial bodies adapted to the celestial environment. In this same connection it is to be realised that the whole of the observable universe,

all the array of stars and planets known—and unknown—to man is part of the terrestrial world or order of things. Any beings who at any time may conceivably inhabit such planets are by definition terrestrial creatures. The celestial world with all its inhabitants is a different and distinct order of creation which cannot be related to the terrestrial order in a geographical sense, is not perceptible to the human five senses and not possible of detection by man-made instruments. It used to be said that the spiritual world was on a "different plane of being"; a more up-to-date and therefore perhaps more understandable definition might be that it is on a different wavelength.

Although the words "terrestrial" and "celestial" occur only in 1 Cor. 15 in the A.V., they probably offer the two best "technical terms", so to speak, to describe these two distinct creations and orders of sentient life, extending the horizon from the primitive idea of this small earth with heaven only a few miles above as the whole extent of creation, which was the best the astronomers of the First Advent could offer and hence the then current belief, to the larger conception made possible by modern knowledge. This vast universe, with its billions upon billions of star-suns and planets, with all their possibilities for exuberant intelligent life, is the terrestrial world; all its living inhabitants, present or future, of whatever shape or form, are terrestrial creatures having "terrestrial bodies" (vs 40). Outside all this, of nature, extent and characteristics unknown, is the celestial world, the inhabitants of which are celestial beings having "celestial bodies" (vs 40). This is the basic principle upon which St. Paul bases the whole of his teaching in 1 Cor. 15.

Now the first vital element in this teaching is that the body which is laid aside and buried or otherwise disposed of at death is not the body of the resurrection life. "*Thou sowest not that body that shall be . . . but God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him*" (vss 37-38). This is to prepare the enquirer for what is to come, the declaration of distinction of worlds and corresponding bodies in the resurrection. Next, an everyday analogy; there are in this earth of ours a variety of creatures, men, beasts, fishes, birds, exhibiting an almost infinite pageant of differing appearances, shapes, functions, habits and so on, each kind fulfilling some specific purpose in the overall earthly scheme of things, but all sharing one thing in common—all are specifically adapted to the

environmental conditions of this earth and none of them could survive anywhere else. Even on the way to the moon the astronauts can only live by taking a little of the earth's environment with them in the form of space-suits or space-ships within which earthly conditions are preserved. So, says Paul, there are terrestrial bodies, suited to and inhabiting the terrestrial order of things; similarly, he goes on to say, there are celestial bodies, suited to the celestial order of things, and in order to impress the fact that there is a similar variety of life in that sphere he says that there is one glory of the sun, another of the moon, and others of stars differing from stars in glory. That is not to say that the celestial world is only an aggregation of suns and solar systems; rather he chooses the varied glories of the visible heavens to illustrate what cannot be described or visualised in human words, in contrast to the variety of terrestrial creatures which he can describe. The celestial has a glory of its own, and it differs from the glory of the terrestrial. From that we deduce two facts. The celestial is a real world; in its abundance of life it exhibits variety just as does our world. And there is another aspect. It is intrinsically superior to our world. Of those who after terrestrial death are resurrected to life in that world Paul says they are sown in weakness, raised in power; sown in corruption, raised in incorruption; sown an animal, terrestrial body, raised a spiritual, celestial body. The change of state implies not only a new life but a vastly enhanced life, a life manifested through a body, an organism, so to speak, which possesses powers and attributes by far exceeding anything which appertains to a human being upon earth (vss 40-44). As if to emphasise this essential difference he goes on to say "as we have borne the image of the earthly, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly" (vs 49).

Although at the start Paul set out to discuss the resurrection in general principle his thoughts have obviously been verging more and more to the special position of the Church in what Revelation calls the "First Resurrection" and now in vs 51 and onward he is considering the position of those who are or have been Christ's at the time of his Coming. In Thessalonians he refers to believers who are "alive and remain" at the Coming, and now here in vs 51 he says in effect that those who are thus living at that time must be "changed" in order to enter the celestial land. The Greek word means to transform, to exchange one thing for another, to cause one thing to cease and another to take its place. Taken in conjunction with all that has gone before in this chapter, and particularly his insistence that the terrestrial body ("flesh

and blood") itself cannot pass into the kingdom, the implication of the word is clear. Our earthly bodies come to an end and are done away and we receive in exchange a new heavenly body having all the characteristics, attributes and powers necessary for life in the celestial.

What are those attributes and powers? Unless we understand and can visualise the detailed nature of the celestial world we cannot possibly say, and that we are unable to do. It is possible that St. Paul, in his experience recorded in 2 Cor. 12, was afforded a glimpse of that world or had some perception of it impressed on his mind (the expression "third heaven" of vs 2 was the then current term for the abode of God and the angels) but if so he found it impossible to express his recollection in human language. That in itself would seem to indicate some fundamental difference. There is also the fact that according to both Old and New Testaments angelic visitants from that world have appeared to men. From the records of some of these visits it would seem that the celestial messenger, normally imperceptible to human senses and unaffected by terrestrial conditions, manifested himself in a terrestrial body apparently formed for the purpose from materials existing to hand, dissolved back into its constituent atoms when the need for its use had passed. Some such process could explain the "appearances" of Jesus after his Resurrection. A sober appraisal of the Gospels makes clear that in most of these appearances He was not recognisable as the pre-crucifixion Jesus by dress or features and this is quite in accord with the fact that He was raised a celestial being of which his former terrestrial body—with or without wounds and nail-prints—formed no part.

The celestial world, then, is so fundamentally different from the world we know that we could not understand or visualise it even if the Scriptures tried to describe it. A short passage from a series appearing in this journal some years ago is perhaps worth repeating in this connection. "It is not just that the trees are greener and the streams are clearer and the gold is brighter and the music sweeter. It is described in the Scriptures by many such devices but only because that is the nearest we can get to comprehending it. The spiritual world must be a real world, as real to its citizens as is ours to us. The fact that it may not be found anywhere in the physical creation of which we are a part does not detract from its reality, nor, be it said, from a certain similarity which must subsist between that world and this. For this world is a copy of that. When God made man, He said 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness'. In some very definite sense

man's world is modelled after the likeness of that which God had before created for the celestials. At the very least, man is in the image of God and of the angels in his love of beautiful things and inspiring things; in his urge to create, to build, to accomplish; in his impulse to happiness, to joy, to laughter. Then there must be in that world, too, beautiful sights and inspiring sounds, things to create and build, purposes to accomplish, events that evoke happiness and joy and laughter. How inconceivable it is, when one comes to think it out, that God should make it possible for men to have laughter and merriment on earth if in all the long ages that preceded man's creation there had never been laughter and merriment in Heaven! The sights and sounds and surroundings of that world must assuredly be as real and substantial to its inhabitants as those of our world are to us, even although we may, with the aid of all that human science can give us, range throughout the whole wide domain of the starry heavens and never catch a glimpse of its splendour nor sense one note of its celestial harmonies. 'Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God'. It is not just distance in space, measured in so many millions or quadrillions of miles, that bars us from reaching the golden gates. It is something much more fundamental, a barrier that can never be crossed except by those who experience the reality of the Apostle's words 'We shall be changed'.

"What if that 'change' is a change to life on a different 'wave-length', so to speak, as if one had switched from the B.B.C. to the I.T.V. programme on the radio? That may be a difficult thing—it may even seem a ludicrous thing—to contemplate. But it may serve to indicate a possibility. It is a common experience in everyday life to switch on a television receiver and 'tune

in' to a particular wave-length. The room is filled with music—a definite world of sight and sound is created and is perceptible to the eyes and ears of the observer. Almost everyone realises now that simultaneously with that programme other worlds of sight and sound, inaudible and unperceived, are pulsating through that room, not seen or heard only because the force that creates them is on a different wave-length. They are just as real, and in other rooms, on correctly tuned receivers, are yielding sight and sound just as evident. Each receiver can discern only that to which it is adapted and tuned.

"If the spiritual world can, by analogy, be pictured as something like that, and existing, not in some other part of the material universe, but as it were upon a different wave-length, then, imperfect as this analogy must be, it can at least serve to free us from the geographical limitation which has of necessity shaped men's thoughts in the past, and help us to visualise that world as divorced from this, and yet in a sense superimposed upon it."

If, then, this is the nature of the celestial world, if life is to continue in that world in ever-widening vistas of experience, progressive increase in knowledge, greater and ever still greater achievement, and if all this is what Paul had in mind when he spoke of the "glory of the celestial", what wealth of meaning must reside in his words recorded elsewhere (2 Cor. 3. 18) "*We all, with open face beholding the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory, by the Spirit of the Lord*". From the glory of the terrestrial to the glory of the celestial; this is the prospect presented to those who in this Age have "come into Christ" and are following him to the end of the way.

The women were too late with their spices;
Mary was not with her ointment.

* * *

Both teachers and learners go to sleep at their
posts so soon as there is no enemy in the field.

J. S. Mill

* * *

The creation of the visible universe is great,
but the creation of countless invisible laws is
greater still.

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

* * *

Attractive as is the proposal, we cannot "cut"
repentance and get on with the Kingdom, for
things will not be taken out of their Divine Order.

Rev. Paul Gliddon.

* * *

It is only through labour and prayerful effort,
grim energy and resolute courage, that we move
on to better things.

(J. F. Willfinger, missionary and martyr.)

? THE QUESTION BOX ?

Q. Is there an explanation of St. Paul's seeming inconsistency in having Timothy circumcised (Acts 16.3) and in his own association with a purification ceremony in the Temple (Acts 21.26) compared with his known frequent insistence that the Judaic rites, especially that of circumcision, were done away in Christ and their observance is unnecessary for Christians?

* * * *

A. Timothy was half Jew and half Greek by birth and Paul purposed to associate him with himself in the forthcoming missionary work which would be, in great part, directed towards orthodox Jews of the Dispersion. An uncircumcised co-worker would be viewed with intense distaste by these orthodox Jews so that whilst Paul held to his view that this rite was no part of the Christian obligation he evidently considered it an advantage for the sake of the work that Timothy be circumcised, purely to avoid what might otherwise have been an unnecessary obstacle to the work of the Gospel. This was in accordance with his own declared principle "*I know that there is nothing unclean of itself, but to him that esteemeth anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean*" (Rom. 14.4).

The occasion upon which Paul joined with four others in a purification ceremony in the Temple (Acts 21), is in a different sphere. This was an instance of five men, all Christians, taking upon themselves the Nazarite vow of abstinence and self-denial for a limited period in token of thanksgiving for some benefit or deliverance received at the hands of the Lord. The custom stemmed back to the ritual set out in Num. 6 and so was associated with the Mosaic Law. For a period which might be as little as eight days or, at the time of the First Advent, as much as thirty, they abstained from wine and choice foods, allowed their hair to grow, and remained in a condition of meditation and prayer. The general idea was not unlike that of the strict observance of Lent by pious Christians in our day. At the end of the period certain sacrificial rituals, including the ceremonial burning of the shorn hair, were enacted in the Temple, after which the participants were free to resume their normal lives.

Paul had previously undergone a similar

Nazarite vow when at Cenchrea (Acts 18.18) and this might well have been a manifestation of thankfulness for his various escapes and deliverances during his past missionary journeys through Greece which culminated at Corinth and Cenchrea. Now he was in Jerusalem again and faced with the false accusation that in his travels among the Jews of the Dispersion he urged them indiscriminately to apostasise from the Mosaic Law and all its customs. This, of course, was untrue; Paul's preaching was to the effect that one coming into Christ, becoming a Christian, was thereby freed from the ceremonial obligations of the Law, but he did nothing to abrogate the demands of that Law upon those who remained Jews. And he always maintained that the moral standards of the Law remained good and incumbent upon all men (Rom. 3.31; 7.12). In order to refute this distorted impression of his teaching, James, the leader of the church at Jerusalem, suggested that he join with four of their number who at the time were themselves undergoing the ritual of this Nazarite vow; to this course Paul assented. The ceremony was a customary form of rendering an expression of devotion to God, and if it seems rather over-elaborate in all its detail to us, that reflects the differences of the respective eras and the more noticeable influence in that day of the system under which Israel had worshipped for centuries. As an act of worship it was as appropriate for Christian as for Jew, and Paul compromised or sacrificed no principle by his participation.

There may be a point worth noting here. All too often we tend to disparage or condemn the fashion in which believers of other communions than our own worship God—the evangelical will decry the formalism of the established church and vice versa, and so on. There is a danger of forgetting that we all worship the same God and He is indifferent to the trappings in which that worship is arrayed because He sees only the sincerity and love which prompts it. "*Who art thou that judgest another man's servant?*" asked Paul again in that same 14th of Romans. "*To his own master he standeth or falleth*". We do well to look for the good in a man's work and not criticise over-much the manner in which he does it.

Absolute truth can have nothing to fear from the disintegrating influence of time.

Sir James Jeans.

This world will not be saved from its madness by a church asleep. It needs a church aflame.

Percy Sowerby.

THE CALL AND DESTINY OF ISRAEL

From earliest times the nation of Israel has considered itself set apart for a special purpose in the plans of God, and other nations and peoples have in varying degree resented this apparent assumption of a position superior to theirs. What is the nature of this claim and to what extent is it justified by Scripture?

The constitution of Jacob's descendants into a nation some three million strong at Mount Sinai in the 15th century B.C. is a historical fact; at that time they occupied the land which has ever since been associated with the name Israel. According to the Bible the inception of that nation was in consequence of a Divine revelation and the institution of a Covenant whereby Israel bound themselves to obey a codified system of laws defining Divine standards for everyday life. The Covenant provided that national loyalty to God would ensure peace and prosperity in their land; disloyalty, on the other hand, would bring adversity, invasion and ultimately expulsion from the land and the loss of all their God-given privileges. In the outcome the nation was, from time to time, alternately loyal and disloyal, and experienced the respective consequences, but at all times there remained the underlying consciousness of a God-given mission so that the idea of a destiny of separation from the rest of the world for the execution of some as yet only dimly-seen purpose was always there.

That purpose was more clearly revealed after the coming of Christ, when the nature of the Divine working in the world of men was defined and understood in greater detail. Looking back from the vantage point of the New Testament, it is perceptible that God's purpose in calling and selecting Israel for a specific duty in human history was three-fold. In the first place, Israel was the appointed channel and custodian of the oral and written revelation of God and His purposes for the fifteen hundred years which were to elapse ere Christ appeared. Moses, as the practical founder of the nation, already held the records of God's dealings in the past with the patriarchs, the histories of ancient times, and so on, all going back to an unknown antiquity. To these he added the happenings of his own day, and the revelations and commands of God transmitted to Israel through him at this momentous beginning of their national history. Then in after times saintly and upright men contributed that which they them-

selves had discerned of the ways and purposes of God; so the Old Testament came into being and remained intact during the remainder of Israel's national existence. "*Unto them*" says Paul in Rom. 3.2 "*were committed the oracles of God*" and it is due to the care of reverential men in each successive generation that these oracles were preserved as no other book of antiquity.

In the second place Israel was commissioned a concrete witness to the reality of Divine lordship over the earth, that notwithstanding the prevalence of evil in the world, God is ruler over all and will ultimately make His rule effective. However imperfectly Israel did witness to this and however grievously they were guilty of disloyalty it remained always that God was their God and their king. In a world rapidly degenerating from polytheism to atheism Israel maintained that God IS, and God is ONE. The existence and the history and the achievements, as well as the failures, of Israel were an essential preliminary to the establishment of the Christian Church of this present Age. The debt owed by Christians to Israel is very great.

Thirdly, and most important of all, Israel is the destined Divine instrument on earth, working in association with the Church in heaven for the education and conversion of the world during the coming Age of Christ's kingdom upon earth. "*Israel shall blossom and bud*" said Isaiah "*and fill the face of the world with fruit*" (Isa. 27.6). Of the purified and converted and completely dedicated Israel nation of that future day God has said "*I will also give thee for a light to the nations, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth*" (Isa. 49.6). From the national experiences, both light and dark, joyous and tragic, of three and a half millenniums, there will emerge a fruitage, a "remnant", as Isaiah puts it, a servant of the Lord, in the form of a people that is fitted both by knowledge of God and experience of good and evil to be messengers and missionaries of that new Age when the Gospel is to be preached in power, and none will fail to hear. And it follows, of course, that in that day Judaism and Christianity will be one faith, for they who rejected Christ at first will now cry out, as Jesus said they would, "*blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.*"

Why was Israel the nation thus chosen out of all possible candidates? There is no doubt about

the fact that the Lord did specifically select and appoint this people for his purpose. *"Thou art an holy people unto the Lord thy God, and the Lord hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself above all people that are upon the face of the earth"* (Deut. 7.6). This was no arbitrary selection. The Lord had a reason. Elsewhere in the Pentateuch it is repeatedly stated that the Lord chose Israel because of the loyalty and faith of their forefather Abraham, and his consequent promise that his purposes for mankind would be worked out through Abraham's posterity. But God only chooses and uses fit instruments for his service. A dispassionate appraisal of the character of Abraham and of Israel shows that there was, and is, something in this particular patriarch and these his descendants which stands out in sharp relief against the characteristics of humanity in general. Abraham was a man of very rare faith and tenacity; emerging as he did from the welter of Semitic—Hamitic peoples of Sumer, the world's oldest civilisation, inheritors of the wisdom and knowledge of the most ancient times going back perhaps to the beginning of man's presence on earth, he was peculiarly fitted to build upon the foundation of such past experiences of God as men had retained, and advance that experience to new conceptions and new heights. He was a man of rare insight and unparalleled courage; when the Divine call came to him he unhesitatingly forsook the glittering but fast disintegrating Sumerian civilisation in which he had been born, and went out to a land which God showed him, *"not knowing whither he went"* (Heb. 11.8). That same faith and courage, transmitted to his descendants of six hundred years later, enabled them to declare at Sinai *"All that the Lord hath said will we do, and be obedient"* (Exod. 24.7), so the nation of Israel was born and became the special people of the Lord.

The Lord himself selected the land—not for nothing has it been called the Holy Land. In Deuteronomy it is described as the land which the Lord has chosen, to put his Name there. It is always to be known as peculiarly the sanctuary of the Most High. Over the wide span of four thousand years it has been thus regarded. The earliest peoples—Sumer and Egypt—had hardly touched the land of Canaan, its original name, prior to 2000 B.C. or so when Abraham entered it, and when he did settle there the land was only thinly populated by a few inhabitants who even then worshipped the "Most High God". At that point the land was promised to the patriarch and his seed for an everlasting possession and although two and a half centuries later the sons of Jacob had to migrate because of famine, and

dwelt in Egypt, where after a few more centuries they grew into a nation, they did eventually return to their inheritance. From that day to this the land has never wanted for the seed of Abraham within its borders, notwithstanding the great Dispersion of the present Christian era when most of the sons of Israel were scattered to the four corners of the earth. And this our current generation has seen the beginning of the end of that Dispersion!

The land was strategically selected. Situate at the meeting-place of three continents, commanding the passage between east and west, it lies at the centre of the land mass of the Old World. It is roughly midway in distance between the west coast of Africa and the east coast of China, between the southern limit of Africa and the northernmost of Siberia. More than any other place it can lay claim to be called the centre of the earth and in Ezek. 38.12 it is so called (see RSV). As the administrative seat of that World Government which will be in operation during the coming Messianic Age no more suitable place could be chosen and it is tempting to think that God deliberately selected this particular part of the earth's surface for its historic mission because of its physical suitability.

