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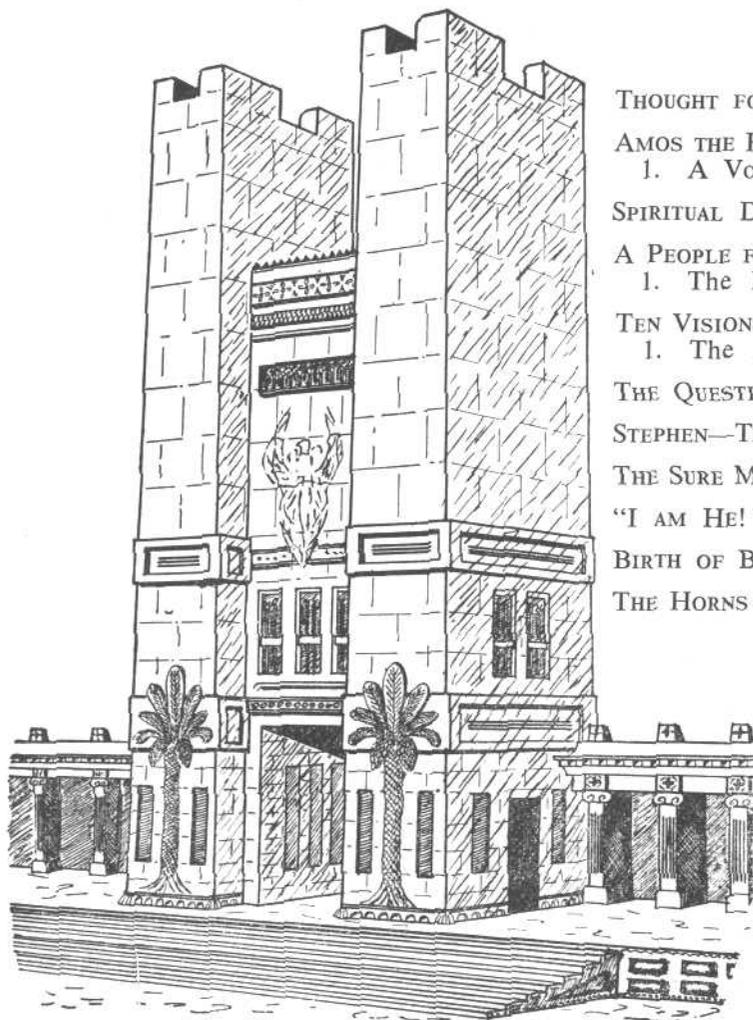
Thou, therefore, endure
hardness as a good
soldier of Jesus Christ

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

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Thought for the Month

"While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, shall not cease" (Gen. 8.22).

At the dawn of a New Year God's promise to Noah comes with significant emphasis. The cycle of Nature has repeated itself something like five thousand times since that word was uttered, but its validity extends into the infinite future. It remains as an expression of the Divine determination that there shall be a family of ever-living creatures, earth-born yet also sons of God, who will live their lives to all eternity in an environment created for them and suited to the conditions of their existence, an environment in which the ever repeating cycle of Nature's processes will produce all that man will ever need and provide also that continual variety of outward things which is so characteristic of all that God creates. No dead, dull uniformity such as man's own creations tend to produce; no growing of trees and plants in regular straight lines in which each several one is the exact replica of its fellow. No mountains built in the form of exactly square cubic blocks or rivers constricted within parallel straight banks. The world God designs for man is one which, like the tree of knowledge in Eden, is good for food, pleasant to the eyes, and greatly to be desired to make one wise, but unlike the initial effect of that tree, bringing nothing but beneficent results to those who inhabit it. Hence as this year opens we can step out into the unknown experiences and circumstances which it will surely bring in the certain knowledge that despite the fear and turmoil, the apprehension and foreboding of the day in which we live, we are that much nearer the time of light and gladness when under the Divine rule of the coming Age, all the strife and suffering and death of the present will be gone, and the time of man's final period of training for eternity will have come, It

is because of our certainty that this glorious future awaits all men that we can truly say—
A Happy New Year!

NOTICES

New Features for 1979. In this issue there commences three new serial features. "A People for a Purpose" is a devotional study taking as its theme the Christian calling; "Amos the Herdsman" is an exposition of the Book of Amos; "Ten Visions of Christ Triumphant" looks at the symbolic pictures of our Lord at his First and Second Advents as presented in the Book of Revelation. It is hoped that all these will be helpful.