The land produced the people. It is almost as if some mystic link between land and people gives them something approaching superhuman virility and strength when they tread its soil. As slaves in Egypt the sons of Jacob were a cowed and abjectly submissive people. In the desert, on the way to the Promised Land, they were querulous and deficient in faith, easily defeated by the enemies who attacked them. But as soon as they set foot on the Land under Joshua they became a terrible and invincible army against whom the entrenched Canaanites, physically and numerically their superiors, melted away and were no more. During the Dispersion of the past two thousand years the Jew, stateless and landless, has been the subject of oppression, contempt and derision, but since the establishment—more properly re-establishment—of the sovereign State of Israel his military achievements in defence of that State against apparently overwhelming odds have stunned the world. There is something in this physical link between the son of Israel and the land of Israel which cannot be explained in ordinary human terms, but it is real, and it is an additional evidence that the providences of God are somehow involved in a special sense.

The nation was organised at Sinai. There they entered into a Covenant with God at the instance of Moses, binding them to loyalty and obedience and rigorous separation from their neighbour

nations. It is easy to credit all this to the statesmanship of Moses to the exclusion of Divine participation but this does not account for the remarkable manner in which the promises and warnings of the Covenant were fulfilled centuries afterward. Throughout Israel's national history faithfulness brought prosperity and apostasy brought adversity, precisely as Moses had told them. The terrible description of their final scattering among the nations of the earth and the loss of their homeland in Deut. 28 was realized to the letter fifteen hundred years later. This was a period of experience for the emerging nation, experience of the surety of Divine law and the inevitability of retribution if that law is infringed. For the first four centuries of their occupation of the land Israel existed as a fairly loose federation of tribes owning one God and one faith; more often than not one or another section of the nation broke away from God and adopted the idolatrous worship of the surrounding nations; speedily came the penalties of the forsaken Covenant upon them in war, invasion, crop failure, pestilence; each time the erring ones turned to the Lord in repentance and the curse was lifted. In a very material but eminently practical manner they began to learn the soundness of the maxim "*righteousness exalteth a nation but sin is a reproach to any people*" (Prov. 14.34) and to know that "*whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap*" (Gal. 6.7). The second phase of their instruction came when the tribes formed themselves into a monarchy and desired a king to rule them in the manner of other nations. Five hundred years of kingship led them into disaster. Some kings were good men and influenced the people for righteousness but most of them were bad men and led their subjects into political and social and military adventures which culminated in the era of the captivities when the land was dominated by foreign invaders and many of the people taken as exiles into faraway countries. Those experiences at least taught Israel the folly of alliance with earthly kings and powers and brought them nearer to God than they had ever been before. "*By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion*". (Psa. 137.1.). Israel never relapsed into idolatry after the Babylonian captivity. At the Restoration under Cyrus of Persia they were more meticulous in observance of the Covenant and zealous for the law of God than at any previous time, although during the four centuries which thereafter elapsed to the coming of Christ that very passion for righteousness developed into a legalistic and formalistic conception of God's ways which produced the Scribes and

Pharisees of Jesus' time and led eventually to the rejection and crucifixion of Christ. The varied experiences of fifteen centuries had not been enough; they had not yet learned all that must be learned ere they could be ready for their destiny. Something more harrowing and soul searching was necessary, and so it came about that less than forty years after the Crucifixion the prophetic words of both Jesus and Moses came terribly true. The Romans desolated the country, destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple, sold the women and children as slaves, sent the able-bodied men to the galleys, and banished the greater part of the population from the land, to settle where they could among the nations, until "*the Times of the Gentiles*", to use Jesus' words in Luke 21.24, "*be fulfilled*."

There already existed, and had existed for many years, communities of emigrant Israelites or Jews in almost every part of the known world and some of them had prospered greatly in material things. Many of the exiles were assimilated into such communities. There was a considerable migration into Arabia in the south, and the joint Arab-Jewish culture which resulted endured for many centuries. But there were two factors which made the position intolerable to every true-hearted son of Israel. One was the loss of the land, implying loss of the Divine calling for without possession of the land the promise and calling of God could not be fulfilled. The other was the contempt and hatred for the Jew manifested by the major part of the world into which he had been forced—a hatred inspired in great part by the antipathy of so-called Christians on account of Jewish responsibility for the Crucifixion. Injustice, oppression, extortion, and worse, was the lot of the exiles, generation after generation. And all this might well be a means in the Divine economy for giving this people, on a kind of national scale, a direct and personal experience of the injustice and suffering to which man can be subjected by man, that they might be the better qualified in sympathy and understanding for the woes of man when they finally take up their destined Messianic work "for the healing of the nations." Just as the Christian Church of this Age has to be fitted for its future work by suffering and endurance now, just as Christ himself was "*made perfect through suffering*" that He might be a "*merciful and faithful High Priest*" (Heb. 2. 10, & 17), so, it might fairly be said, the earthly missionary nation of the next Age has likewise to be made perfect through suffering.

The remarkable thing about this nineteen centuries' Dispersion is that Israel never lost its identity. The Jew remained distinguishable

throughout all generations and in all nations. He never lost his hope and belief that one day he would return to his own land. It is true, of course, that at no time during those nineteen centuries has the land been entirely without Jewish inhabitants; at all times there has been a remnant, sometimes a pitifully small remnant, inhabiting the land but always under the domination of some alien power—Roman, Persian, Crusader, Moslem, Turk and finally British. Although many of the dispersed settled down in their countries of adoption or refuge there was always the element which looked and worked for the day of return. "Next year in Jerusalem" was the constant prayer at their most solemn ceremonies. And in the late nineteenth century, with the appearance and work of Theodore Herzl, the political aspect of the age-old hope began to take concrete form.

The wresting of the Holy Land from the Turks by Britain during the 1914 war opened the doors to the Return—slowly at first and beset by many obstacles, particularly Arab objections in the later years, but increasing steadily until in 1948 Britain, the last Gentile power to exercise control over the land, moved out, and the sovereign State of Israel was proclaimed, two thousand years from the days of the Maccabean priest-kings when Israel had last known national independence.

So began the Great Restoration, political in its basis and nature, although many who hastened to return to the land of their fathers did so believing that the time had come for the purpose of God for their nation to take a great step forward. The powers of the world, and the man in the street, looking on, saw only another re-shuffle of the ever-changing political map of the world and a perhaps not very permanent one at that. The God-instructed Jew, and the instructed Christian also, knew it for what it was, the moving of Divine forces into position for the events that are to bring this world to an end and usher in the Age to come, the "new heavens and new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness." (2 Pet. 3.13).

Israel is being re-gathered in unbelief. Not that there is no religious element in the social and the governmental structure. There is, plenty of it. But the essence of Israel's uniqueness in the world has got to be its future complete dedication to God and reliance upon God and the corresponding rejection of the methods and particularly the weapons of this world. Despite certain signal manifestations of Divine deliverance in their ancient history—the Red Sea, Jehoshaphat, Sennacherib and so on, that lesson has not yet been learned. Perhaps, in view of the tragic history of Israel during the past two millennia, that is not altogether to be wondered at. But it

has to be learned; until Israel as a nation has been purified and converted, trusting God implicitly for every kind of defence and protection, organising its own life in accord with Divine standards, it will not be ready for the Divine purpose.

They come, from far, as the Old Testament prophets said they would. The old vigour and tenacity returns as soon as they set foot upon the sacred soil, and the old arrogance. Not for nothing are those born in the land known as "sabras"—the name means a prickly pear. The land is being restored and built up; the desert is beginning to blossom as the rose; their advances and discoveries in scientific and technical knowledge are beginning to spill over into the wider world to the greater benefit of man generally. Of old time Isaiah said, "*they shall build the old wastes, they shall raise up the former desolations, and they shall repair the waste cities, the desolations of many generations*" (Isa. 61.4). They are doing all this, and nothing can stop them. Despite their continuing unbelief, God's hand is in this thing, for God's purpose is directly involved, and no one can fight against God.

One final time of stress is ordained, one last trial of faith, an event which will bring to the surface all the underlying devotion of which Israel is capable and leave them, at last, fully ready for their destiny. The continual progress and prosperity of Israel will excite the jealousy and antagonism of the wider world, and, perhaps, some dawning realisation that this emerging nation is indeed, as the Bible has so consistently declared, the initial phase of the incoming earthly Kingdom of God which is to overcome all evil and institute everlasting righteousness. Whatever the reason, there will be a great coalition of evil powers and interests intent upon destroying Israel. Ezekiel (chaps. 38-39) pictures this attempt under symbol of the 8th century B.C. invasion of the Middle East by the Scythians, Gog of the land of Magog and much people with him. Israel is pictured as defenceless so far as material weapons are concerned, but resting in faith that God will deliver—and God does so deliver. That deliverance, and the vindication of Israel, and the overthrow of the "hosts of Gog", mark the time of Israel's complete conversion and acceptance of her destiny. "*So the house of Israel shall know that I am the Lord their God from that time and forward*" is the prophet's comment on his account of this momentous event.

It is impossible to estimate the effect upon the world generally of a nation that is completely and altogether dedicated to the service of God and aflame with missionary zeal to extend its influence

for righteousness throughout the world. This, under the direction of Christ and his Church in the heavens, is the mission of Israel. "*Out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem*" (Isa. 2.3.). The purpose of the Messianic Age is the reconciliation of "whosoever will" to God and the bestowment upon them of eternal life; Israel will stand before the world as an example of a people converted to righteousness and fully loyal to God. In their dedication

to his service they will become a servant nation to all, that they might endeavour to win all. "*Thou, Israel, art my servant, the seed of Abraham my friend . . . I the Lord have called thee in righteousness, and will give thee for a light of the nations, to open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house*" (Isa. 41 & 42). Israel will, at the last, become a means in the Lord's hands for the salvation of the world.

REFLECTIONS ON FAITH

"*Through faith we understand that the worlds came into being and still exist at the command of God.*" (Heb. 11.3).

Man is not responsible for the existence of the earth. It revolved in space long before it was leased out to his race. Were it not under the control of a merciful and wise Intelligence, it could be shaken like a paper bag and there would be few men left. The things men have built upon it would quickly disappear, but the earth itself on its strong foundations abides forever. Such is the difference between God and man, the Infinite immortal and the finite mortal.

"*In the beginning God created*". The words are addressed to the readers of faith. There is no long speculation on spontaneous combustion, no scientific dissertation on a slow and complicated evolution of species from red-hot lava or dead matter, to animate, intelligent existence. In the beginning God! From that great source of invisible power came the visible. Globe-vegetation, the animal kingdom and man were God-made. The same power keeps them going, holding the earth in its place. Not the earth only but the whole vast, mysterious universe, the work of His fingers, are upheld by the word of his power.

Beside all this awe-inspiring grandeur what is man, "*the microbe seeded on a sixpence*" as one of his more jocular students of the skies has been pleased to describe him? The Word of God describes him in rather more gracious terms as "*created a little lower than the angels*". Faith accepts this statement as defining the true status of man in the ranks of living creatures. Man, made upright in the image of God. God for the first time in His works of creation allied to flesh and blood, the Divine parent of a human race. Searching for the springs of life the scientist looks first in primeval mud, then to the apes, then to the stars, exalting his evolved creature to a place

in the heavens.

Faith sees man fallen from his first estate, a little lower than the angels. It is not interested in space but in salvation, the only means by which man and the earth may be restored, reconciled with the Maker of both to their original beauty and harmony.

Science has produced enough power to destroy the earth and its contents. God safeguards the earth from any such calamity. He will save the race whose welfare he has watched through many ages, for whom He has made such bountiful provision. Man must come face to face with his Maker on his own doorstep, not in the heavens nor in the haunted swamps of the dinosaurs, but on the earth where he belongs. The intelligent, responsible human being, minted out of the dust of the earth, beautifully formed and mentally endowed with superior qualities, to rule a flourishing productive planet, must attain the ideal of God's purpose.

This is faith's answer to the fears and perplexities of the modern world. The kingdom of God is beauty, peace and perfection. Through much tribulation shall the earth and her peoples enter that kingdom, but enter it they will and must, because God has spoken the word.

The Power which produced order out of chaos, the Voice which commanded light and rebuked the oceans, which put living creatures in every part of the globe, adapting them to their places, will at a fore-known hour rebuke evil. The tumults of man will cease and the earth will enjoy her rest. Because faith understands that He made the earth for his own purposes, that He produced man from its various elements, that He has kept faith with the human race, it accepts with full assurance of faith that He will complete that purpose. "*As truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord*".

THE PARABLE OF THE WINESKINS

Luke 5, 31-37

Matthew Levi the tax collector was a proud man and a happy one this day. This was not the first time he had entertained his fellow collectors and his other friends to a feast in his house, but it was unusual for his regular guests to find themselves seated in the same room with members of a totally dissimilar social class, the Scribes and the Pharisees. And they were rather intrigued by the purpose for which they had assembled. They were there to do honour to the new prophet who had arisen in Israel. Tax collectors usually had no time for prophets; they left that department of life to the men whose business it was, the priests and the doctors of the Law. The business of a tax-collector in Israel did not usually permit of much else than observing one's financial obligations to the Roman government in paying all accounts promptly, and taking care to extract enough from the unwilling taxpayers to keep the business out of the red, with a suitable profit left over to make it all worth while. A tax-collector had to be a practical man and must not concern himself too closely with religion.

Apparently though their highly respected colleague was not keeping to tradition. His business was sound enough, sufficiently so to maintain his known standard of entertainment and hospitality, yet most inexplicably he had avowed himself a follower of the Nazarene prophet, closed down his business, settled his account with the Roman Chancellor of the Exchequer, and invited his erstwhile business associates to this feast where they were to meet his new Master. It might not have been so bad had they found themselves seated at the table only with this new young visionary and his personal disciples. They were all fishermen and peasantry and there would be no feeling of constraint with them. The real trouble was that Matthew had also invited some of the respectable religious fraternity, who in business life customarily suffered much at the hands of these same tax collectors, and in any case heartily despised them as willing tools of Rome. Both groups had come with equal curiosity to see and hear this new prophet about whom so much was being said, but there was a coolness between the two parties which led the respectable ones at length to voice their irritation in a question to the guest

of honour which exceeded all the bounds of breeding and good taste in view of the fact that they were there as the guests of a tax collector. "Why" they demanded of Jesus "do ye eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?"

Jesus regarded them gravely. He knew the sense of outrage that filled their hearts. For four hundred years past the Pharisees had preserved the ancient traditions of Israel and maintained that standard of rigid righteousness which had to be preserved if Israel was to remain separate and undefiled from Roman influence, and so be fit to receive Messiah when He should appear. The tax-collectors, having no regard for God or Moses, traitors to their own nation and its national destiny, made their bargains with Rome for the privilege of extracting what they could of taxation from their own countrymen. They were universally despised and hated. Yet Jesus and his disciples, ignoring all this, were content to accept their hospitality and treat them as though they stood on the same level in the sight of God as the Scribes and Pharisees themselves, when all Israel knew the latter to be the favoured ones in God's sight. Jesus looked into those eyes of outraged righteousness with his own eyes of infinite understanding, and smiled. He gave them his answer. It was a totally unexpected answer too. "They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance."

This was a poser. Some faces were thoughtful, others angry and frustrated. They could not dispute the reply without denying their own claim to righteousness. Jesus had put them in a position from which they could not extricate themselves. They ate in silence whilst they digested the implication of his words.

Some of those at table had been disciples of John the Baptist. They had much in common with the better minded of the Pharisees—it may be, were Pharisees themselves. Perhaps to tide over an awkward moment they put a question of their own; a little more sincerity in this one, and no suspicion of bad taste. "We, as John's disciples, are ascetics—so are the Pharisees; we, and they, lead pious lives and keep aloof from the common man. Your disciples are not ascetics; they eat and drink in the same manner as all men and generally mix with all men irrespective

of class or creed, careless of possible defilement or contagion. Why?" That is a fair paraphrase of their question. Jesus looked at their earnest faces with eyes of quiet gravity. "If you go to the wedding of one of your number", He said, "you who are the friends of the bridegroom do not abstain from food and drink and merrymaking while you are in his presence and the feast is proceeding. You enjoy to the full all that is provided. It is later, when the feast is over and the bridegroom has departed, and you yourselves are back in your customary place, that you resume the self-denial and asceticism of your normal life." Perhaps there was a gentle reminder here that despite their claim of asceticism and fasting, in contrast with Jesus' disciples, they were in fact doing themselves very well indeed at that moment in a manner far removed from fasting. Luke says that Matthew had provided a "great feast" and that a "great company" sat down to it. Fasting or no fasting, these Scribes and Pharisees and disciples of John were disposing of Matthew's best viands and choicest wines at an appreciable rate and enjoying themselves hugely in the process. They had probably, for so many years, taken themselves so seriously that the absurdity of asking such a question in the present situation did not occur to them.

But Jesus saw the absurdity and in the silence which followed his second reply He channelled their thoughts into position for receiving the principle He wanted to inculcate, a principle which is just as important to us to-day as it was to them, for we often fall short in precisely the same respect. "No man" He said, "*putteth new wine into old bottles, else the new wine will burst the bottles, and be spilled, and the bottle will perish. But new wine must be put into new bottles, and both are preserved. No man having drunk old wine straightway desireth new; for he saith, the old is better*". His gaze must have fallen upon the wineskins stacked in the outer room, waiting their turn for use at the feast, and his hearers must have looked at them too and begun to sense a glimmer of the truth He was about to expound.

The most common receptacle for wines and oils in Jesus' day was a suitably dressed and prepared goatskin. The rich possessed store jars, large earthenware containers with a wide neck, but although these were ideal for dry goods such as grain or dried fruits they were not so useful for wine which needed to be kept closely sealed. A goatskin, open only at the neck, could be filled with wine and the opening tied up tightly. Thus contained, the wine could be equally conveniently transported on donkey or camel back or hung up in the store room until required. One

precaution was necessary. Until the wine was matured and old, the pressure inside the skin was likely to increase. With a new goatskin this was nothing to be concerned about; the skin itself was resilient and to a certain extent elastic, and would stretch and accommodate itself to the increased pressure. A skin which had already done appreciable service, however, would eventually reach the limit of its stretch, and if then used again for new wine would be liable to rupture and lose its contents. Such a skin would however be quite suitable for wine which had already matured. The allusion was one which would be readily understood by all those present at the feast, and those among them who were sincerely desirous of giving heed to Jesus' words would immediately start casting around in their minds for a clue to his object in giving such an illustration. What did Jesus mean. What was his object in speaking thus?

The Scribes and Pharisees there present were men who had spent the whole of their lives in the study of a systematic theology which was already completely documented and defined before they commenced. Judaism comprised a rigid and dogmatic presentation of Divine Truth which, based upon the Mosaic Covenant and every revealed word of God recorded from ancient times, had been overlaid by a mass of Rabbinic interpretation and exposition. With all its faults, its shortcomings, and its insufficiency, it was, nevertheless, the Truth in which they had been brought up. It had sufficed for them. In that faith they had been born and in that faith they were prepared to die. It was old wine, and it was very comfortably contained in old bottles.

Now Jesus came with something new and revolutionary. True, He had said, "*Think not that I am come to destroy the Law and the prophets. I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil*" (Matt. 5.17) but in that process of fulfilment He must of necessity cast a new light upon many old and long-cherished beliefs. He must needs show himself as the reality of which much that had gone before was the shadow. He was very definitely going to remove "*the handwriting of ordinances, nailing it to his cross*" (Col. 2.14) even although in so doing, He would in fact "*magnify the law and make it honourable*" (Isa. 42.21). Some at least of those Pharisees were sincere men; they wanted to know and do the will of God; but how so to present the unfolding purpose of God to their dubious minds as rightly to convince them of its truth? Jesus knew that He had come in humiliation to die as a malefactor on the Cross; they were expecting a victorious military leader who would expel the Romans and estab-

lish his throne in Jerusalem. Jesus knew that a long, long time must elapse before God's visible kingdom on earth would come; they expected it there and then. Jesus knew that Israel as a nation would reject him, and his call to discipleship would go out to all the nations to draw out a spiritual people for God's Name, a Church whose members would at the last be exalted to be with him in the celestial sphere; they expected to see Israel exalted forever upon earth above all the Gentiles and thus to rule all the peoples everlastingly with an autocratic even though righteous rule. How were they ever going to be persuaded that a new light was now to be shed upon the Divine purpose and those who would be God's ministers must be ready to advance in the light?