Anonymous. We would acknowledge with sincere appreciation the receipt of an anonymous gift of £5 from Kilmarnock (September). At the same time we are desired by Bro. John Shepherd of Bradford to acknowledge on his behalf his receipt of a similar gift of £30 from Maidenhead (October) towards the special fund of which he with two others are the administrators.

Glossary of little-known terms in this Issue

JOSEPHUS. Jewish historian AD 70-90.

JOS. ANT. 9.10.4. The "Antiquities of Josephus" Book 9, chap. 10, sec. 4.

SEPTUAGINT. Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures made about 275 BC, and in general use at time of First Advent. Still used as Bible of the Greek and Eastern churches.

SUMER. The most ancient nation and civilisation known. The Sumerians were the descendants of Ham soon after the Flood.

Gone from us

— ❁ —

Bro. A. Carrington (*Leeds*)
Sis. A. F. Harding (*Worthing*)
Sis. D. Smith (*Aylesbury*)
Sis. - Smith (*Luton*)

— ❁ —

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

AMOS THE HERDSMAN

I. A Voice from Zion

He was born and brought up a simple peasant, earning his bread by the tending of cattle belonging to one of the wealthy farmers of Judah. He supplemented his meagre wages by gathering wild figs as he followed his charges over the rough hillside country of Tekoa, a few miles to the south of Bethlehem. He was probably of the royal tribe, the tribe of Judah, maybe even distantly related to the royal family, the house of David, but, if so, a very humble and undistinguished member of that house. In outward appearance no different from his fellow workers, he was an ordinary labouring man having no access to the privileges of the wealthy and the powerful. At the end of the day he returned to his primitive cottage in the village and emerged again in the morning to take up his task as he had done all his life and his father had before him.

In one respect Amos was different. Outwardly a labouring peasant, inwardly he burned with zeal for the laws and the ways of God. Judah and Israel had relapsed into almost complete idolatry and Amos was one of the few far-sighted men who realised that the consequence could not fail to be utter disaster. Under the terms of the Mosaic Covenant Israel was guaranteed security and prosperity all the time that they adhered to the Covenant and loyalty to God. Failure so to do, apostasy from the true faith, the going after false gods, would, conversely, bring invasion, adversity and disaster. Israel in general in the days of Amos did not really believe that disaster would come. They were prosperous and for the time being had the whiphand over their enemies. Even though their own histories told them of past times when the penalty of the broken Covenant had been exacted from their forefathers they did not believe that it would happen to them. They were prosperous; they had been prosperous for a long time. They worshipped false gods; they had worshipped false gods for a long time. Nothing adverse had happened; nothing adverse would happen. So they continued in their way, confident.

But Amos knew that disaster would come; moreover, that it was imminent. He knew that God was long-suffering towards his errant people and would wait a long time before inflicting judgment. But that judgment would eventually come he was certain. And in his fervent zeal and burning desire, not only for the honour of God's Name, but also for the welfare and happiness of

his nation, he had to speak out. The inspiration of the prophet came upon him and he left his cattle and his country home and made his way to the cities where his voice could be heard.

The king of Judah, the two-tribe nation, was Uzziah. The ten-tribe kingdom of Israel was ruled by Jeroboam II, who was probably the most able king the northern kingdom ever had. In the first place he had cultivated friendly relations with Uzziah of Judah and so made himself safe from attack from that quarter. He conquered his eastern neighbours, Moab and Ammon, making them subject to Israel, under native rulers appointed by him. Edom was a friendly ally. The traditional enemy of Israel, Syria, was invaded by Jeroboam and conquered. His sway extended from the borders of Edom in the south to Hamath in the north of Syria—virtually as far as the original empire of Solomon. Concurrently with this, the greatest foe of all the middle Eastern countries, Assyria, was experiencing serious internal trouble under a succession of undistinguished kings, and had no time or resources for foreign conquest. The Assyrian armies were needed at Nineveh. A generation or so ago the prophet Jonah had foretold the coming destruction of Nineveh, and since the same prophet had also foretold the career of conquest of King Jeroboam before it happened (2 Kings 14.25) his stock was high in Israel and the general feeling was that Assyria need not be feared again. And few in Israel stopped to reflect that perhaps the Lord was giving them this time of freedom from enemies that they might return in faith and loyalty before He invoked the penalty of continued unbelief, just as He so recently had done with the Ninevites who had repented at the preaching of Jonah so that the Lord in his turn "*repented of the evil that he said he would do unto them, and he did it not*" (Jon. 3.10). A parenthesis in the history of Jeroboam's predecessors who were in subjection to Syria confirms that the Lord did do just this in the days of Jeroboam: "*And the Lord gave Israel a saviour, so that they went out from under the hand of the Syrians, and the children of Israel dwelt in their tents (houses) as aforetime. Nevertheless they departed not from their sins . . . and there remained the idol shrine in Samaria*" (2 Kings 13.5-6). That saviour was Jeroboam, who despite that the hand of the Lord was with him to deliver Israel from Syria as He had been besought by King Jehoahaz his grandfather, con-

tinued still to "do evil in the sight of the Lord" (2 Kings 14.24). The goodness of the Lord brought no response.

The consequence of this period of peace was material prosperity. The ten-tribe kingdom of Israel was more wealthy than it had ever been before or was again. Spoil taken from their vanquished enemies and the profits from commerce and trade created a class of rich Israelites who lived in magnificent houses lined inside with paintings and frescoes, and in some cases panels of ivory brought from Africa (Amos 3.15). The interiors boasted elaborate and artistic furniture. Gardens and vineyards, summerhouses and shady courts, surrounded them. The occupants gave themselves over to feasting and luxurious living, with no thought for the morrow and no care for the needs of the poor. For there were poor as well. In every such society, as the rich grow richer, so the poor become poorer. Outside the cities of grand houses were the mean dwellings of the peasantry. But all, rich and poor alike, had forsaken God and turned to the false gods of Canaan. In the capital of Samaria, and at the tribal centre of Gilgal where the Tabernacle had rested awhile when Joshua and his hosts invaded the land, there stood images of the bull-god for worship (Hos. 8.5 & 12.5). The original place of idolatrous worship set up at Dan in the days of the judges (Jud. 18. 30-31) was still there, served by an apostate priesthood. At Bethel there was a great temple, where the king and his court came to worship Baal (Amos 7.13). Altars to false gods abounded all over the country (Amos 2.8). The shrine sacred to the idol goddess which Jehu had built in Samaria remained and was still a centre of worship (2 Kings 13.6). The time had come which is spoken of in 2 Chron. 36. 15-16 where it is recorded "that the Lord God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising up betimes, and sending: because he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling place. But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against his people, till there was no remedy".

There was less than half a century to go before the judgment came, and the end of the Kingdom of Israel. Within that half century king and people had one last chance, the final opportunity of deliverance. God sent them the prophet Amos.

Amos was probably a young man when the Lord called him. There is an impetuous ring about his repeated expression "Thus hath the Lord showed me" which breathes a spirit of haste and urgency more in keeping with the impatience of youth than the calm mellowness of middle age. Peasant though he was, he was

well informed both as to Israel's own corruption and decadence, and that of the surrounding nations with whom Israel had so much to do and from whom she had drawn so much of that corruption. His prophecy commences, not with the declaration of imminent judgment upon Israel which would normally be expected, and which in any case does form the main burden of his prophecy, but with the Lord's condemnation of those same surrounding nations for their oppression of Israel. Maybe there was good psychology here, a mode of approach dictated by the indwelling Spirit of God by which he was inspired. Maybe his hearers would listen more intently if the message of judgment related to peoples other than themselves, peoples for whom in the main they harboured thoughts of enmity. It is significant that after the judgments upon the six alien nations his next message is directed against Judah, the southern kingdom. Only after that does he turn his attention to Israel, but when he does so it is evident who is the real object of his denunciation.

Amos received his call to the service of God, according to his own statement, "in the days of Uzziah king of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam, king of Israel, two years before the earthquake" (Amos 1.1). This precision avails little since we do not know the date of the earthquake. It is established that Uzziah reigned from 791 to 739 BC, and Jeroboam II from 793 to 753, so that it was between 791 and 753 when Amos executed his mission. A closer approximation may be possible. Uzziah's leprosy was the result of his presumption in attempting to usurp the priest's prerogatives in the Temple. (2 Chron. 26. 16-21). In consequence he was barred from contact with his fellows and Jotham his son acted as regent until his death. The most likely reconciliation of the chronology of the period shows that this regency commenced in the 41st year of Uzziah's reign, 751 BC so that this was probably the time of Uzziah's sin. Now Josephus in his history of Israel says that at the moment of Uzziah's refusal to heed the High Priest a great earthquake shook the city and rent the Temple roof so that the sunlight streamed through and fell upon the king's face, revealing the sudden infliction of leprosy (Jos. Ant. 9.10.4). The source from which Josephus took this is not known; it may be from the variant Hebrew version of the Old Testament which he is known to have had, but if there is any substance in this the mission of Amos would have been in 753 BC, the year of Jeroboam's death.