The Master knew that, in the main, they would not. The introduction of the new wine of his teachings into the old bottles of Judaism would, in almost every case, wreck the bottles and waste the wine. The message He preached was received, in the main, by the younger and fresher minds who were themselves more resilient and less hide-bound—fitting word—in the old traditions. Even though they must themselves become, in the course of time, as it were "old bottles", they were for the present fitting bottles for the Master's use. Some there were, old in years but new bottles in spirit, Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea, Simeon, Anna, who did receive and retain the new wine without disaster. In every generation there are those to whom advancing years proves no handicap to progress in increasing light. There are always those who can weld the revelation of the present to the knowledge of the past and in that fusion perceive a clear vision of the out-working purpose of God. But in the main the old wine must remain in the old bottles and new bottles must be found for the new wine.

Perhaps all this is part of the tenderness and compassion of God for his servants. "He knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are but dust". A faithful disciple has served his God to the limit of the light he had, throughout the span of a long life; why should his failing powers at the last be called upon to receive and assimilate conceptions and definitions of truth which, however superior to the older definitions they may be in the light of more modern knowledge and understanding, might seem to him, in comparison

with the things he was taught of old, the rankest heresy. It is not as though there is any finality to truth in this life, for the new wine of to-day becomes the old wine of to-morrow. He was a farsighted man who coined the oft-quoted phrase "*the heresy of to-day is the orthodoxy of to-morrow*". And no single vessel can contain the whole of Divine truth; as soon seek to scoop up the entire ocean in one little pannier.

Whenever Jesus talked like this He included a special word for the "hearing ear". This time was no exception. He left on record his own knowledge of the conflict which must take place in the minds of some before they can accept him and his claims and his message. "*No man,*" He said "*having drunk old wine straightway desireth new; for, he saith, the old is better.*" The determining word there, the one that implies so much, is "straightway". Many there are who come into contact with some striking advance in the progressive unfolding of the Divine purpose who will not have it at any price. "The old" they say "is better". Later on, when the force of the new presentation has begun to make itself felt, they look upon the new with a less unfriendly eye. Saul of Tarsus was one such. He would not accept the new wine straightway. He kicked, at first, against the ox-goad. But the New Testament abundantly manifests how completely the new wine of Christianity did fill that chosen vessel to the Lord, rigid and hard as it may originally have been in the unyielding mould of Judaism.

That is how the parable affects individuals, now as well as then. There is no doubt that Jesus meant it to have a dispensational application also. He knew that Israel would not accept his message, that the rulers would put him to death that the old order might remain. He was yet to pass upon them that irrevocable sentence "*The kingdom of God shall be taken from you and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof*" (Matt. 21.43). He knew that new bottles, those disciples who in after ages, even to this present, would constitute the Christian Church, must be selected to receive and contain the new wine of his teachings and his mission. So it has been, and so it must be, for it is that same new wine which, so preserved in those new wineskins, is to be brought forth in the greatest feast of all, that all mankind may partake, at the end.

Those who would successfully govern the world must have both an inexhaustible capacity, and an insatiable appetite, for work. "Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world?"

"In the past we have suffered from theologians who have lacked the spirit of evangelism, and evangelists who could have done with a little more theology."

Rev. Percy Sowerby in a broadcast talk.

GIDEON, MAN OF VALOUR

3. Disaster at the last

The third phase of Gideon's career was marked by his making the ephod, the tragic mistake which blemished the brightness of his spectacular career. As a successful military commander, hero of a notable victory, he was a very different man from the simple farmer pictured in Judges 6. At that time his implicit and obedient faith in God enabled him to carry out the Lord's commands to the letter and in consequence the Midianite hosts had been put to flight and the land delivered, as the Lord had promised. The fact that Gideon went beyond his instructions afterwards and allowed the remainder of Israel to help him destroy the enemy to a man may well be put down to an excess of zeal not justified by the necessity of the case, but his subsequent refusal to allow himself to be made king by his grateful countrymen and his insistence that the Lord must be their only king shows that his heart was still right. But this same zeal, even more unwisely directed, led him into serious trouble in the matter of the ephod.

It all began when Gideon rejected the plea that he become their king. Although he declined the invitation, he did ask of his countrymen one favour, that they would give him an offering of the gold rings taken from the defeated enemy and the ornaments taken from their camels. The request was received with enthusiasm and Gideon found himself possessed of a considerable amount of gold and other valuable regalia taken from the defeated kings. The upshot shows that Gideon did not want this for himself, but for the worship of God and the honour of his native village. Of these golden rings and ornaments and luxurious clothing, we are told, he "*made an ephod, and put it in his city*" (village) "*in Ophrah*". An ephod was a garment intricately constructed of valuable fabrics, precious stones and fine gold, worn by the High Priest of Israel as indication of his sacred office and by virtue of which he could approach to God for counsel and instruction. In later times possession of the ephod became invested with a kind of superstitious reverence and it was believed that any who could gain such possession would thereby be able to command a hearing and a response from God. There were two occasions in the life of David when he took it upon himself to summon the High Priest to his side so that with the aid of the ephod the Lord

could be asked to give instructions as to forthcoming operations. But Gideon had been in close touch with God throughout this whole series of happenings and would hardly be likely to think the possession of an ephod necessary for any further instruction at this juncture. It becomes a valid question therefore: what was his purpose in doing this?

The Tabernacle, which was the centre of Israel's worship and the responsibility of the Aaronic High Priest, at this time stood at Shiloh, having been finally erected there following a few years at Gilgal during the conquest of the Land. Thither the tribes came on the occasions of the great feasts and here the High Priest conducted the annual Day of Atonement ceremonies. But Shiloh was in the territory of the tribe of Ephraim, and there was no love lost between Ephraim and Manasseh, Gideon's own tribe. Jealousy had existed between them from earliest times, when Manasseh the eldest son of Joseph had been passed over by the patriarch and the birthright conferred on Ephraim. Something of that jealousy emerges in this very story when the Ephraimites chided Gideon for not calling them to the battle before he had started the rout; his tactful reply in ch. 8. 1-3 avoided a serious clash but the animosity was there. Chapter 12 of Judges tells of another occasion when Ephraim was involved in fratricidal strife with men of Manasseh. It might well be, therefore, that Gideon had formed the idea that the institution of some kind of a centre for approaching God in the territory of Manasseh might well advance the status of his own tribe relative to the brother tribe and be welcomed by the northern tribes, Ashur, Zebulon and Naphtali, who had assisted him in the campaign. Already, a century or more in the past, a rival priesthood with images and ephod, in honour of Jehovah the God of Israel, had been set up in the extreme north by the tribe of Dan (the story is told in Jud. ch. 18 but chronologically it was long before Gideon's day). That centre of worship had degenerated into flagrant idolatry and the official priesthood at Shiloh had been able to do nothing about it. Perhaps Gideon, in his zeal for the Lord, thought that he could succeed where Shiloh had failed and at least establish a centre of worship more acceptable to the northern tribes than the one in the territory of the univer-

sally disliked tribe of Ephraim. If that was in fact his idea, he was grievously in error in supposing that any deviation from the Divine arrangement, no matter how sincerely undertaken, could be productive of anything but ill. Thus it was in this case; Gideon had in effect set up a rival sanctuary to the legal one in Shiloh and the consequence was that *"all Israel went thither a-whoring after it; which thing became a snare to Gideon, and to his house"*. That expression means that unlawful worship and ceremonial was carried on in Abi-ezer of Manasseh and the fact that the Deity worshipped was the Ever-Living and not Baal did nothing to mitigate that fact. It is probable that Gideon established some kind of priesthood, and attempted to emulate in some degree the ceremonies which could rightfully only be observed at Shiloh. Thus there were now three places in Israel claiming to represent God before the people, Shiloh in Ephraim, Dan in the far north where a renegade Levitical priesthood functioned, and this at Abi-ezer. The sad refrain of the Book of Judges comes to the mind "In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did that which was right in his own eyes". The wonder is that the knowledge and service of the God of Israel subsisted at all. Evidently it did in measurable degree, for after Gideon's victory the land had rest for the unusually long period of forty years, and this of itself denotes that there was no general apostasy. The most reasonable conclusion is that under Gideon's leadership the nation remained nominally loyal to God and the Covenant, and the shrines of Baal were destroyed, leaving a form of worship which so far as its ceremonial aspect was concerned represented no more than a pale reflection of what it could have been had the Covenant been zealously observed in all its provisions.

There is another possibility which may explain Gideon's institution of this rival sanctuary, an action so much out of character compared with his earlier scrupulous observance of Divine leading. At some time during the period of the Judges there was a violent disruption in the High Priestly family whereby the ordained succession from Aaron's son Eleazar was broken and the priestly office transferred to the descendants of Aaron's younger son Ithamar. The Scriptures are completely silent as to the details of this affair; it is not so much as mentioned anywhere. Jud. 20.28 indicates that Phinehas, son of Eleazar, was High Priest in his turn and then no more is recorded until, much later on, we find Eli, of the line of Ithamar, as High Priest in the days of Samuel. Josephus has a little more to say although the source of his information is unknown; he says

that after Phinehas, his descendants Abishua, Bukki and Uzzi were High Priests and then the office passed to Eli who was the first High Priest of the line of Ithamar. Now the days of Eli's youth must have coincided fairly well with the time of Gideon. Eli is represented in the Scripture as an indolent and indifferent High Priest and his sons, his destined successors, irreverent and depraved. One wonders if some "power struggle" within the family of Aaron occurred at or just before the time of Gideon which resulted in the legal line of Eleazar being ousted from Shiloh and the junior line substituted by force and illegally. The reputation of Ephraim generally and the character of the inhabitants of its chief towns, Shechem, Bethel, Shiloh, and so on, was such that almost any kind of roguery could take place. Although Shiloh was the place where the Tabernacle stood for over four hundred years the Lord bitterly reproached the people there for their iniquity and predicted that his judgment would come upon it—as it did in the days of Samuel. *"But go ye now to my place which was in Shiloh"* He said to Jeremiah *"and see what I did to it for the wickedness of my people"* (Jer. 7.12). It was in fact the iniquity of the people and priesthood there in Ephraim that caused the Lord to take away the birthright which in Jacob's day had been given to Joseph, and to award it to Judah, so that Judah became the royal tribe. *"He forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh, the tent which he placed among men . . . he refused the tabernacle of Joseph, and rejected the tribe of Ephraim, and chose the tribe of Judah, the mount Zion which he loved . . . he chose David also his servant"* (Ps. 78. 59-71) What great crime was this which took place in the very place of God's sanctuary; what depth of iniquity was there in the lives of those people and priests in Ephraim which drew forth such condemnation from the Most High? The behaviour of Eli's sons during the boyhood of Samuel (1 Sam. 2.22) of Abimelech and the men of Shechem (Jud. 9) of Micah and his graven images in the very vicinity of Shiloh (Jud. 17) are only three incidents which show just how far gone in the ways of evil were these professed men of God.

Is it then possible that Shiloh had in the days of Gideon fallen into the hands of a faction which made Eli, or perhaps his father, High Priest in defiance of the legal rights of the Eleazar line and that the true High Priest—whether Uzzi or one of his successors, Zerariah or Meraioth, all recorded in 1 Chron. 6 as the legal line from Eleazar although not said to have been High Priests—was compelled to flee into exile? In such case he would most likely cross the border into

Manasseh; the enmity between that tribe and Ephraim would assure him of a welcome and safety, and the Manassites would certainly recognise him as the legal holder of the office. Gideon had already erected an altar in his home village and named it Jehovah-shalom; "God will give peace". Did he now, in the flush of victory, add to his enthusiasm for the abolition of Baal worship a zeal for the service of God in a form which perhaps had not been known at Shiloh for many years past? Did he, in declining the offer of kingship over Israel, dream of a restored legal High Priest of the line of Eleazar, functioning not at Shiloh in Ephraim, but at Ophrah in Manasseh, and is this why he made the ephod?

We do not know. We only know that whatever the motive prompting his establishment of Divine service at the altar he had built, it was doomed to failure. It was not of Divine appointment. Despite all the shortcomings of the sanctuary at Shiloh, it was still the place where the Lord had put His Name. The Ark of the Covenant still reposed within the Most Holy and the mysterious *Shekinah* still illumined that secret apartment with its supernatural light. It was for God, not Gideon, to say when the order of things was to come to an end. And when it did end, it was to Judah, not Manasseh, that the honour went; at Jerusalem, not Ophrah, where the Lord authorised a sanctuary for his name, and Solomon, not Gideon, who in due time was to restore the priestly office to the rightful line of Eleazar.

It is probable that Gideon's fault was over-enthusiasm for God and failure to realise that enthusiasm itself can be a snare if it is not controlled by a scrupulous adherence to the Divine leading. It is not said of him in the case of the ephod, as it was in the case of the expedition, that he sought signs from God that he was doing the right thing. It might well have been that his righteous indignation at the godlessness of Shiloh convinced him that as virtual ruler of the nation he must strike another blow for God, not against external enemies this time but against internal enemies. He underestimated the extent of irreligion which still existed in Israel. In destroying the altar of Baal at Ophrah and setting up in its place an altar to Jehovah; in doing away with the *asherah* and substituting an ephod, he had merely changed the name of the god and left the basic principle untouched. And so idolatry was not completely eliminated in Israel; it was merely driven underground to bide its time for its re-emergence. It was going to require the work of Samuel a century or two later to replace the corrupt and godless priesthood at Shiloh by a new and vigorous administration which would bring all Israel back to a real and living faith.

Nevertheless Gideon did much to arrest Israel's decline into apostasy. He lived forty years after his great victory and during all that forty years, under his administration, the land had rest from enemies, sure sign that in the main God was honoured and the Covenant observed. But it was largely a personal loyalty; "*as soon as Gideon was dead, the children of Israel turned again . . . and made Baal-berith their god, and remembered not the Lord who had delivered them out of the hands of all their enemies on every side*". (ch. 8. 33-39). A new generation arose that knew nothing of the famous deliverance except by the stories told by their grandfathers, and the whole sad experience had to be endured again. So it has been throughout history; no generation seems able to learn from the mistakes of its predecessors; each must learn by actual experience. In their arrogance and self-will, pride in their own abilities and achievements, men will not brook being told what is for their good. They cannot endure the thought that they owe existence and life to a Higher Power and are as yet immature babes, unable to fashion their own lives and steer their own course aright without acceptance of guidance and instruction from on high. The thirtieth chapter of Isaiah presents an eloquent lament on this sad propensity in the hearts of men and its inevitable consequences. The people refuse the word of the Lord and reject His prophets; the Lord intervenes to tell them that in quietness and confidence in him lies their real strength but they will not have him. "*No*" say they "*for we will flee upon horses*" to which the Most High sadly responds "*therefore ye shall indeed flee*". "*We will ride upon the swift*" they claim exultantly, and again, more sadly still, the response "*therefore shall they that pursue you be swift*". There can be no escape from the consequences of their own folly and short sightedness. At the end of it all there is only utter ruin.

But not for ever. Just because man is an immature babe, and is so to the end of this present earthly life, God will not cast him off for ever. The lessons will be learned, and eventually in a further stage of development men will emerge chastened but better for the experience. So, says Isaiah as he continues his strain "*therefore will the Lord wait, that he may be gracious unto you . . . for the Lord is a God of judgment; blessed are all they that wait for him . . . he will be very gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry; when he shall hear it he shall answer thee. And though the Lord give you the bread of affliction and the water of affliction, yet . . . thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it*". Just as the Lord delivered Israel in the days of Gideon when they

repented and cried unto him, so all who turn from their own ways to seek him in sincerity and submission, whether in this life or the next, whether before death or after resurrection, will experience the truth of that saying "he will be very gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry." There will be, there must be, an end to the day of grace and the opportunity of salvation, a time when those who resolutely and in the face of full knowledge choose Baal instead of the Everliving, choose death which is all that Baal can give instead of life which comes only from the Everliving, but that moment does not come until the immature babe has been brought to the full stature of a man fully cognisant of the issues between life and death, between good and evil, between righteousness and unrighteousness, and with clear understanding of the principles involved and the effects of his decision makes his choice. Israel in the

time of the Judges alternated between the true and the false, between life and death, many times, and Gideon was only one of the many Judges who rose up to deliver and bring them back to the right path. They always slipped back again. The coming Age in which the living and the dead will stand before a Divine Deliverer greater by far than Gideon will face a final crisis greater by far than that incursion of Midianites in that far-off day, for Christ is set to destroy all evil, not for a limited time as then when other nations eventually ravaged the land of Israel again, but for all time. And with the end of evil will come the end of evil-doers; at the end of the Messianic Age it is going to be gloriously true that *"in the name of Jesus every knee shall bow and every tongue confess, that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."*

The End

THE POWER OF HIS RESURRECTION

"But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you" (Rom. 8. 11). The resurrection of Jesus brought strength and unity to the Early Church. Following the crucifixion, the disciples were as dead men. All that they had toiled and hoped for had suddenly vanished and they were plunged into gloom and despair. He whom they had trusted to *restore the glories of Israel, lay dead in the tomb, crucified as a criminal.*

When Christ rose from the dead, He gave to his followers new life which they had never known before. From being frightened, ignorant and powerless, they became happy, full of spiritual vitality and imbued with a faith which weathered many a storm of persecution. They were, in the words of Peter in Acts 1. 22, witnesses of his resurrection. The change which took place in the early disciples is perhaps the strongest historical evidence for the resurrection. The power which had wrought so great a miracle as the raising from the dead of the Son of God became available for the spread of the Gospel by his followers. As we trace the story of the Church, as recorded by Luke in Acts of the Apostles, the effect of the power upon individual disciples and the Christian communion as a whole is often quite striking. There had not been or ever could be a "religious faith" anything like that which surrounded the Gospel of Christ. It was quite different from the philosophies of men and religions of the east. They were based upon

intellectual knowledge, argument and ethics. Even the members of Jewish religion never enjoyed the personal relationship with God which they should have done. In the church of Jesus Christ, however, there was a faith based on revelation and power from God. Whence came these things and why? What was it that was so different in these men and women that the eternal Creator of the Universe should confer so great a privilege?

God was able to work in and through the early Christians because they had learned from Jesus the doctrine of self-denial and complete dependence upon God. The teachings of men, whether scientific, philosophical or religious, have always advanced the doctrine of "self". Self-culture, self-esteem and self-expression are the modern counterparts of the same idea. Jesus had taught his disciples to be meek and contrite in heart, trusting God for everything, whether it was their daily bodily needs or the virtues to be developed by their characters.

Such a condition of mind is the result of a new relationship to God, based on redemption through Jesus, and maintained by constant prayer with God. By these things the resurrection power of Jesus Christ was given to his first followers, and to every true disciple from then until now. Prayer played a very big part in the Master's life, and He frequently resorted to communion with his Father in order that He might know God's will. When faced with a crisis, He resorted to fellowship with his Father and therein lay the success of his ministry. (Luke 6. 12; 9. 29; Mark 9. 29).