So the fervent voice of the youthful prophet burst upon the complacency of King Jeroboam and his court as they paid their devotions to the

idol god of Bethel. *"The Lord shall roar from Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem"* (Amos 1.2). That, for a start, was an unwelcome reminder to the hearers that the true sovereignty of Israel was at Jerusalem, kings of the line of David, sitting upon the throne of the Lord, and that there was the Temple of the true God of Israel where men ought to worship. *"The pasture of the shepherds shall be woebegone and the top of Carmel dried up"*. Northern Israel was pre-eminently the land of lush pastures, meet for many flocks, and well furnished with trees—trees of the forest and fruit trees. *"The top of Carmel"* is equally accurately translated *"the trees of the fruitful places"* and this is more likely to be Amos' meaning. Compared with the more arid highlands of Judah, the pastures and forests of the northern kingdom, in which they took such pride and from which they drew much of their wealth, were to wither and be destroyed. But having attracted the attention of the people to whom he had been sent—and from chap. 7 it is evident that he had made his way from Tekoa straight to the pagan sanctuary at Bethel and there announced his mission in the hearing at

least of the idolatrous High Priest if not of the king himself—having thus attracted the attention of the people, he turns aside from the real subjects of his condemnation and commences by declaring what the Lord is shortly going to do to the nations round about. Syria, Philistia, Tyre, Edom, Moab, Ammon; all these have incurred the Divine wrath and must enter into judgment. These have first to be considered and after this the guilty nation must listen to the declaration of its own faithlessness to God and the judgment that must inevitably follow, except they repent.

In point of fact, they did not repent. And not many decades later the Assyrians came and destroyed their cities and their land and took them all away to die as captives in a strange land. The final penalty of the broken covenant had been exacted.

So Amos, the herdsman, stood there in the sanctuary of the idol, facing an apostate king and an apostate priesthood, telling them of the doom that must surely come. In a very real sense Amos was the Herald of the Captivity.

To be continued.

SPIRITUAL DROUGHT

*A lesson from the
life of David*

According to the heading in the A.V., the fifty-first Psalm is the expression of David's sorrow and penitence after his double sin of adultery and murder. In trying to arrive at a proper understanding of this penitential Psalm, we should not forget that prior to writing it David had been in an impatient attitude for many months. It was after the Prophet Nathan's visit and the enormity of his guilt had been brought home to him that his pent up, deliberately repressed feelings found vent in this spate of self-condemnatory words—words which have been the medium of repentance for countless thousands of men and women, in more recent times, when throwing themselves upon the mercy of Almighty God.

This black spot, the blackest spot in his whole life, shows that David was a man of like passions with other men; that in unguarded moments the black depths of his heart showed how even the best of human kind is fallen in sin. It shows the truth of Paul's dictum that "that there is none righteous". The inclusion of such a story in Holy Writ shows that the Divine Author has drawn a true picture of man when He said that the heart of man was desperately wicked and deceitful above all things. It is included, not because God approved of the sin, but for the very opposite reason, because God disapproved and strongly

condemned it, and that it might serve as a model of God's clemency and grace to the thousands who should repent and confess their weaknesses and shortcomings. It stands on record as a permanent testimony that man's life is barren and cheerless when earth-born clouds intervene between God and his earthly creatures, and illustrates the truth of Jesus' words that "man does not live by bread alone" but only when in touch with the words of the Lord.

It was after the birth of Bathsheba's child that Nathan came to David to tell him that the death of the child was to be part of the punishment for his sin. The better part of a year must therefore have elapsed between the sin and the deep repentance for it of which this Psalm is the expression. What had been going on during this time? What had David been doing all this while? The Scriptures do not say directly, but certain hints are given which help somewhat. We may form some conception from our own particular experiences of sin not immediately repented of — of sin never honestly faced, never dragged out into the light of God's presence and there confessed. David was trifling with his better self; playing tricks with his conscience. He was substituting diligence in his duties as king and magistrate—his duty to man—for his duty to God. He heard and settled the disputes and grievances which

came before him as Israel's chief judge (as did Solomon later when asked by the two women to decide whose child was living and whose dead); he received petitions addressed to the throne; he went up to the house of God to worship; he endeavoured, no doubt, to conform to and administer the law with even greater diligence. This we realise from his hot anger against the rich man who took the poor man's ewe lamb to feed his visitor, as Nathan unfolded the parable.