The history of the activities of the Early Church reveals a group of people who had learned to apply the lessons of prayer taught by Jesus. From the first chapter we learn that they *"all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication..."* (v. 14). After Pentecost the same attitude is reflected in chapter two, *"And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers."* (v. 42). In chapter three we catch a glimpse of Peter and John going up to worship at the Temple at "the hour of prayer". In chapter four we are given considerable information about a prayer meeting in the Early Church, and so great was their intercession that the very building where they met was shaken. The passage concludes with these words *"The multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul; neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common. And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all."* (Acts 4. 32, 33). Later, deacons were chosen in order that the apostles might give themselves "to prayer and to the ministry of the word." Still further, Luke relates how Peter was released from prison as the result of a prayer meeting in John Mark's home.

All of these examples of the early Christians at prayer, after the Holy Spirit was out-poured at Pentecost, were accompanied by a display of Divine power operating through God's people. On some occasions it was the power of the Gospel unto salvation and at others, the ministry of healing. It was not the educated, wealthy and influential in Israel through whom God worked, although He did not despise their gifts. Thus when men of learning like Paul and Luke gave themselves to his service, God used their abilities to the furtherance of his Kingdom. Throughout his epistles Paul repeatedly exhorted those to whom he wrote to "pray without ceasing".

Coupled with this power through prayer came a unity of purpose and action hitherto unknown among the disciples. They were men of different upbringing and outlook; some were rugged, others polished but God had not looked at the outward appearance when selecting the foundation stones of the Church. Rapidly these men and women from all walks of life were welded into a united band by a common purpose and energised by a single source of power. They preached the same gospel of Jesus, crucified and resurrected. This was the "oneness" for which Jesus had so earnestly prayed before his death recorded in John 17. It was an exhibition of the love in

action about which he had so often taught them. It was the love which showed that they had passed "from death unto life" (1 John 3. 14).

The unity of the early Christians broke down sectarian and social cliques; it ignored national and racial barriers. Within the community of the first believers were Jews and Gentiles, rulers and slaves, scholars and peasants. They regarded each other not by their former associations but as fellow disciples, and thereby received strength through their common bond. Repeated exhortations to love each other as brethren in Christ were necessary and even then occasional failure in their unity is reflected by such passages as 1 Corinthians 1. In his second letter to the same church Paul wrote *"For the love of Christ controls us, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. And he died for all, that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised. From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view;"* (2 Cor. 5. 14-16 R.S.V.). To-day, that lesson in the Christian Church still needs to be learned. The spirit of Christ, given free course in the lives of his brethren must completely abolish all feelings of hurt pride and retaliation. Personal opinion and ambition must be subordinate to the common good, "in honour preferring one another". Natural interests are crucified in order that Christ might live within us. Such an attitude towards other Christians and our fellow men in the world, is not developed by trying to be virtuous, for that just cannot be done. Human nature breaks down under the strain of inner selfishness and outward circumstances. It is only as Christ is given control of our hearts, to provide us with the guidance and strength for each daily experience, that we can be "more than conquerors" over our weaknesses and desires. So the apostle Paul learned from the Lord *"My grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness."* Therefore was Paul able to say *"Most gladly therefore will I glory in my infirmities that the power of Christ may rest upon me."* (2 Cor. 12. 9). Our bodily weakness should not hinder us from obeying the Divine will, for we have a reservoir of energy in Heaven which is sufficient for every service for God.

Perhaps there are few more outstanding examples of this than Peter on the day of Pentecost when he stood up as spokesman on behalf of the rest of the disciples. He had been a coward, thrice denying his Master on the day of the Trial. However in the power of the Spirit, he became a new man who many times faced persecution and death for Jesus. The outward manifestation of

the Holy Spirit through the first disciples was in their witness to the world. By their preaching and healing they continued the work which Jesus began. That power has never changed, and *"the God that lived in the apostles' day is still the same to-day."* The only alteration has been in the faith of the believers. It still requires men and women to venture forth, with implicit trust, so that the Lord will honour his promises "even until the end of the world" (Matt. 28. 20).

"Christian"; the name bespeaks of one who follows the Lord Jesus. Jesus trod a pathway wherein He preached the Gospel. He did not just do it now and again in the convenient phrase "as He had opportunity". His whole life was bound up in the announcement of the Good News of the Kingdom of Heaven. The first Christian community did the same thing. The apostles were hardly eager to go to the Samaritans and Gentiles, but by various means the Lord led them forth from Jerusalem unto the uttermost parts of the earth. Generation after generation through the ages their labours have continued often at the cost of martyrdom. Many have been inspired to leave the comfort and security of their homes in order to blaze the trail overseas. No less have been those remaining in their normal home and work who have sought to let their light shine. We, of this generation, must ask ourselves, what are we doing to maintain the faithful witness of the ages? Are we exempt from this service in this day and age? Can we run for the prize according to a new set of rules?

WHAT THINK YE OF CHRIST ?

Bethlehem cannot account for Jesus. Do mangers produce Messiahs? Things bring forth after their kind—this is the primal law of Genesis. It is true that genius often arises from lowliest station, and the great human powers seem to make way for themselves through narrowest surroundings. The seed of the oak is small, the source of the Amazon insignificant, and great men have usually had lowly cradles. But here is more than genius or greatness. What if out of the acorn should come in a single season a forest of Lebanon; what if out of the Amazon springs should come a river of gold?

Consider the meaning of this fact, *"that from the lowliest of peasants sprang the soul that has swayed the mightiest intellects of the world."* The moving powers of the eighteen centuries have been themselves moved by Jesus Christ.

Consider another related fact, *"that out of the most materialistic of religions came the most spiritual of teachers."* Judaism clung with almost

The power of his resurrection is at present confined to the immediate associates of Jesus, those who long to know him and share his sufferings. Their resurrection now is pictured for us in the words of the father in the parable of the prodigal son when that son returned to his family, *"this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found."* Such is the love of God for those who repent from their sin and become his children. The same thought was expressed by Jesus as recorded in John 5. 25 *"The hour is coming, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God and they that hear shall live;"* He went on to speak of an age yet to come when the power which was to bring him from death, and which was to empower his disciples, would bring everyone back from death; for He said *"... the hour is coming in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice and shall come forth;"* It was a wonderful moment to which Jesus looked forward, to the day when all the conditions brought about by sin, through accident, disease and war would be removed for ever, and the mighty power of God would be exerted to give life to all who had ever fallen asleep. So writes the apostle once more, *"But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved) and raised us up with him, and made us sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus."* Eph. 2. 4-7 (R.S.V.)

ferocious tenacity to external signs and symbols. Many things in the Old Testament are concessions to this national and racial materialism. An altar of stone or bronze, a literal sacrifice of slain beast or bird, a visible tent or temple with a mercy-seat on which Jehovah was supposed to descend and sit—these were to the Jews essential to any religious life. He rebuked that aspiration with unswerving courage, and died because He taught sordid materialised souls to worship in the temple of the heart only.

Consider, also, *"that out of an age which exalted power as supreme, came one who exalted love as supreme in God and in man."* The symbol of Rome was the rapacious, unwearied eagle. Military virtues were supreme. The Jews wanted a conquering general as Messiah. Out of such environment and atmosphere came One who exalted the feminine virtues, and proclaimed that the meek should inherit the earth.

And as Bethlehem could not produce Christ, it could not confine Christ. (Selected).



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

BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

Vol. 49, No. 6

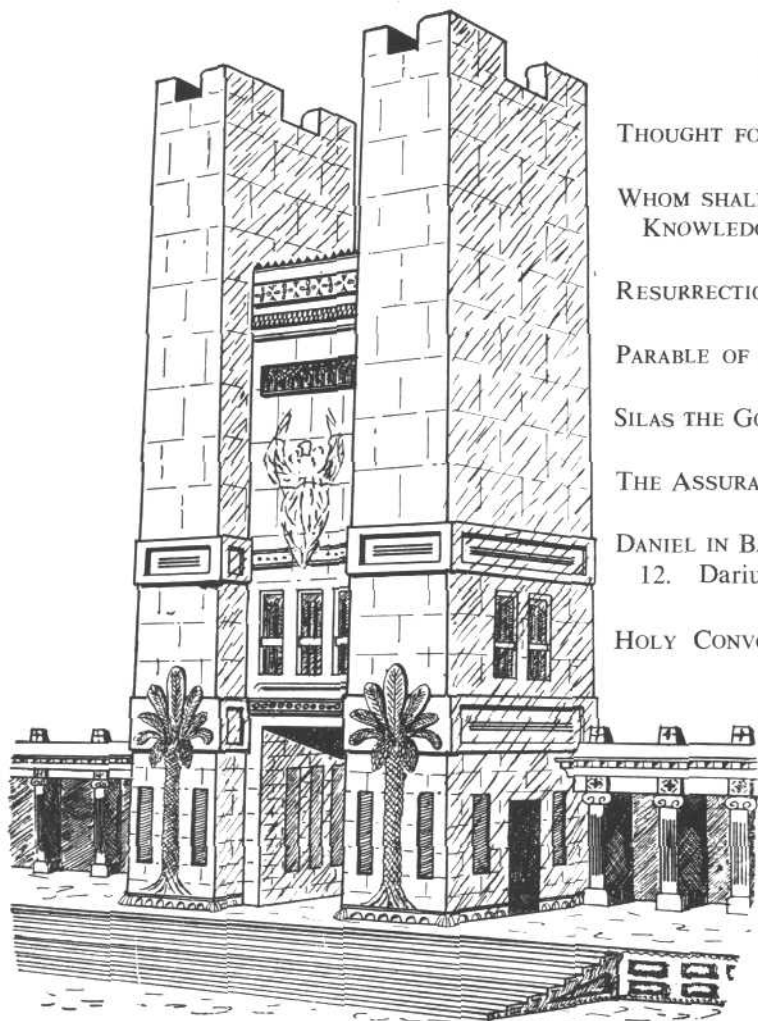
NOV./DEC. 1972

Published November 1st

Next Issue January 1st

CONTENTS

THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH	122
WHOM SHALL HE TEACH KNOWLEDGE?	123
RESURRECTION POWER IN JESUS ...	128
PARABLE OF UNFORGIVING SERVANT	130
SILAS THE GOOD COMPANION	133
THE ASSURANCE OF THE ASCENSION	136
DANIEL IN BABYLON 12. Darius the Mede	139
HOLY CONVOCATION	142



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

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

Published by
Bible Fellowship Union
11 Lyncroft Gardens, Hounslow,
Middlesex, England

Bible Study Monthly

FOUNDED 1924

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

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

Communications and donations to Bible Fellowship Union, 11 Lyncroft Gardens, Hounslow, Middlesex, England.
 Secretary & Treasurer: B. G. DUMONT (Hounslow) Editorial & Publishing: A. O. HUDSON (Welling)

Thought for the Month

Christmas is imminent and with it the usual blatant commercial exploitation of what for nearly fifteen hundred years has been regarded as a purely Christian festival. Traditionally the date of the birth of Jesus, present-day research has established the fact that the true date was in early October, but the old tradition still lingers and, for Christians, will probably never die. Neither is there any real reason why it should; the end of the old year, the beginning of the new, the point at which the nights begin to get shorter and the days longer, is surely the time of all times for the good fellowship and merrymaking, the forming of good resolutions for the future, which really makes Christmas what it is.

All the same, say a few worthy folk who are sticklers for that which is correct: Christmas was originally a pagan festival adopted into the Church. Let us away with it and refuse to recognise it! Let us take a stand for truth and cleanliness by refusing to subscribe to the honouring of a day which had its origin in the uncleanness of paganism! Sounds logical, put like that; "be ye separate, touch not the unclean thing" as Isaiah said in another connection. It is certainly true that December 25th has been a Christian festival only since the 3rd Century. Prior to that it was a Roman holiday devoted to pagan rituals. There is no doubt that the organised Christian church took over the occasion together with the general stock-in-trade of paganism when it became the State religion of the Empire at that time. But the story is even earlier. Long before Abraham, the same feast on the same date was a feature of the idolatrous faiths of Babylon and Sumeria, in honour of the Babylonian god Marduk, and much of what is claimed for Christ in these days was then attributed to him. The Yule log, the Christmas tree, the roast boar, many of the trappings of modern Christmas were present even then, a striking

example of the persistence of tradition. And always there was in evidence the spirit of gladness that the dark winter was coming to an end, the tide had turned, and summer days would soon be here again. It is this fact, that Christmas comes precisely at the winter solstice, when the receding sun turns and begins to come back, that has led some to surmise that the origin of the whole thing is just this natural change for the better in the annual seasons.

But before going with the iconoclasts and repudiating Christmas as a pagan festival improper for Christians let us enquire more deeply into its probable origin. What great event in the dim and archaic past gave occasion for this annual celebration which has lingered so long under so many forms? It is not difficult to find such an event; it is enshrined in the story of the Flood. The dated indications in the Genesis account show that the Flood commenced forty days before the winter solstice and the initial cataclysm continued solidly for forty days. At the end of that time, on the day which is now December 25th, the surging waters from the sea ceased to flow, and the colossal atmospheric disturbance created by the gigantic tidal waves from the south which caused the Flood died away, and there was a great calm. Noah knew that the crisis had passed, the old world had ended and the new begun—even though months must elapse before the water was gone; just as three months must elapse after Christmas before spring comes. But the tide had turned and he knew now that he would assuredly step out into a world cleansed from sin and start afresh. There, surely, was the first Christmas, and if that be so, we can forget the later pagan associations and celebrate it as did Noah, a symbol of the close of an old sinful dying world and of the certainty that a new one, in which dwelleth righteousness, is at the door.

WHOM SHALL HE TEACH KNOWLEDGE ?

The pursuit of knowledge brings out at once all that is noblest and all that is most debased in human nature. Men have devoted their lives to the never-ending quest, and their unselfish labours, though oft-times bringing no material regard, have enriched the lives of their fellows. Yet in many instances that same search for truth, in whatever sphere it may be, has produced pedants, recluses, eccentrics; and demonstrated time and time again how inadequate is the capacity of man's mind in his present fallen condition to preserve that proper balance which will enable him to profit aright from the things which he learns. How many there are, specialists in some branch of learning, whose minds have become so centred around their absorbing passion that in every other phase of human life and experience they are helpless and ignorant?

This is the subtlety of knowledge—its appeal which calls to the mind to forsake all else and follow it into the trackless wilderness. The human mind seeks to learn, and every vista of an unknown land invites to fresh fields of exploration, let the end be what it may be. It is this urge in human nature to discover the "hidden things" which can be of such immeasurable value in the search for Truth, and yet this same urge if not restrained and controlled by the spirit of a sound mind can very easily be the means of losing our appreciation of spiritual teaching in a slavish devotion to the letter of the Word. And it is true that "*the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life*" (2 Cor. 3:6). The people that for fourteen hundred years had been the custodian of the Divine oracles and enjoyed a knowledge of God and His works shared by no other nation on the face of the earth were, despite that knowledge, unready to receive Jesus when He came and even incapable of understanding the nature of his mission, of which all their Prophets and holy men had spoken for centuries past.

Right at the outset we must realise that the appeal of knowledge is to the natural mind. The acquisition of facts and the deduction of conclusions from those facts becomes a mental exercise which is the more attractive in proportion as our intellect is naturally clear and keen. The interminable theological controversies of earlier centuries when Christian divines launched voluminous treatises upon a long-suffering community and brought all the weight of argument and oratory against their opponents was very evidently no product of the Holy Spirit's influence.

Here was clearly the result of men seeking to apply the standards of this world in their handling of the Word of God, and small wonder it is that those controversies ended so often in rancour, hate, persecution, banishment, and not infrequently the shedding of blood. The work of the Spirit does not produce such fruits as these, notwithstanding the admitted sincerity of many of those who thus sought to establish the doctrines of the Church upon a sure foundation. The very fact of their having recourse to worldly standards demanded the use of worldly methods, and that in turn brought forth a harvest which could only be according to the things of this world.

In every Christian communion which has ever existed, the seeds of the same spirit have been present—and woe betide us, both as a community and as individuals, if we allow those seeds to blossom and bear fruit. The most terrible word which Jesus ever uttered to the Pharisees—"*The Kingdom of God is taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof*" (Matt. 21:43)—is written anew in letters of fire across the horizon whenever a Christian community veils its eyes from the glory of God and turns back to the standards of material reason and argument. A group of believers which has become the custodian of Divine revelation must hold that revelation in all spiritual understanding and by the illumination of the Holy Spirit. When because of weariness by the way, or the desire for novelty, or the self-seeking of men, the Spirit's guidance gives place to the fallacies of human argument, not only does all forward progress cease, but the Truth already held becomes dim, and finally the angels once again look down upon a city in which the light of a candle no more is seen, and the voice of the bridegroom and the bride is heard no more at all (Rev. 18:23).

It cannot be denied, moreover, that in a community where spirituality is lacking, recourse to intellectual knowledge is invariably made to remedy the deficiency and hold the group together. Insistence upon the outward features of the Divine Plan to the exclusion of any spiritual understanding of them is a danger signal to the "Watchers." A dogmatic assertion of the formula of belief which must be accepted to gain salvation, with claims of Divine authority and threats of dire results to heretics, coupled often with some feverish outward activity to keep both mind and hands occupied, so that no opportunity or occasion is given for "dwelling in the secret place of the Most

High" is the sure sign of a church system from which the Spirit has departed. Appeals for loyalty to a past reformer or founder of the particular community is a confession of weakness which heralds the disintegration of that movement—an admission that the belief and work which once brought that community of people together has lost its power to retain them—a rejection of the promise made so long ago that the Holy Spirit would at all times "guide you into all truth" (John 16.13).

But the Truth never loses its power. The "meat in due season" provided for the "household of faith" in their time of necessity remains as vital as ever. God, who reveals his Truth from time to time, by the ministry of his appointed pastors, in great times of illumination and revelation, does not suffer that work to be vitiated and nullified by reason of the hardness of men's hearts. In those seasons of quietude which lie between the appearance of men upon whom the Lord has put his Spirit, although the love of many may and does wax cold, although a thousand may fall, and ten thousand may fall, yet the power of the Truth is as all-sufficient as ever, and those who have learned well the lesson that this wonderful knowledge of the Divine Plan which has made all the difference in their lives can be received and can be retained only by spiritual perception and by continuance in Christ's discipleship, will realise its abiding power in their lives. Their minds are buttressed against the assaults of the Evil One, and the hosts of wickedness of which Paul speaks in Eph. 6. 10-18. They can continue laying down their lives in the service of Christ, knowing of a surety that their labour is not in vain in the Lord. They, in a spiritual sense, stand with the Lamb on Mount Zion, singing the new song which no others can learn.

Our growth in knowledge, therefore, must have as its background the wisdom from above, that wisdom which is first pure, then peaceable, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy (Jas. 3.17). There is much in these words which gives food for thought. Purity and peaceableness are essential characteristics of the wisdom which comes from above. The fruit of righteousness is "sown in peace of them that make peace" (Jas. 3.18). It is impossible to ignore the stress which the Scriptures lay upon this characteristic of peaceableness as an attribute of all that has to do with the development of the New Creation. "Where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work" (Jas. 3.16). Even though we live in an atmosphere of fightings within and fears without, and our calling is one which involves a daily conflict with opposing forces, it yet remains true that the inward guidance we

receive from above and the outworking of that guidance in our daily lives is distinguished and branded by that peace of God, which, passing all understanding, is to garrison our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4.7 Weymouth). This wisdom is to be without partiality and without hypocrisy. How many of us can truthfully claim to be impartial in our dealings with our brother? Individual preferences and the influence of our own personal predilections for one or another divergent view or teaching oftentimes brings in a spirit of partiality which is totally foreign to the Spirit, and is the cause of schisms and divisions in the Body such as the Apostle Paul condemns in no uncertain manner in 1 Cor. 3. 1-14. One of the hardest lessons for any one of us to learn is that of impartiality in those things in which it is right for us to be impartial. Yet it is a lesson—perhaps the lesson above all others—which must be learned and learned well; for the first essential of one to whom is committed the task of judging fellow-beings is that of impartiality, and nothing less than this is to be our lot in the future Age, if faithful (1 Cor. 6. 2, 3; Matt. 19.28; Rev. 20.14).

It is this recollection, that we, in accordance with the Divine will, are being trained and fitted by God himself for the stupendous work of showing humanity the way to perfection in the Millennial Age that brings home to us the importance of knowledge, the necessity of a definite and clear-cut understanding of the manner in which God has worked in the past, what He is doing in the present, and the glories which the future holds in reservation. To be co-labourers with him it is good that we should seek to know that which is ready to be revealed, for although it is perfectly true that our entire submission to him makes it possible for the Holy Spirit to work in our hearts and lives to bring us closer to him, it is only as we seek to come to an appreciation of the whys and wherefores of Divine dealings with men that we can stand before the Throne as did Isaiah, and when the question comes, answer as he did, "Here am I, send me".

The primary purpose of doctrinal teaching then must be as a servant to our consecration and to enable Christians to serve God intelligently in the place to which He has appointed them. It is not given to all to understand in every detail the arguments of Paul or the types and shadows of the Old Testament. There must always be many who will receive at the ministry of faithful under-shepherds the studied conclusions which their own mental powers cannot reason out for themselves. Indeed, were this not so, there would be no place in the Church for the pastors and teachers of 1 Cor. 12. 18, neither would it have been said of certain elders that "they watch for your souls, as they that

must give an account" (Heb. 13, 17). The entire Church on earth is likened to a body which has many members, not all having the same office or even the same adaptability, but all, very definitely, having need one of another.

Knowledge then is necessary if we would serve our Lord Jesus acceptably as "his witnesses". Knowledge, attained not merely by the reading of books or listening to a favourite preacher or expositor, but that knowledge which can be attained only by reverent, prayerful study of the Scriptures and dispassionate discussion with others who also have the same ideal before them. In a rapidly changing world our knowledge of God's Plan and the outworking of his purposes must keep pace with the development of contemporary events and the problems which face the world today. It can be of no conceivable utility to remain rooted in the outlook of the nineteenth century when the generation to whom we witness is of the twentieth. It becomes vitally necessary, therefore, that in order to be effective ambassadors for Christ to this generation, we must, standing firmly in the light of Truth which has been revealed, so relate that Truth to the world in which we live that its full and satisfying explanation of every problem that confronts man today can be shown up with the visible impress of "Truth now due".

Finally, it must be realised that the purpose of God is to bring all men eventually to a full knowledge of his Truth, and that an entire Age has been set aside to accomplish this stupendous work of sealing every man with a heart appreciation of the Divine principles in creation and an intelligent understanding of God's attributes and character. The ultimate reason for the permission of evil is that mankind might learn, by the knowledge which is gained by experience, the bitter fruits and exceeding sinfulness of sin and the beneficent results of righteousness. Since this is the declared purpose of God for the human race in the days of the Kingdom, should it not be clear that we, who have tasted in advance of the powers of the Age to come (Heb. 6.5), and who stand before men today as representatives and exponents of the new order of things shortly to be ushered in, must make progress in that same knowledge even now. Hence our very appreciation of the fact that we are Christ's ambassadors should make us diligent to learn and understand the writings of the Apostles and Prophets that we might be armed with knowledge.

By what road do we attain this desirable condition? There are many who have set out to learn the things that relate to God's Plan and in their search have come to diverse ends, but have not found what they sought. Some have been deceived by the specious arguments of men out to justify a

theory, or are beguiled by the glitter of catchwords and trite phrases. So many there are who "*professing themselves wise, became fools*" (Rom. 1.11) and whilst still deluding themselves into a belief that they are seeking the heavenly wisdom, in point of fact are delving ever deeper into that other wisdom which is "*earthly, sensual, devilish*." (James 3.15). It is necessary, therefore, that a clear understanding of the manner in which the knowledge of Divine Truth comes to us is kept before our mental vision.

Now the very first principle which must be rooted in our minds in this connection is that Truth and the knowledge which sanctifies does not come upon the mind suddenly without previous preparation. The Holy Spirit in Old Testament days acted mechanically upon men's minds who "*spoke and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit*" (2 Pet. 1.21). But God does not deal thus with the House of Sons. For them it must be in very truth "*first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear*" (Mark 4.28). To each one of us must first come the time that He "*begat us with the Word of Truth*" (James 1.18), when as babes in Christ we can imbibe but the milk of the Word. It is in the after days when the early lessons have been learned that the mind is prepared for a deeper and perhaps more definite understanding of Divine Truth. And are we not all witnesses that this process continues throughout life, and that individually it is true of each one of us that the "*path of the righteous is as the early morning light, which shineth more and more brightly until the height of noonday*" (Prov. 4. 18, Leeser). There will be many crudities of thought and misapprehensions of the Divine character and purposes to be seen in a better light and thus have greater power in our lives as time goes on. Happy are those disciples whose minds are flexible enough to allow this moulding of thought and understanding to continue throughout life under the hallowed direction of God's Holy Spirit.

This does not preclude the coming of a revelation of Truth, perhaps at the mouth of some human instrument in the Lord's hand, which dispels as in a moment doubts and perplexities which had troubled and distressed in the past. The point to remember is that such a sudden revelation can be efficacious only when the mind has been previously prepared and is ready to receive it. Nicodemus was shown the light, but he was not ready, and the light was darkness to him. But to Peter, prepared by long years of waiting and watching for "He that should come" there broke forth in an instant that cry which has echoed through the ages: "*Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God*". Knowledge and wisdom such as characterises the disciples of Christ must be a

long steady growth, seasoned to the assaults which will be made upon it and able to withstand all the machinations of the Evil One. The gourd which sheltered Jonah grew up in a night, but it also perished in a night, unable to withstand the shrivelling heat of the noonday sun. Rather let our knowledge grow as does the palm, reaching straight up to heaven and taking root in the deeper levels of the earth where alone can be found that water which is essential to its sustenance: slow of development, but able at length to withstand the fury of the elements and bear fruit which shall be for the life of mankind.

Thus has it always been that a great reformer has arisen only and always when a people are ready for the message. The Reformation came, not because Martin Luther alone saw the light, but because throughout the length and breadth of Christendom men and women were sighing and crying for release from the thralldom in which they were held, and when he stood up to voice truths which had long been hidden, a myriad hearts responded because it was the message for which they had been waiting. So, later in the Age, when in the fulness of time a word went through Christendom which dissolved the grosser elements of mediaeval theology and opened a vista of glorious salvation for "whosoever will" of all men, a salvation which included and harmonised the earthly with the heavenly promises of Scripture, a wave of new life swept across the Christian world.

It must therefore be clearly seen that Truth comes by revelation, at the hand of chosen messengers, at crucial times in the history of the Church. It is in the fulness of time, as it were, "all men are in expectation" that the Divine Word comes illuminating Christian belief and doctrine with a radiance brighter than ever before, and pointing the way not only to aspects of Truth not previously understood, but also to the work which is to be done among God's people in consequence of that illumination. For with every fresh step in the Divine revelation comes a correspondingly responsibility in the Divine service. Hence every great reform or advance in Christian thought is accompanied also by great outward activity and an increased stimulation in the proclamation of the things of God and his Kingdom.

But in between times, after one reformer has finished his work and his course and ere the next one has arisen up to carry the work of God a step farther, there must not be stagnation. The community which ceases to advance in Truth will shortly begin to recede. The multiplicity of denominations who today hold tenaciously to relics of teachings of the Dark Ages are witnesses to the failure of so many to live up to the spirit of their revered leaders. Although the message for

the time may have been given, and its chief exponent be laid aside in death; although the impetus to spiritual life and knowledge afforded by that message may transcend all expectation, yet the community which has thus been carried on to a higher level of spiritual understanding, must continue to progress into a full appreciation of that new view of Truth which is before it—else the coming of a further revelation of Truth finds them unprepared, unready, and like many of old, "*knowing not the time of their visitation*" (Luke 19.44).

There is, then, much scope for careful, reverent study of the Scriptures and free discussion within the framework of revealed Truth. This study does not involve an endless wandering over the pages of the Book with no object in view save the discovery of novelties and new interpretations. Neither does it imply a discarding of belief already well settled and grounded, and built in to the Christian character. Rather does it denote an intense appreciation of the manner in which we have been led in the pathway of Truth and a determination to continue in that pathway until all our seeking and meditation and expectation is swallowed up in the glorious reality which is the end of the way. It is not sufficient that we once heard the word of life—not sufficient that at some time in the past we accepted this outline of belief as representing the Divine Word to us. If we would keep the knowledge of such things fresh and vivid in our minds there must be continual study and discussion, a re-examination of the evidences, a reconsideration of possible objections, "*that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto every good work*" (2 Tim. 3. 16, 17).

Then too there must be a practical application of the Christian principle of tolerance—a much abused word, perhaps more so than any other attribute of the true disciple's character. For tolerance does not denote a spirit of "peace-at-any-price", nor a slurring over of principles in order that quietude may prevail, nor an ignoring of true progress in the knowledge of the truth in order that the circle of associates may be widened. Tolerance is an admission that all who are Christ's disciples are alike searchers for truth; that each must in some manner differ from his fellows in his capacity for perception of the Divine mysteries, or in the rapidity of his progress toward the light; that all are equally prone to make mistakes. Thus there will be developed a very real spirit of brotherhood which, while standing firmly for the principle of personal conviction in the perception and understanding of the Truth, is prepared to extend the same liberty to others who are recognised as fellow-heirs of the grace of God. The truest evidence of Christian tolerance is willing-

ness to learn of others as well as to impart knowledge to them.

Thus may fellowship within the community be founded upon a basis of mutual esteem and respect, a basis upon which growth in knowledge and association in service can proceed unchecked. The voice of the Shepherd can be heard in that hallowed atmosphere speaking to each one through every other one, and the knowledge of His Will, which alone can bless and sanctify our lives, will influence the heart of each and bind all together in a fellowship as enduring as it is Christ-like. Nothing less than this can be a fulfilment of the Saviour's prayer: "*I will . . . that they may be one . . . as we are one*". Nothing short of this, the Divine ideal, can possibly be becoming in us as his disciples.

While we yet tabernacle in the flesh, with all

the limitations this material world imposes upon us, the understanding of truth we have will always be as the shadows of images. Paul realised that although abounding in visions and revelations more than them all, he yet would only know "in part" until that which is perfect is come. So with us. In all our searching for knowledge and in all our progress towards a clearer and more definite understanding of heavenly things, we must ever keep in mind that our vision of these things will be formed and coloured according to our own mental capacity and the environment in which we live, and move, and have our being. It is only as we put on more and more of the mind of Christ that we are able so to view the Divine mysteries that we can truthfully say, like Job of old, "*I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth Thee*".

NO SELF-GLORY

"And when they arrived, they gathered the church together and declared all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles." (Acts 14. 28).

What is so extraordinary about this report made by Paul and Barnabas of their missionary trip is that they did not tell the Church of Antioch all that *they* had done and how *they* had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. They gave God all the glory! There is not the slightest trace of self-glory in this report. They could have recounted some exciting experiences that had befallen them, for they had travelled through Cyprus, crossed the arm of the Mediterranean Sea which separates Cyprus from the mainland, travelled through the provinces of Pamphylia, Pisidia, and into Galacia. They had founded churches and ran into the opposition of Jews who resented the success the two missionaries had among the Gentiles. The opposition grew into violence "*against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district.*" (Acts 13.50).

Later, hearing of an attempt to stone them in Iconium, after their preaching of the gospel had borne fruit, "*they fled to Lystra and Derbe*". More wonderful things happened when Paul healed a

man crippled from birth and the heathen crowd, thinking they were gods come down in likeness of men, wanted to offer sacrifices to them. With great difficulty the two missionaries restrained the multitude from offering up the oxen.

Following this, the Jewish leaders again stirred up the people and seized Paul, stoned him, and left him for dead. God, however, spared the Apostle's life and the two men reached "home" in Antioch. Oh, what a story they could have told the brethren, with themselves as the heroes in their adventures, but they did not! They said God was the one who had done wonderful things.

What a lesson for us whenever we begin to think God cannot accomplish His purposes without us. That which is of greatest import is not what we are doing, but what God is doing with us. Unless it is God working through us, all our activities come to nothing. We are his instruments to achieve his purposes, and only as we yield ourselves to him, will his blessing be upon our efforts to serve him.

"Therefore, as it is written, 'Let him who boasts, boast of the Lord.'" (1 Cor. 1.31).

(Cicero "Berean News")

"I do not believe that a Christian who wishes to make his faith real needs anything except Christ's understanding of God, a mind that is not afraid to think, and a love of the brethren which comes from his knowledge of how he himself needs a Saviour."

Dick Sheppard

King Solomon has been called "the wisest fool in Judaism" and the appellation is an apt one. Solomon commenced his reign full of promise, but with all his wisdom he left the kingdom plunged into idolatry, and that was eventually its undoing.

RESURRECTION POWER IN JESUS

"Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection and the life"—John 11.25.

Resurrection power resides in our Lord Jesus because in the Divine plan He was to redeem the world by his sacrifice and consequently restore it. This included not merely an awakening from death, but also such vitalisation as would overcome the dying processes and ultimately bring the revived one up to the full perfection of being *originally enjoyed by our first parents in Eden*, forfeited because of disobedience under the sentence, "The soul that sinneth it shall die." (Ezek. 18.4). This is the most important feature of all the plan of God revealed to us, and if we discern it clearly it assists us in the understanding of every other feature of that plan. We must see that death is the *absence of life, the loss of life—that it is a penalty upon our race because we are unworthy of life.*

All references to a future life imply a redemption from the sentence which came upon us because of original sin. The cancellation of the sentence, however, does not restore mankind, but it does remove the barrier to man's restitution to all that was lost. Hence it is that our Saviour's work is to follow. First, it is to be a redemptive work: the redemption was accomplished at his First Advent—though He had used this Gospel age as the period in which to accept some of the redeemed ones as his Church, under him as their Head, to be his associates in the work of restitution which belongs to the next age.

Second, restitution is to be our Lord's work at his Second Advent, when the Church will have been selected, prepared, and associated with him in glory. Then the full work of the redemption will be *granted to mankind—not by raising them from the dead to absolute perfection in an instant, but by first awakening them from death, and then, under the disciplines and instructions of the Millennial age, lifting them, in harmony with their own wills and co-operation, step by step, out of sin and death condition into life, as they may respond to these mercies and opportunities.*

The words of the text, although specially applicable to our Lord in the future, at the beginning of his Millennial reign, when He will abolish death by lifting mankind out of its power, and out of the weaknesses that are associated with the fallen condition, nevertheless were applicable also in some degree at the First Advent. True, our Lord's own sacrifice was not finished until He

died at Calvary, and the sacrifices of the members of his body would not be finished for centuries, but when our Lord at thirty years of age made a full consecration of himself to do the Father's will, to lay down his life, the Divine plan which He there undertook to carry out included all these subsequent features—the completion of his own sacrifice and that of his completed body, the Church.

That our heavenly Father so regarded his sacrifice was evidenced by the impartation of the Holy Spirit, which anointing upon him constituted him the Messiah, the Christ. Hence, since our Lord had never abrogated that covenant of consecration, since he was still in line with the Covenant, and since the Father still so recognised him, it was proper for him to think and act and speak from that standpoint, which not only looked down to the end of his own course with faith, but also looked down to the end of this Gospel age with confidence, and to the end of the Millennial age with assurance that all the good purposes of God would finally be accomplished in and through him. From this standpoint, therefore, He said, "I am the resurrection and the life." He knew that the sacrificial work He had undertaken would secure his being the Life-Giver to the world, and that in the exercise of that right He would raise up not only from the tomb, but completely out of death conditions up to perfection, all who would come unto the Father through him—all who would have the desire of heart to return to loving obedience to the Creator.

This present lesson follows the Sermon on the Mount—the thought evidently in the minds of Matthew and Luke in thus arranging matters being to show that He who had given wonderful teachings on the mount was fully attested by the miraculous powers shown to reside in him. He had returned to Capernaum, the home city of Peter and others, and now the home city of Jesus, since He had been spurned and rejected at Nazareth. Now our Lord, the disciples and quite a multitude of followers were approaching the little city of Nain, when forth from the gateway of the city came a funeral procession, a widowed mother and mourning friends, pall-bearers, and a bier or litter on which lay a dead young man, the widow's only son. Our Lord was touched with compassion as he saw the widow's tears, and He said to her, "Weep not,"; the pall-bearers stood still, and Jesus touched the bier and said "Young man, I

say unto thee arise." The dead man stood up and began to speak. In a manufactured story it would be considered the proper thing to suppose that the widow fell at the Lord's feet, praised him in a loud voice, and that the whole multitude would join in acclaiming him; but in the simple narrative of our lesson, "there came fear upon all"—a realisation that God was very near to them as represented in the power of Jesus. The multitude glorified God, not with loud hosannas, but with a reverential appreciation of the fact that a great Prophet, a great Teacher, was in their midst, and that God was thus with him, saying, "God hath visited his people."

Their anticipations were correct; Jesus was the great Prophet, the representative of the Father and of His favour. And yet how long the test of faith! How long the period necessary for the raising up of the members of the body of Christ, and until the Father's plan should be fully developed and the times of restitution ushered in at the Second Advent of the Lord. Our Redeemer's work of healing and of awakening from death were merely fore-shadowings or illustrations of the great blessings coming to mankind through his obedience unto death as our sin offering. No wonder the message of Jesus and his work spread over all parts of the country.

A greater work was being accomplished by our Lord's miracles than was apparent at the time. One is inclined to be surprised that only about "five hundred brethren" were gathered during the Lord's ministry—that only that number were counted worthy of the privilege of meeting our Lord after his resurrection during the forty days. However, it may reasonably be supposed that under the new dispensation, under the ministries of the apostles from Pentecost onward, a large fruitage was found to our Lord's ministry. For instance, it could be very probable that this widow of Nain and her son would become followers of Jesus, and that others in that multitude who witnessed the miracle and who were in proper condition of heart would therein find a sufficiency for a foundation to their faith in the Messiah. It cannot be doubted either that after "the middle wall of partition" had been broken down, and Cornelius the first Gentile convert had been brought into faith-fellowship, the centurion whose servant was healed, and who manifested every way so noble a character, would be one who would be specially susceptible to the message of grace and truth. One lesson that may be learned from this is that we

must not at once look for full fruitage of our own efforts in the Lord's service. We must be content to labour and to wait, and must realise that the Lord himself is behind his Word.

Let us then scatter the good seed everywhere as we have opportunity, for we "know not which shall prosper, this or that." Sometimes that upon which we bestowed the greatest zeal and effort proves fruitless, and sometimes that from which we expected the least proves very fruitful. Let us remember that the Lord will reward us according to our zeal or efforts, and not according to results, and indeed the chief results He seeks are in ourselves, in the development of the graces of his Spirit, which will manifest themselves in so many ways in connection with our love for him, for his message, for the brethren, yea, for the whole world of mankind, and even for our enemies.

Our Lord's ministries of healing lasted but a few years and reached comparatively few of the Jewish people, but since He ascended He has been carrying on a work of healing on a still higher plane—through his disciples whom He acknowledges as "members of His body." (1 Cor. 21:27). Operating through these, many eyes of understanding have been opened, many deaf ears have been unstopped, many morally halt and lame have been cured, and many have been raised from the dead in the sense that the Apostle refers to when he says, "You hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins"; and again, "If ye be risen with Christ seek those things which are above"; and again, "If the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you."

If we are inclined to marvel that the Jews rejected Jesus after seeing his mighty works, what might be said of us if for any reason, we become doubters or unfaithful to him who has so clearly spoken to us from heaven, by whose stripes we have been healed, and who have realised him to be indeed the resurrection and the life?

But we have more confidence in each other than to surmise such an unworthy ending to our call, such an unworthy response to the mercies and favours which we enjoy at the hands of him who loved us and bought us with his precious blood. Let us be faithful, let us remember that the resurrection work begun in us is the one which is to be completed by the grace of God in the First Resurrection, when in a moment of change we shall be like our Lord, see him as He is and share his glory.

THE PARABLE OF THE UNFORGIVING SERVANT

Matt. 18, 21-35.

It must have been after that breath-taking declaration of Jesus "the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Matt. 18, 11) that the train of thought was set up in Peter's mind which led to his asking that question about forgiveness. "*How oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Till seven times?*" (18, 21). Forgiveness was very much an alien thought to an orthodox Jew; the law of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth did not easily square with forgiveness of enemies or those who do injury to one. And the popular conception of the Son of Man was one that pictured Him as coming in the clouds and tempest to execute judgment upon sinners, not to reclaim and forgive them. A Messiah who would punish and destroy the Gentiles and the rebellious, and exalt righteous Israel to everlasting felicity they could understand; one whose mission was to convert and reconcile the wayward and the sinful, to seek and find the lost ones, was a new kind of Messiah altogether and such ideas must inevitably have started new trains of thought altogether in the disciples' minds. As usual, it was Peter the impetuous who put into words the questions which probably came to all their minds. "*How oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him?*" Even then the range of forgiveness was to be narrow; they were perhaps prepared to tolerate forgiveness of their own brethren whilst as yet the idea of forgiving enemies was not entertained.

According to Matthew, the parable of the lost sheep was spoken at this time. Luke in his Gospel groups the three parables of the lost, the lost sheep, the lost piece of silver, and the lost son (the prodigal son) together, but this does not necessarily demand that they were all spoken together. More likely they, and perhaps many others like them which have not been recorded, were spoken at different times in the Saviour's ministry. It may be that a fairly frequent repetition of this seeking and saving and forgiving aspect of Jesus' mission had given cause for enquiry in the minds of the disciples for some time past, and now, at last, it came out into the open. "*How oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him?*"

Jesus took advantage of the opportunity thus created. It was necessary that they come to understand this vital principle in the Divine purpose. The incident of the Samaritan villagers, upon whom they wanted to call down fire from heaven

and destroy them, in the manner of Elijah of old time, showed how far they were from understanding the purpose of the coming of Christ to earth. "*I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth*" God had told their fathers in times gone by but they had forgotten that. They were not really concerned with the Samaritans' conversion; only with revenge for the slight the villagers had offered the message of Jesus by rejecting His messengers. They still had much to learn. We ought to sympathise with them for the lesson is even now only very imperfectly realised. Far too many Christians still think in terms of the punishment of the wicked rather than their conversion and reconciliation. Jesus, looking upon the serious questioning faces around Him, knew that they were ripe for this advance in the knowledge of God and His ways.

First of all, a direct answer. "*I say not unto thee, Until seven times; but, Until seventy times seven.*" That came as a bit of a stunner. Peter had thought he was being pretty generous in going so far as seven successive acts of forgiveness. Jesus surpassed all expectation by naming a figure so fantastic in the circumstances that He might just as well have said "to infinity". At any rate, His ruling implied that forgiveness would become such a habit that they never would be able to stop forgiving, and that is most likely exactly the idea He intended to instil. Our God is a forgiving God, and we, to be like Him, must be forgiving also. Having made that point, Jesus proceeded to tell them by means of this parable exactly why men should be forgiving in their relationships with each other in the affairs and the wrongs and enmities of daily life.

A certain king had the auditors in to bring his financial affairs up to date. During the course of the ensuing investigation it was found that a debt of ten thousand talents owed by one of his servants had been outstanding for considerably more than the statutory period. The unlucky man was summoned into the king's presence and immediate payment was demanded. But the sum was so enormous that payment was impossible and the unfortunate debtor found that he, his wife and children, were to be sold into slavery and all his property confiscated in order to pay off at least part of the debt. This practice was a usual custom although in Israel the maximum period for which such unfortunates could be sold into slavery was

six years. But the man's life was ruined; he would have to start all over again at the end of the six years. In utter despair he fell on his knees and begged for mercy. "*Have patience with me*" he pleaded, "*and I will pay thee all*". Whether he honestly expected ever to be in a position to clear off the debt is not stated and perhaps he knew within himself that the amount was far too great for him ever to be able to pay, but in his extremity he could do no other than beg for mercy.

His hope was realised beyond his wildest dreams. "*Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt.*" Not only did he grant his plea for time to pay, but he went even further and in compassion for the man's hopeless position he forgave him the entire debt and the servant went out from the king's presence lightened for ever from a load which had burdened him for a long time in the past but would never burden him again.

The story was half told; the other half is of darker hue. As the rejoicing servant went on his way he met one of his fellows who owed him a hundred denarii ("pence" in the A.V.). For the moment all thought of his own recent marvellous deliverance vanished from his mind; here was someone who owed him some money and he wanted that money. Laying hold of the other man, he demanded payment. "*Pay me that thou owest.*" This debtor, however, was in no better position to meet his obligations than his creditor had been a few minutes before, and he asked for time and patience on exactly the same terms that the other had so recently desired of the king.

This time, however, the creditor was not so accommodating. Heedless of the fate he had himself so narrowly escaped, he invoked the full rigour of the law and had his hapless comrade cast into prison, there to remain until he should find some means of paying his debt.

The force of the Saviour's simile in this parable can be better appreciated if the import of the sums of money involved is realised. The "talent" was equivalent to three thousand silver shekels, and the silver shekel had just about the same intrinsic value as the silver in an English half-crown. One talent would therefore be worth intrinsically about £375. The Roman denarius was, on the same basis, worth about 3p and a hundred denarii amounted to £3. (In American currency the equivalent would be about one thousand dollars and eight dollars respectively). But this is not what these amounts meant to men in our Lord's day. The value of money has steadily declined throughout human history so that both the prices of goods and rates of wages have continuously increased, a pheno-

menon that is not by any means confined to this postwar era nor to be blamed in its entirety upon the activities of the trade unions. Whilst the intrinsic value of the shekel has remained at about half a crown since the days of the early Sumerians the number of shekels, or halfcrowns, needed to buy any given quantity of goods, or to pay the rent, or to fill the wagepacket, has increased to a fantastic degree. In the year 530 B.C., which would be just about the time of the death of Daniel in Babylon, one Nabu-nasir-aplu signed a contract to rent a house in Babylon from Itti-marduk-balatu for the sum of five shekels a year, equal to about 62p. (Landlord, tenant and house alike are dust these many years, but the contract remains, safely preserved in the British Museum). But since the wage rate for a working man at the time was about thirty shekels a year, about £3.75, the worthy Nabu-nasir-aplu spent one-sixth of his income on rent just as does the average working man to-day. Of course prices in Daniel's day were considered very high compared with earlier times—in the days of Abraham a house could be purchased outright for seven or eight shekels, less than one pound or three dollars, but since in those days a man was well paid if he got five shekels a year, house purchase was no less of a problem then than now. The intriguing thing is that the relation between current wage rates and the cost of living seems to have remained the same from Abraham's time to now but perhaps only the financial kings of this world can explain why this should be so.

Applying this to our Lord's day and the parable in question we have to set this ten thousand talents and hundred denarii against the background of their value to the creditors and debtors in the story. A labouring man could earn six denarii in a week's work—these servants would probably enjoy about the same financial status. A hundred denarii was equivalent to four month's wages; the same class of labour in 1972 would expect say £300 in wages for that same period. On the same scale the ten thousand talents represents a truly fantastic sum. To buy what one talent would purchase at the First Advent would require the respectable sum of thirty-six thousand pounds to-day, so that the servant faced with a debt of ten thousand talents was in the same position as a man to-day who owes someone three hundred and sixty million pounds, (nine hundred million dollars). No wonder he could not pay!

Why did Jesus name so fantastic a sum? No servant could ever in practice have accumulated so great a debt. "*Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all*". If he paid over the whole of his

wages every week, leaving nothing for himself, and the king charged no interest, it would still take him 400,000 years to pay off ten thousand talents. Was it that Jesus indulged in the Eastern passion for exaggeration in order to heighten the dramatic appeal of the story? That is not very likely. More probably this tremendous sum was deliberately chosen in order to suggest the truth underlying the parable. This debt is one that no man could ever possibly pay. He is completely helpless unless One greater than himself extends a full, free forgiveness and sets him on his way, freed from his burden. And that, of course, is the meaning of the parable. The servant owing ten thousand talents is every man, standing helpless before God, completely unable to do anything that will justify him in God's sight and earn for himself the title of God's freeman. "None of them can by any means redeem his brother, or give to God a ransom for him" (Psa. 49, 8). All that the man can do is to ask for God's patience. *"Have patience with me..."* The publican, standing afar off in the Temple, smote his breast and cried "God be merciful to me a sinner". There is the key. God is patient and will wait while the slightest gleam of hope remains that the man can be restored to his upright standing. "Ye have heard of the patience of Job" says James (5, 11) "and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy." So the provision is made; "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved". Repentance, conversion, reconciliation: and the ten thousand talents are remitted, the debt forgiven. "Being justified freely by his grace through the deliverance that is in Christ Jesus" (Rom 3, 24).

But the repentance must be sincere, the conversion sincere. Faith must be demonstrated by works (Jas. 3, 17-24). The man who has received "so great salvation" must needs reflect towards his fellows the glory that has come into his own life. Unless he in turn is prepared to extend mercy and forgiveness towards his fellows in everyday affairs, he has received the grace of God in vain, giving evidence that he has not properly understood or appreciated the purpose and the nature of his standing before God. So he loses that standing. In the story the freed servant threw his own debtor into prison, refusing to extend to him the same mercy he himself had received, and the consequence was that the king rescinded his former decree, summoned the unforgiving one into his presence, and reproved him, and then delivered him into that same prison into which the servant had cast his own debtor. In a moment he lost all, and his fate, because of the magnitude of his debt,

was final, hopeless.

"So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every-one his brother their trespasses." (18, 35). That is how Jesus concluded the parable. A strange—in some ways paradoxical—ending to a story devoted to extolling the virtues of forgiveness. Does this mean that even God will be unforgiving at the last in token of revenge for the unforgiving attitude of some recipients of His favour? Are we, following such a lead, to withdraw forgiveness from those of our fellows who show themselves unworthy of our forgiveness? Elucidation of the subject would become a little confusing if we allowed ourselves to argue on that basis. The truth is that we must set this statement against the fundamental principles on which God builds His purpose. The statement says nothing about God's forgiveness; it does say that the unforgiving man forfeits all the benefits he had attained by virtue of God's forgiveness, *all that he could have had of salvation and life, and having forfeited that, loses all.* God "will have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2, 4). He is "long suffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3, 9). "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn ye, turn ye, from your evil ways..." (Ezek. 33, 11). That is the Divine wish, but it is contingent upon the willing compliance of the subject, and although God is patient and long-suffering and will not let go of the sinner whilst the slightest chance remains that he can be converted from his ways, the time must come when in His infinite wisdom God sees that the "point of no return" has been passed. The man will not and will never respond to the Divine Spirit, he will not and will never assume his rightful place in Divine creation, and so, with infinite sorrow, we must be sure, God lets him go to his chosen fate. The principle upon which God has built creation, the principle upon which alone that creation can endure, decrees such consequence in the case of such an one. The door to life stood open, but the man refused to enter in. That is what Jesus meant when He said that God would do to the unforgiving man just what that man did to his fellow. Divine forgiveness, reconciliation with God, eternal life, are for the repentant, and this man was not truly repentant. The everlasting continuance of creation requires that every man shall give as well as take. This man took, but he would not give, and so there was no place for him in all that God has made.

SILAS THE GOOD COMPANION

Silas is known chiefly by the incident at Philippi during Paul's second missionary journey, when they were both involved in a riot which led to their incarceration in a prison cell where they sang praises to God and converted the jailer. He appears but briefly in the records but from what little is said something of a picture emerges.

Silas first comes into view as a "chief man" among the brethren at Jerusalem ten years or so after the Crucifixion. The expression means a leader or overseer and it may therefore be taken that Silas was an elder of the church and might well have been a believer during the Lord's life upon earth. Now he had been selected, in company with his fellow-elder Judas Barsabas, to accompany the emissaries of the Antioch church, Barnabas and Saul, to Antioch, bearing to that church from the Jerusalem brethren the letter which adjudicated on the questions which had been at issue between them. The whole story appears in Acts 15 and it is in that chapter that we have our first glimpse of Silas.

He was a man who had "*hazarded his life for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ*" (Acts 15.26); evidently he had remained in Jerusalem during the persecution which followed the martyrdom of Stephen and been a pillar of strength to the newly-formed Church. Like James, the principal elder of that Church, he must have had a clear understanding of the relative places of Jew and Gentile in the Divine Plan and the manner in which the Divine call was now being extended to the Gentiles, to have been chosen as one able to present the judgment of the Jerusalem Church on the matter. This points to a mature man of sound judgment and wide vision, fully consecrated to the Lord. The Apostle Paul's choice of him, later on, to accompany him on his second missionary journey, is therefore quite understandable.

The Church at Antioch in Syria was less than ten years old. Originally founded by several missionaries including Barnabas of Cyprus, it had the distinction of being the first Gentile Church, in that both Jews and Gentiles constituted its membership. Antioch itself, more than three hundred miles from Jerusalem, was the third largest city in the world; only Rome and Alexandria exceeded it in size. Its main street, running straight from one side of the city to the other, was four and a half miles long; miles of other streets were paved with marble and adorned with temples, public build-

ings, market places, fountains and statues, all redolent of Greek civilisation. At night the streets were brilliantly lit and the business and pleasures of the inhabitants went on by night and day as in any modern city. The Jewish colony was one of the most prosperous in the ancient world. This was the city to which Paul was brought by Barnabas and in which he commenced his life's work; Silas in those early days was one of his co-labourers.

According to Acts 15 Silas and Judas, after delivering their letter to the brethren of Antioch, "*being prophets also themselves, exhorted the brethren with many words, and confirmed them*". It would appear that Silas had marked ability as a preacher and the opportunity of ministry during his stay. All of this must have endeared him the more to these believers so that, when Judas returned to Jerusalem, Silas chose to stay at Antioch. (There is a little doubt about this, for Acts 15.34 "*Notwithstanding it pleased Silas to abide there still*" is only a late interpolation and does not appear in the older manuscripts; it is thought that it was inserted to account for the fact that soon afterwards he was chosen to accompany Paul). If he did thus stay it can only be because he saw a need for his services or opportunity for greater missionary outreach than was afforded by the community at Jerusalem. The indications are that, like Paul, his mind was reaching out toward the evangelising of the Gentile world and here at Antioch he found himself at the centre of missionary endeavour to that end. And Paul, planning his second missionary journey not long afterwards, chose Silas to be his travelling companion and co-worker. So they departed from Antioch, "*being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God*" (Acts 15.41).

Silas was a Roman citizen, like Paul, and this rather unusual honour for a Jew did constitute a definite advantage when travelling in the Roman world. It is not known how he obtained this citizenship, but probably it was, again like Paul, by right of birth. Later on in life he seems to have adopted the Latin form of his name, Silvanus, by which he is mentioned in 1 Thess. 1.1, 2 Cor. 1.19 and 1 Pet. 5.12, for the same reason that Paul used his Latin name "Paulus" in preference to the Hebrew "Saul" when moving about in the Roman world.

So these two set off, visiting the Christian communities Paul and Barnabas had established a few

years earlier in Syria and Cilicia, Phrygia and Galatia, provinces of Roman Asia, in what is now modern Syria and Western Turkey. At Lystra they encountered the young man Timotheus (Timothy) "well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium," (Acts 16.2). Inspired by his zeal for the work, Timothy accepted the invitation to join them and finally they came to Troas, on the Aegean Sea opposite Macedonia in Greece. Here they met Luke the physician and here, so far as can be discerned, began a friendship between physician and Apostle which was to last the rest of Paul's life and produce the two notable histories, the Gospel according to St. Luke and the Acts of the Apostles, both of which have been of such inestimable value to Christians in all times. Here, at Troas, Paul had the famous dream in which he saw a Macedonian man beseeching him to "come over into Macedonia and help us" (16.9) in consequence of which the four men took ship and crossed the sea to Greece, eventually finding themselves in the Macedonian capital city of Philippi. Silas must have been reflecting by now that the work of the Lord was taking him a long way from his home church of Jerusalem. It is highly probable though that he was conscious of an extreme satisfaction of heart that in a very real sense he was engaged in the duty laid upon all believers by the Lord at the time of His ascension, to be His witnesses "to the uttermost parts of the earth".

Certain business men of Philippi (perhaps they would be better described by the more modern term "racketeers") however, did not see the matter in this light. They were the owners of a slave-girl the victim of demon obsession; the public exploitation of her frenzied utterances brought them in a very comfortable income. Paul, pitying the girl, exorcised the demon and restored her distraught mind to normal, thus destroying what had been a very profitable racket. The two evangelists found themselves arraigned before the magistrates, subjected to a merciless scourging, and thrown into the city jail with their feet made fast in the stocks. In what must have been a condition of acute physical pain they spent the night singing praises to God with such verve that the other prisoners in the jail could do naught else but listen. Then came the earthquake which disrupted the prison walls and set them free, the conversion and baptism of the jailer, the morning visit of the magistrates, now in a state of sheer panic upon learning that they had unwittingly scourged uncondemned Roman citizens thus laying themselves open to the severest of penalties, and finally the meeting with the brethren of the newly-formed Philippi church in which they exhorted them to steadfast endurance, and so departed. A crucial and gruelling

experience, but one that proved Silas a worthy companion of the stout-hearted Paul and a fitting representative of the One who said "ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake, but he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved" (Matt. 24.9, 13).

Still the pilgrims plodded on, first to Thessalonica, where they founded the Thessalonian church but not without active opposition from the Jewish community, then to Berea, where they received a welcome and an acceptance of their message which warmed their hearts. Here were some true Bible students, who "received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so" (Acts 17, 11). Paul went on to Athens; Luke had stayed behind at Philippi, but Silas and Timothy remained for a while at Berea establishing the brethren in in the faith. Then came a message from Paul; he had reached Corinth, the most dissolute city in Greece, and here, against all apparent likelihood, there was prospect of a great work for Christ. They were to come to him with all speed.

Silas laboured with Paul at Corinth for something like two years. It must have been a good training-ground. The Jews of the city were mainly hard-hearted and hostile and in the end there had to be an open rupture between Paul and the orthodox synagogue, although a substantial number of them, including Crispus the presiding minister, took their stand with Paul. The Gentile converts came from all walks of life but in the main from the dregs of society, for Corinth was a city where everything that was corrupt and depraved and immoral tended to congregate, so much so that in those days the expression "Corinthian" denoted the extreme degree of all that was foul and unclean and degenerate. And yet the Lord had said to Paul something that He said of no other place: "I have much people in this city" (Acts 18.10). Paul had just come from Athens, the pinnacle of the country's culture and civilisation, where he found but a poor response to his preaching. At Corinth, the haunt of every kind of wickedness known to man, he found "much people". The Epistles to the Corinthians show what struggles those believers had to rise out of their native environment to the purity and the holiness of the glory of God.

It was during these two years at Corinth that the two Epistles to the Thessalonians were written and despatched. In both of them Silas, under his Roman name-form Silvanus, joins his greetings with those of Paul and Timothy. He evidently remained with Paul during the whole of the latter's sojourn at Corinth.

After that, we do not know. Silas drops out of

the New Testament history save for one reference by Peter years later; but not, we can be certain, from the work of the Gospel. Somewhere in the ancient world he must have spent the rest of his life labouring faithfully for the Lord he loved, perhaps achieving great triumphs of faith or undergoing severe trials and persecutions, unknown because there was no Luke by his side to record them.

Paul went from Corinth to Ephesus, taking with him Aquila and Priscilla. Timothy went too, but there is no mention of Silas or evidence that he accompanied Paul to Ephesus. Several years later, when Paul was again at Ephesus, he wrote the two Epistles to the Corinthians but there were no greetings from Silas as might be expected if he was there too, only one reference (2 Cor. 1.19) to the work of Silas at Corinth in the days of the founding of the church. It is clear he was not with Paul then. Neither did he accompany Paul on his third missionary journey as did Timothy and Luke, at least in part.

Did Silas stay to minister to the church at Corinth? It is not likely, or Paul when writing to the Corinthians later on would almost certainly have sent greetings to his old colleague. It is more probable that there came a call for his services either at the home Church at Antioch or his original one at Jerusalem. With his missionary experience among the Gentiles it is perhaps more to be expected that it was to Antioch he returned. It tends to be forgotten that these missionary journeys of Paul and his colleagues were inspired and endorsed by the Antioch church, which was the leading centre for missionary outreach in those early days. The prominence of Paul's journeyings in our minds is due to the fact that Luke the historian was his constant companion and fellow-traveller: Peter and others had equally full lives and the stories of their travels and achievements would have been just as absorbing and instructive had the Holy Spirit seen fit to appoint historians for them as was done for Paul.

A very slight clue to what might have been the later work of Silas is afforded by the First Epistle of Peter. There is ground for thinking that Peter himself spent some time with the Antioch church and served them as leader round about fifteen years after the Crucifixion. The first "bishop", or leading elder, of Antioch recorded by Eusebius

is Evodius, who held office during the period just preceding the Jewish rebellion and destruction of Jerusalem in A.D.70. Evodius declares that he assumed office in direct succession from Peter. The next "bishop" was the famous Ignatius, who served for nearly forty years and was martyred at Rome in A.D.107. Now if Silas did in fact return to Antioch from Corinth round about A.D.52 he might well have found Peter there and worked with him and earned that Apostle's regard. About a decade later we find Peter writing his First Epistle from Rome (the expression "*church that is at Babylon saluteth you*" in 1 Pet. 5.13 is almost certainly his guarded reference to Rome at the time of Nero's persecution although some do contend that Peter was writing from Babylon on the Euphrates or even from the Roman garrison of the same name in Egypt) and sending it to the Christians of the Greek provinces, Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, by the hand of Silas (1 Pet. 5.12). So at this time Silas was in Rome with Peter (and, incidentally, with John Mark). Paul, following his acquittal, had already left Rome; this would be during the several years' gap between his first and second trials when no one knows where he really went. Spain, Britain, Greece, Asia, all have been suggested. Luke also was absent from Rome. Silas therefore was commissioned to take Peter's Epistle to all the churches of Roman Asia, many of them the ones he and Paul had visited some twenty years earlier. It is hard to resist the conclusion that Silas did undertake at this time a kind of final missionary journey over these lands, perhaps, for all we know, finishing at Antioch and there spending the final years of his life. He would by then be at least in his late sixties and perhaps more.

So, at last, this valiant soldier of the Cross must have come to the end of the way, convinced, like the one who at the first introduced him to missionary service, that he had fought a good fight, kept the faith, and finished the course in glorious confidence that the crown of life was laid up for him "in that day". A young man when Jesus moved and talked in Judea and Galilee, he may have seen and heard Him and given his heart and life; in later years that gift was utilised to the full, as this erstwhile "chief man" of the church at Jerusalem travelled the length and breadth of the known world, even at last to Rome itself, fulfilling his mission as a herald of salvation.

This doctrine has not in the teachings of Jesus the appearance of a fresh philosophical theory or of a new truth, kindling in him a constant surprise and intensity. It seems rather like unconscious knowledge. He speaks of the great invisible world

as if it had always lain before him and, as familiarly, as to us stretches out the landscape which we have seen since our birth. The assertion of a future state is scarcely to be met with in his teachings: the assumption of it pervades them.

Henry Ward Beecher

THE ASSURANCE OF THE ASCENSION

A study in
Acts 1: 11

All that is known of the incidents surrounding the Ascension depends on the historical records of St. Luke. Second only in importance to the story of the Crucifixion, nothing whatever as to its nature and details would have come down to us had it not been for his stories of the event, both in his Gospel and in the Book of Acts. From both these narratives it is known that some forty days after His resurrection Jesus took his disciples to a spot on the Mount of Olives and there visibly ascended into the skies in their presence. After that they saw him no more. Thus convinced that He had indeed returned to his Father in heaven, they returned to Jerusalem with joy, and a few days later underwent the profound emotional experience of Pentecost which launched them upon their life's work and resulted in the establishment of the Christian Church.

It is noticeable that the account in Acts is fuller and more detailed than that in Luke's Gospel. It would seem that during the ten years or so which elapsed between the writing of these two books Luke must have obtained more information relative to the event; had he possessed the full story when writing his Gospel it is unlikely that he would have refrained from including it since this is the natural climax to the Gospel. As it is, Acts virtually overlaps the Gospel insofar as the story of the Ascension is concerned and the combination of the two accounts enables a very full picture to be drawn.

It would seem that Jesus took the entire eleven disciples with him on this last journey. He led them, says the Gospel (Luke 24:50) as far as Bethany, and then lifting up his hands and blessing them. He was carried away into heaven and they saw him no more. Acts adds the detail that a cloud received him out of their sight. A minor apparent discrepancy arises from the statement in Acts that they returned from Olivet "*which is from Jerusalem a sabbath day's journey*". This distance, the most that an orthodox Jew could travel from his home on the Sabbath, was, according to Josephus, a little over half a mile, whereas Bethany is a mile and three-quarters from the city walls. It is not likely though that Jesus made his ascent from the middle of the village in full view of the townsfolk; the story has the atmosphere of a quiet leave-taking in a secluded spot. More probably, Jesus halted his little party whilst still on the slopes of the Mount, with Bethany perhaps coming into

sight in the distance, maybe no more than a mile from the city, so that Luke's earlier account could still be reasonably correct. In fact the western slopes of Olivet are only about half a mile or less from the city.

The last time they had followed Jesus along this road it had been to Gethsemane and death; after that they had believed all was over and there was no hope. Now they followed him with quiet joy, past the Garden with its tragic memories and out on the open road as it traversed the southern slopes of the Mount where the sun shone brightly down. He was alive, and death could have no more dominion over him; all that the prophets had spoken would now surely come to pass.

So they stood to receive his blessing, and then in wonder watched his form ascend steadily into the blue sky above their heads. It was all so very clear now. During the past forty days He had appeared and disappeared time after time, convincing them that He was truly alive, risen from the dead, and with them still, not yet ascended to his Father. But this was different. They knew, now, that they would see him no more. As they "*looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up*" they realised, as no other situation could make them realise, that He had returned to the Father in heaven as He always said He would. The receding form vanished into a cloud passing across the sky, and that was the end. Thoughtfully they made their way back to the city and their waiting friends, conscious only of a great joy in their hearts.

Now we know that that body of flesh, with its enshrouding garments, did not continue its upward levitation onward from the cloud, through the earth's atmosphere, out into the vastness of space and so to the portals of the celestial land. We know that because we know it to be impossible for flesh and blood to enter the heavenly world and appear in the presence of God. When our risen Lord, to use the language of Hebrews "*appeared in the presense of God for us*" He did so, no longer as man nor manifest in the accoutrements of humanity fitted only for this earthly world, but in the spiritual glory of his Divinity. Now was his dying prayer fulfilled; He returned to his own place invested with the glory which He had with the Father before the world was (Jno. 17:5). We know so little of that mystic relationship which exists eternally between the Father and

the Son; all our illustrations and definitions are inadequate to convey to our minds a truth which must lie fundamentally outside the range of human intellect: but it were a grave indignity to the One in whom all things subsist to think of his Person as eternally manifested within the compass and lineaments of a terrestrial human being, a tiny creature designed for and fitted to the physical conditions of a minute speck of matter in the vast creation of which He is Lord and Head. We know all that, but the disciples did not. Their day and age was by no means ready for such an appreciation of the majesty and mystery of God and so it must have been that as they wended their way back to the city they were conscious only of the simple realisation that their Master had returned to his Father in heaven and of that they were sure because they had seen him go.

There was another assurance too and one that accounted for the unmixed joy which filled their hearts. One day He would come back to them; they had not lost him for ever. One day He would come back in glory and power to establish the Kingdom He had so often talked to them about, and then they would be in his company for all time. All their hopes and desires would then be satisfied. All that the prophets of old had predicted would be fulfilled. Jesus himself had told them all that, during the life they had shared with him, but not only so, even now, before they left the scene of the event they had just witnessed, two messengers of God, two angels, had appeared to them and repeated the promise, "*Ye men of Galilee*", they had said to them, "*Why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven*" (Acts 1.11).

The full force of the assurance is lost in the English translation. All too commonly it is assumed that the angels indicated that Jesus would return in exactly the same physical state and environment as He went away, that just as He had ascended visibly into the cloud, so He would one day descend visibly from a cloud, in a human body like that of his Ascension, arrayed in clothing like that in which the disciples saw him go, setting foot again upon the Mount of Olives amid a circle of watching and waiting believers. This is not really what the angels meant; the expression "in like manner" in this verse has a deeper and, to the disciples, an infinitely more assuring significance. The comparison denoted by the Greek expression behind the translation was not so much that of the similarity of action or condition between the going and the coming but the equivalent certainty of the two factors. "As surely as ye

have seen him go, so surely will he return."

This is nowhere better illustrated than by another occurrence of the same expression in Acts. During the narrative of Paul's shipwreck in Acts 27 there comes a point where Paul in a dream received Divine assurance of safety and deliverance for the whole of the ship's company with instructions for their action. In recounting all this to his fellows Paul says (vs. 25) "*I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me.*" "Even as" here is the same word, "*hon tropon*", as "in like manner" in Acts 1.11. In Paul's word it denotes the certainty of fulfilment; the coming deliverance was as real and assured as the fact that God had spoken to him. Upon Olivet the promised return was as real and certain as the obvious fact that they had seen him go. It was this certainty which sent them back to Jerusalem "with great joy."

For the more studious, the basic idea behind the expression "*hon tropon*" is that of the regular duplication of similar events, of one following the other in automatic and assured sequence. It is derived from *trope*, a turning around or about, referring primarily to the regular and predictable motion and return of the heavenly bodies in their seasons, as the sun in its course along the ecliptic or the planets in their orbits. In the circuit of the year the sun travels first to the north of the Equator and then to the south, returning at the end to the position from which it started. (Hence our word "tropics", which comes from "*trope*".) Hence it came to mean an orderly way or succession, the certainty of an expected future event compared with the acknowledged certainty of a known past event of the same class. Whilst the expression "like manner" can express this idea fairly well, the rendering "as—so" is much more forceful and accurate and this is how "*tropon*" is usually translated in the A.V. Just a few examples from the Greek New Testament and Septuagint Old Testament, and one from the Apocrypha, will suffice to illustrate this. The italicised words are the A.V. renderings of "*hon tropon*" or "*tropon*".

- Acts 27.25. "I believe God, that it shall be *even* as it was told me"
- Acts 15.11. "We believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, *even as* they"
- 2 Tim. 3.8. "Now *as* Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these resist the truth"
- Gen. 26.29. "That thou wilt do us no hurt—*as* we have done unto thee nothing but good"

Deut. 11.25. "The Lord your God shall lay the fear of you upon all the land . . . as he hath said unto you."

Exod. 14.13. "For *whereas* ye have seen the Egyptians to-day, ye shall see them no more for ever."

Obad 16. "As ye have drunk upon my holy mountain, so shall the heathen drink continually."

Psa. 42.1. "As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God."

2 Macc. 15.39. "As wine mingled with water is pleasant . . . even so speech finely framed delighteth the ears of them that read the story".

It can be argued that if one thing is "even as" another it can be said to be "in like manner", similar in manner, and this is true enough provided the basic meaning behind the expression is kept in mind, that it is the assured recurrence of the relevant events, the fact that they stand together as related matters equally certain of realisation. As *this* is true, so *that* is true. As *this* has happened, so *that* will happen. When "manner" in the ordinary sense of the word, as custom, action, fashion, is concerned the word "*ethos*" is employed, as in Jno. 19.40, Acts 15.1 and 25.16, Heb. 10.25; sometimes it is "*houtos*", which latter can be roughly rendered thuswise or accordingly, as in Mark 13.39 "So ye, in like manner, when ye see these things" and 1 Pet. 3.5 "For after this manner in the old time holy women also" or Rev. 11.5 "He must in this manner be killed".

Coming back for a moment to Acts 27.25, the expression in the Greek text is identical—save for the verb concerned—as in Acts 1.11. Here is the comparison.

Acts 1.11. Thus (*houtos*) he-will-come even as (*hon tropon*) ye-are-seeing him go-away into the heaven.

Acts 27.25. Thus (*houtos*) it-shall-be even as (*hon tropon*) it-has-been-told-to-me.

Small wonder then that with this note of certainty ringing in their ears the predominant feeling in the hearts of the disciples as they returned to Jerusalem was one of "great joy", so much so that this was the salient feature of the story as it was afterwards received by St. Luke and incorporated in his Gospel. The sad and anxious enquiry "*Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?*" was swallowed up and forgotten in the face of this heavenly assurance of the certainty of his return. He had only gone away for a time; He would surely come again. In the meantime they could with good heart execute his commission to preach the Gospel of the Kingdom to the uttermost parts of the earth, firmly persuaded that, even as He had gone away, so surely would He come back.

So it is with us, who two thousand years later wait still for the fulfilment of the angelic assurance. It is of little importance in our Christian lives that we know the time of his coming—and no man knows, or ever can know, the time anyway. It is more important that we have as clear an understanding as we can gain from the Scriptures of the manner of his coming, that we be not deceived either by false Christs or false expectations. It is greatly important that we understand very distinctly the purpose of his coming, for without that knowledge we are as servants who know not what their Lord doeth and are unready to enter into his higher service when He does come. But most important of all is the firm and fixed conviction, which nothing can shake, that He most certainly returns at the pre-ordained appointed time, and sets in motion that chain of events which characterises the Days of the Son of Man, without delay, without failure, unaffected and uninfluenced by whatever of opposition on the part of his enemies or apathy and lack of comprehension on the part of his followers He may find. When the Clock of the Ages points to the hour already set for the Advent, He comes. So surely as He went away, so surely will He come again.

If you are looking off unto Jesus, avoiding the call of the religious age you live in, and setting your heart on what He wants, on thinking on his line, you will be called unpractical and dreamy; but when He appears in the burden and the heat of the day, you will be the only one who is ready.

(Oswald Chambers)

The Apostle James says: "*Count* it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations." He does not say, "*Feel* it all joy . . ." You cannot always rejoice in your circumstances, but you *can* rejoice in the Lord always. God may not change your circumstances, but He will change you, and give you victory in those circumstances.

DANIEL IN BABYLON

The story of a great
man's faith

12. Darius the Mede

"And Darius the Median took the kingdom, being three score and two years old." (Ch. 5, 31).

With the capture of Babylon by the Medes and Persians an entirely new life opened before Daniel. At eighty-four years of age he could reasonably have expected to spend his few remaining years in leisurely retirement; the fact that for twenty years past he had been excluded from any official part in the administration of government affairs had without doubt led him to re-organise his life so that he could give his entire time to the study and consideration of the future purposes of God. That much is clear, from the accounts we have of his visions and dreams, and the celestial visitants who came with the revelations and interpretations which have been of such interest and importance to students in every generation since. It is not at all an unusual thing for a man who has led a full and busy life in some business or occupation to hail his retirement as an opportunity for the closer investigation of Biblical truths to which he has not been able to give the attention he would have liked while the responsibility of earning a living or discharging a public office lay upon him. Daniel at the death of his king and benefactor, Nebuchadnezzar, must have felt something like that. For forty-two years he had endured the obligations of high administrative office in Babylon because he knew it to be the will of God that he should thus serve: when upon the accession of successive kings who had no use for him he was deprived of office and allowed to retire into private life, he must have hailed the change as of Divine direction and gladly betaken himself to the more continuous and diligent study of the Divine purposes. And during the twenty years or so thus spent the fruits of his devotion were manifest in the dreams and visions and their interpretations with which we are so familiar.

Now the scene was to change again. The last official act of Belshazzar the last king of Babylon was to appoint Daniel third ruler in the kingdom and therefore the highest State official next to himself. At one stroke Daniel found himself restored to the position he had occupied under King Nebuchadnezzar. Almost immediately fresh responsibility was thrust upon him. The royal decree promoting Daniel to his new position had hardly been proclaimed when Belshazzar himself was dead, slain by the Median invaders. When Cyrus, seventeen days after the capture of the city, came

looking for someone who could formally hand over the civil administration of the capital and the empire, it could very likely have been to Daniel he came. Perhaps in that very hall where only a few days previously the supernatural writing had appeared on the wall, serried ranks of Median and Persian soldiers stood immovable whilst Cyrus, the invincible military conqueror, and Daniel, the gentle and yet firm man of God, transacted the formalities which even in those days, no less than in ours, marked the transfer of sovereignty from the vanquished to the victor.

What a tremendous stimulus to faith it must have been to Daniel, thus to witness with his own eyes the fulfilment of prophecy. Sixty-odd years previously he had stood in that same hall, a lad of nineteen or so, and declared to King Nebuchadnezzar *"Thou art this head of gold; and after thee shall arise a kingdom inferior to thee, . . . the dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure."* Now he beheld the fulfilment of that prediction. The second of the four world empires had stepped upon the stage to play its part in the drama, and the Kingdom of Heaven was that much nearer.

Happy indeed we if we can see, in the vicissitudes of earthly powers, the fulfilment of prophecy, evidences of the onward progress of the Divine plan and the approaching of the Kingdom. We are not usually called, as was Daniel, to be personally closely linked with the political affairs of the kingdoms of this world. Our observation of their course can be from a much more detached standpoint and for that we can give thanks to God. It is probable that Daniel would have preferred not to have been so closely connected with State affairs in the idolatrous governments of Babylon and Persia—but he was called to that position by God and he was too loyal a servant of God to avoid the consequences of that call. Perhaps some of the more orthodox and bigoted Jews captive in Babylon criticised his acceptance of high office under the State as disloyalty to the principles of Judaism and the Law Covenant. Perhaps we ourselves, in our rigid adherence to what we hold as the principles of Christian living, may criticise another who undertakes responsibilities or obligations which we would not be prepared to accept. And perhaps, in so doing, we forget the Apostolic admonition *"Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? To his own master he standeth or*

falleth." One of the hardest lessons we have to learn is that our Master has many varied tasks to be carried out on earth by his devoted followers and He must of necessity use various individuals in different ways. We must each serve and labour in accordance with the call that is given to us without expecting all our fellow-servants necessarily to serve after the same manner.

So Daniel found a new king to serve. "*Darius the Median took the kingdom.*" Who was this Darius? It is so usual to think of Cyrus assuming control upon the fall of Babylon and immediately sending the Jews home to build their Temple that the fact of Darius coming between Belshazzar and Cyrus is often overlooked. Whoever he was, he confirmed Daniel's re-appointment as Chief Minister of the empire, and that too requires some explanation. How comes it that a man in high office in the defeated Administration is preferred above all the Median and Persian notabilities who would in the ordinary way be considered proper choices for the control of the vanquished people?

What has been called "the enigma of Darius the Mede" has puzzled many a student of Bible history in times past. This king is one of the few whose name has not yet been found in any contemporary inscription. A similar situation existed with regard to Belshazzar until toward the end of the nineteenth century, and it had been freely declared by some scholars that Daniel had invented the name of a king who never existed. Nowadays the acts and history of Belshazzar are almost as well known as those of Queen Victoria. Modern research and deduction has likewise succeeded in giving us a fair picture of Darius the Mede, at any rate sufficient to demonstrate the accuracy of the Book of Daniel.

To begin with, Cyrus was not the legal or acknowledged king of the Medo-Persian empire at the death of Belshazzar. The ruling dynasty was Median, and Cyrus was not a Mede. The Median empire had its rise a century before the fall of Nineveh, and it was the joint invasion of Assyria by Cyaxares, king of Media, allied with Nabopolassar of Babylon, father of Nebuchadnezzar, which brought about the destruction of Nineveh in 612 B.C. and the end of the Assyrian empire. This friendship between the two kings was cemented by the giving in marriage of Amytis the daughter of Cyaxares to Nebuchadnezzar the son of the Babylonian king. Upon the death of Cyaxares, his son Astyages became king of Media. Cyrus, who was a lineal descendant of the kings of Elam, now subject to Media, was a leading general of the Persian forces in the armies of Media, for Persia also was at that time subject to Media. Cyrus had married the daughter of

Astyages, and with this slight claim to royalty he rebelled against his king and in a short time became the most powerful figure in the empire. Ten years before the fall of Babylon he virtually deposed Astyages and became the real ruler, thus bringing the Persian element much more into prominence. The Medes were still predominant, however, and Cyrus was not yet the acknowledged king. In any case he was still busily occupied subduing other nations and building up the empire.

Darius the Mede was the son of Astyages and the last legal claimant to the throne of Media. It is fairly evident that upon the fall of Babylon the Median influence in the combined empire was still so strong that Cyrus, ambitious as he was, preferred to wait until he could legally claim the title and so the Median king occupied the throne. Hence when Babylon fell at the hands of Cyrus, it was Darius the Mede who "took" the kingdom. That word is significant. It has the meaning of receiving a thing at the hands of another. A similar expression occurs in Chap. 9, 1, where Darius is said to have been "made" king over the realm of the Chaldeans. Darius did not acquire the kingdom for himself; it was won for him by Cyrus.

Two years later Darius died without sons, and now Cyrus, by virtue of his marriage to Mandane the sister of Darius, had the best legal right to kingship. From now on the Persian element came to the forefront, but it was not until the time of Darius Hystaspes, the first truly Persian king, seventeen years later, that Persia took precedence over Media. The Old Testament yields an interesting confirmation of this fact. The Book of Daniel, completed by Daniel in the days of Darius the Mede and Cyrus, refers always to the "Medes and Persians", Medes coming first. The Book of Esther, describing events in the days of Xerxes, son of Darius Hystaspes, has it "the kings of Persia and Media," Persia now coming first.

Daniel, in Chap. 9, 1, refers to Darius as the "son of Ahasuerus, of the seed of the Medes." Ahasuerus in the native languages concerned is the same as the Greek Cyaxares, and in the Apocryphal Book of Tobit is called by that name. The term "son" here means "grandson" as in the case, in Chap. 5, of Belshazzar, who was actually the grandson of Nebuchadnezzar. Josephus and all other ancient historians are definite in stating that a Median king succeeded Belshazzar and was in turn replaced by Cyrus the Persian. It can fairly be stated therefore that the "enigma of Darius the Mede" is, thanks to present century Biblical research, an enigma no longer. Once again, Daniel is proved to have known better than all his modern critics.

"It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom an hundred and twenty princes, which should be over the whole kingdom; and over these three presidents, of whom Daniel was one; that the princes might give accounts unto them, and that the king should have no damage. Then this Daniel distinguished himself above the presidents and princes, because an excellent spirit was in him; and the king was minded to set him over the entire realm." (Chap. 6, 1-3).

Three points in which the A.V. translation is inadequate have to be noticed. Daniel was not "first" of the three presidents, but one of them. He was not "preferred" above the others but distinguished himself above them; and Darius had in mind his further promotion to be the Chief Minister of the entire Medo-Persian empire. The question naturally arises; why such honours to a representative of the defeated nation?

The answer, in the first place, lies in the fact that Daniel, and his sterling worth, were not entirely unknown to the Median king. The close friendship between the Median and Babylonian kings in the days of Nebuchadnezzar must have involved Daniel in some close contact with the Medes. It was the ambition of Cyrus and his Persians which attacked Babylon, not animosity on the part of the Median kings. Very probably Darius the Mede had a closer feeling for his royal Babylonian relatives than he had for Cyrus, whom he must have regarded as a usurper, even though Cyrus was married to his sister. Queen Nitocris, mother of Belshazzar, was herself first cousin to Darius, and in earlier and happier days there must have been plenty of going and coming between the royal houses of Babylon and Media. Darius might very well have been personally acquainted with Daniel in those days. What more natural thing, then, when he assumed sovereignty over the conquered people, to appease them and ensure peaceable submission by appointing as their immediate ruler the man who had been their Chief Minister for forty years in times past, whom he knew personally and in whom he could place confidence.

It would seem that Darius made the subjection of Babylon the occasion for a complete reorganisation of the empire. He created a hundred and twenty provinces (which by the time of Esther, fifty years later, had become one hundred and

twenty seven — see Esther 1, 1) and appointed a local governor over each. Above these came the three princes, of whom Daniel was one, responsible directly to the King. It would seem logical to conclude that these three princes were set over Media, Persia and Babylon respectively, Daniel being the appointed Minister for Babylon. The outstanding qualities of Daniel again marked him out for preferment and the king formed the design of promoting him to have authority over all three divisions of the empire, and at that the other officials took alarm and began to consult together to effect the disgrace of the hated Jew.

The indomitable spirit of this remarkable man nowhere shines out more brightly than at this point. At an age when most men would be considered past performing useful work for the community, he still made such an impression upon his fellows that he could be seriously considered for an administrative position that would tax the abilities of men half his age. Like Moses, Daniel's "eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated." Of him it could truly be said that he was immortal until his work was finished, and although in the story we are now within three years of the time when he leaves the stage, we see him at the height of worldly power and influence, still the confidant of kings, still the object of unrelenting hatred by powerful enemies, still, we may be sure, working quietly but energetically for the welfare of his own people, Israel, as yet held captive in Babylon. Here is an outstanding example of the mighty power of the Holy Spirit of God, entering into a man, inspiring him, sustaining him, rebutting all the assaults of his enemies, prospering the way before him that through him some vital part of the purposes of God might be carried out.

We do well to take the lesson to heart. There is no limit to what God can do with a man who is wholly and unreservedly consecrated to him. Such a man must be prepared to suffer with equal fortitude success and failure, prosperity and adversity, the favours of men and their recriminations, serene always in the sure knowledge that all he is and all he does is for the furtherance of the Divine plans for all creation and that in the power of the Holy Spirit within him he must go forward and he cannot fail. That was Daniel's secret.

(To be continued).

The authority of emperors, kings and princes is human; the authority of councils, synods, bishops and presbyters is human; the authority of prophets is Divine.—*Sir Isaac Newton.*

"Scripture is like a modern continent, with extreme and unhealthy congestion at certain well-known centres and vast tracts of country uncultivated and unknown." *Sylvester Horne*

HOLY CONVOCATION

From time to time in the life of Israel there were occasions when the Temple stairs were crowded with happy throngs going up to worship and fellowship. The sweet singer of Israel used to watch them from his privileged position in the Palace near by. His heart leapt to be with them, and so he broke out into the rapturous strain *"We went up to the House of God in company, with the multitude of them that kept holy day"*. Holyday! That is the word which we now pronounce "holiday", and it is when we keep holiday, holyday, that we gather together, just as our spiritual forbears of old, to worship and fellowship. Let that always be the keynote of our gathering in assembly. Let us come together on the foundation truth that is our common basis of belief—our acceptance in Christ Jesus. Let us unite together in strains of praise that will fill the heavenly realm with music. Let us join in the voice of prayer that ascends before the Throne of the Most High *"O come, let us worship, and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord our Maker"*. Let such seasons of assembling be holy convocations unto the Lord, times in the which we draw near to God, and He to us. Israel of old gathered together from time to time at the command of the Lord, leaving their daily work and usual interests to join together in an act of worship and homage. In that, and from that, they gained a sense of one-ness with God, fresh strength for the tasks and duties of every day. In that respite from the heaviness and strain of normal life they found themselves lifted above the things of this world and given a glimpse of another, a world in which the Lord reigns supreme, and the sadness, the injustice and the hardships of this one has no place. They realised that man does not live by bread alone, but needs the indwelling Word of God in which the soul can find refreshment and rest. More than anything else these holy convocations re-awakened in their hearts the consciousness that they were a people for a purpose and that in all the circumstances of their daily lives they were under the terms of their Covenant, which Moses had negotiated for them, so many years before, being trained and prepared for a future glorious destiny. Perhaps the golden vision faded a little when the assembly was over and they had all returned to their work in the fields and on the farm, but its influence must have remained with them and encouraged them to a greater degree of faithful endurance than would have been the case otherwise.

We, too, are exhorted not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together, and in obedience to that injunction we assemble for fellowship, for study and discussion, sometimes for prayer, all too rarely, one fears, for worship. A convention is the logical union together of many such assemblies, at appropriate times in the year, in order that the circle of fellowship may be widened, and the sense of unity deepened. And just because a convention is an expression of unity in Christ, and an outward witness to the faith, so it ought, more than any other kind of meeting to partake of the spirit of worship. We can learn of the Divine Plan from the printed page, the magazines and the books we read. We can commune with the Father in the privacy of our own homes, or our own rooms, and we do. But only in the company of our fellows may we join in that corporate worship which is the outward symbol of the unity of the Church in the flesh. So the great aim and ideal in our coming together is Divine worship together, we shall be much better equipped to study together and understand the doctrines of the faith together, and learn to appreciate the fact that our unity in Christ does not depend upon the uniformity of our theological convictions, but upon our communion, our communion, together as fellow members of his Body.

The aim of our conventions, therefore, should be just that which is defined for us by the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 4: *"For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ"*. That covers everything, and leaves out nothing. These are words with which not one of us can quarrel; a declaration which no one can dispute.

It is fundamental to the Christian outlook that the only hope for the world is the coming again of Jesus Christ, and the setting up of His Kingdom upon earth. Our prayers, our faith, our studies, our activities, our reading, our preaching, all must be directed to that glorious vision. We pray, as have Christians of all ages *"Thy Kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven"*. But we must work for the kingdom also. And while we pray, and while we work, we must study and discuss these things together, so that our message may be ever up-to-date, and pray and worship together so that it may be vital, living, The Lord

has no use for fossilised theology or sterilised witness. In the Christian world today much of the theology is fossilised; it is still expressed in language adapted to the culture of the Middle Ages and means little or nothing to those who need it so much today. The word of Scripture itself is timeless; its message is always comprehensible and up-to-date, but men, even the saintliest or the most farsighted of men, do not have the power to infuse that quality in their interpretations and expositions and formulations of faith and that is why, even although the living Word stands unchanged and abiding for ever, it is necessary that man's exposition of that Word be continually reviewed to relate it to the generation which is called to listen. And we live now in a time when men will very soon be ready to listen. The world is going to pieces; disaster is inevitable and it is near, and as the sin and selfishness and short-sightedness of the human race carry it into the ultimate collapse of all that they have built it will be as it was so many times with Israel in like circumstances. Apostasy brought judgment, but after judgment came blessing. *"For a small moment have I forsaken thee, but with great mercies will I gather thee"* (Isa. 59.7).

The same scornful and indifferent unbelievers whose self-will and arrogance is fast bringing this world to its end will later, after the catastrophe, look into the heavens and behold the Lord of glory present for their salvation. *"The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together"* (Isa. 40.5). That will be the greatest "holy convocation" of all, when the whole of mankind is gathered to listen to the voice that speaks from heaven, and the gates of the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, are opened wide that whosoever will may enter therein.

But, in the meantime, and before that great manifestation of earth's coming King, we who are pledged to his service, and hope to reign with him then, must needs maintain inviolate our confidence and expectation that He will surely come, and come speedily. In every generation there are those who interpret the signs of their times to assure

them that *"he is near, even at the doors"* (Matt. 24.33) and then, because of disappointment and disillusionment, there has been doubt and loss of faith. It is very true that no Christian group which builds its beliefs and its witness solely around imminent expectations of promised Divine intervention can long survive the failure or apparent failure of that expectation. Something more than exclusive pre-occupation with the "voice of prophecy", no matter how apparently applicable to the current situation, is necessary to a balanced and fully developed faith and service. The fellowship can only survive and continue its witness in the world if to its dispensational and prophetic expectations there is allied the age-old threefold Christian call, the Baptist message; *"Repent—Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ—for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand"*. That evangel is independent of the precise moment that the Son of Man is revealed from Heaven in the glory of the Kingdom; it is unaffected by the accuracy or otherwise of current interpretations of the signs of the times or the precise day the climax of the ages is expected. We can go on through life in the power of that message, always expecting the Bridegroom, always watching for the Kingdom, never cast down or dismayed if He seem to tarry, and the golden radiance of Millennial Day still do no more than gild the tops of the distant mountains. Do they say *"the days are prolonged, and every vision faileth?"* Say unto them *"thus saith the Lord, the days are at hand, and the effect of every vision"*. In the glorious imagery of Zechariah's fourteenth chapter, the prophet, looking toward the east, toward the sunrising, in faith and expectation, sees the Mount of Olives cleave in twain, and a great valley appear between, and in the distant view thus opened to his eyes he beholds a great sight and cries out in exultation *"and the Lord my God shall come, and all the saints with thee"*. This is our hope, our confidence, our message. It is that we may be built up and strengthened in that faith that we gather in convention, and in the joy of that certainty that we serve and labour together in ministry and fellowship.

"Whatsoever things are true, . . . think on these things." It is more painful to think about these things than to think about what we know, about what is old in our experience, because immediately we begin to think God's thoughts after him we have to bring concentration to bear, and that takes time and discipline. (Oswald Chambers)

Importunity is of the essence of prevailing prayer. Never stop praying. At dawn, with David: at noon, with Daniel: at midnight, with Silas: in sorrow, as Hannah: in sickness, as Job: in childhood, like Samuel: in youth, like Timothy: in manhood, like Paul: in hoar hairs, like Simeon: in dying, like Stephen.

INDEX 1972

EXPOSITORY

<i>Assurance of the Ascension</i>	136
<i>Binding of Satan</i>	85
<i>Call and destiny of Israel</i>	107
<i>Daniel in Babylon</i>	
7 <i>Historical Interlude</i>	7
8 <i>Beginning of visions</i>	39
9 <i>Ancient of Days</i>	57
10 <i>Beginning of the End</i>	81
11 <i>Belshazzar's Feast</i>	99
12 <i>Darius the Mede</i>	139
<i>Destroyers of the Sanctuary</i>	93
<i>Every eye shall see him</i>	66
<i>Fiftieth Psalm</i>	17
<i>Gideon, Man of valour</i>	
1. <i>A man for God's purpose</i>	51
2. <i>Sword of the Lord</i>	75
3. <i>Disaster at the last</i>	115
<i>Glory of the celestial world</i>	103
<i>He that hath no sword</i>	68
<i>Historical background Ruth</i>	15
<i>In Adam all die</i>	87
<i>Judas and the Potter's field</i>	71
<i>Parable of sheep and goats</i>	12
" " <i>wicked husbandmen</i>	54
" " <i>pearl of great price</i>	91
" " <i>wineskins</i>	112
" " <i>unforgiving servant</i>	130
<i>Pearl of great price, parable</i>	91
<i>Principles of Divine deliverance</i>	21
<i>Question Box</i>	96, 106
<i>Rebekah, Bride of Isaac</i>	44
<i>Resurrection, story of the</i>	61
<i>Ruth, Historical background</i>	15
<i>Sheep and goats, Parable of</i>	12
<i>Silas the good companion</i>	133
<i>Story of the Resurrection</i>	61
<i>This is my Body</i>	37
<i>Unforgiving servant, Parable of</i>	130
<i>Virgin birth of Christ</i>	27
<i>Wedding of the Ages</i>	
1. <i>Call of the Bride</i>	9
2. <i>The Heavenly Waakeel</i>	34
3. <i>Behold the Bridegroom</i>	69
<i>When God calls</i>	41
<i>Wicked Husbandmen, Parable of</i>	54
<i>Wineskins, Parable of</i>	112
<i>Zacharias and Elisabeth</i>	3

HORTATORY

<i>Entering into rest</i>	19
<i>Everlasting arms, The</i>	78
<i>First fruits, The</i>	59
<i>Holy Convocation</i>	142
<i>In remembrance of Me</i>	47
<i>Into the New Year</i>	14
<i>Power of His Resurrection</i>	118
<i>Reflections on Faith</i>	111
<i>Resurrection Power in Jesus</i>	128
<i>Thought for Month</i> 2, 26, 50, 74, 98,	121
<i>Unity of the Spirit</i>	6
<i>Whom shall he teach knowledge</i>	123

MINOR ITEMS

<i>Cold or Hot</i>	93
<i>Fish anagram, The</i>	36
<i>Fruit of Evil</i>	5
<i>Insight of an Inca monarch</i>	95
<i>Intelligence decline</i>	24
<i>Jot or tittle, One</i>	87
<i>No self-glory</i>	127
<i>Note on Luke 9, 53</i>	16
<i>Note on Matt. 10.8</i>	6
<i>Thinking point (on intelligence)</i>	24
<i>Tragedy of Babylon</i>	11
<i>What think ye of Christ</i>	120

TEXTS EXPOUNDED IN DETAIL

<i>Deut. 32, 47</i> 50	<i>Luke 1, 27-38</i> 28
33, 27 78	3, 23-38 30
<i>Ezra 8, 28</i> 26	5, 31-37 112
<i>Job 33, 4</i> 74	9, 53 16
<i>Psa. 74, 5-6</i> 93	22, 36 68
<i>Isa. 7, 14</i> 31	23 & 24 61
<i>Amos 3, 3</i> 98	<i>Jno. 6, 44</i> 41
<i>Matt. 1, 1-16</i> 30	19 & 20 61
1, 18-24 29	<i>Acts 1, 11</i> 136
10, 8 6	1, 15-20 71
13, 14-15 96	16, 3 106
13, 44-46 91	21, 26 106
18, 21-35 130	<i>Rom. 8, 11</i> 118
21, 33-46 54	<i>Heb. 11, 3</i> 111
25, 31-46 12	<i>Jas. 2, 18</i> 59
27 & 28 61	<i>Rev. 1, 7</i> 66
27, 3-10 71	3, 14-15 93
<i>Mark 15 & 16</i> 61	20, 1-3 84