It is likely that he had reasoned within himself again and again that he had done nothing more than eastern monarchs did at any time they pleased. Was it not the commonest thing for an Oriental despot (and was not David such a despot) to send for any woman he pleased to become a member of his harem, and to get rid of any man who stood in his way either by violence or strategy or both? "What more have I done than is done every day by my fellow sovereigns?" David might say and think, and would he not make recompense for it by more attention to the administration of the law in coming days, throwing his protection over the weak and oppressed; the rich man should smart for his theft of the ewe lamb when brought before his tribunal!

David had lulled his conscience to sleep so much that he did not recognise his own portrait in the parable of the prophet while it was being narrated to him. Not for an instant did he realise that his own conduct had been much more reprehensible, wicked and hard-hearted than the rich man. All these months he had been hushing up his sin, trying to silence his conscience by his activities (his war with the Ammonites for instance) until the Spirit of God winged those four words, "*Thou art the man*" to his guilty, restless heart. It was with David as it must be with all who leave their misdeeds unconfessed, he was restless and wretched. Listen to his own words in Psalm 32. 3 and 4, written also about this time, "*When I kept silence my bones waxed old . . . Day and night thy hand was heavy upon me, and my moisture is like the drought in summer.*" There was such a hard, dry, stiff, formal life all these months, so unlike the constant play and uprush of spiritual emotions in his earlier and happier days. His conscience was asleep, his soul was in chains, his creative genius was stifled, his life was like a summer's drought.

The truth of the thing is only one of the tests to which it must be put. We may find a matter to be true and yet not find it to be worthy of our thought, dishonourable. Who does not know that there are dishonourable and dishonouring thoughts, the pondering of which not only wastes

Oh! how many others, like David, have played tricks with their conscience over some unconfessed sin or weakness, and have carried their burden for days and weeks and months until the drought of summer has come over them too. All the joy of the Truth has gradually disappeared; all the gladness of soul has evaporated, the songs have turned to sighs and perhaps an attempt has been made to substitute service for repentance, and the longer the fight has been attempted against the voice of the Lord within, the cooler the Altar fires have become until love has waxed cold.

You who read this, if the joys of the Lord which once you knew have been lost; if your soul is in chains, will you not ask yourself the reason why? Is there some dread spectre in your life, some weakness unconfessed, unrepented of? Is there some earthborn cloud intercepting a Father's smile and blotting out the sunshine of his love?

Read the story of David, and profit thereby, for God was very gracious to him though He left him not unpunished. It is not necessary that there should have been anything so flagrant as David's sin to shut the windows of heaven over one. Spiritual dryness and lethargy can come about by sheer neglect, or it can be the result of some little "incident" where we could not have our own way, and hence we have failed to assemble together, and slowly the drought has crept over our souls. No stimulus from fellowship, no iron sharpening iron, no occasional songs of praise to lighten the load on one's shoulders, and later on, no joy of exultation in the morning and evening prayer, till we shrink from the bending of the knee—and then, all the little weaknesses unconfessed and unforgiven. Then the heaven becomes as brass and there is no rain for us. So David's experience became our experience. Spiritual dryness, spiritual lethargy, spiritual deadness, the loss of "the first love," the loss of the response to the things that once stirred the soul. How tragically sad and how prevalent!

God grant to all such a message from some faithful Nathan, which may start the tears of repentance flowing and bring down the showers of blessing to end the drought and cause the blooms and fragrance of restored verdure to shoot forth again in the heart.

valuable time, but instead of bringing a reward, a blessing for the time spent upon them, entails a loss, a disadvantage, in that it leaves a dishonourable stain in our minds, unworthy of us as "new creatures" in Christ Jesus?

A PEOPLE FOR A PURPOSE

*Thoughts on the
Call of the Church*

1. The Purpose

"Ye are a chosen Race, a Royal Priesthood, an holy Nation, a People for a purpose; that ye may declare the perfections of him who called you from darkness into his wonderful Light" (I Pet. 2.9 Diag.).

Purpose, the dictionary defines as an end or aim in view; an intention or resolve.

Whatever has been built upon this planet has had a purpose. Whether it was the great tower of Babel, the pyramid of Gizeh, the fabulous palaces and temples of ancient kings and pagan gods, the stately cathedrals of the west, the halls of learning, the seats of government or the monuments erected to the memory of the famous, all were constructed according to a plan resolved upon by their builders. In every case they were first designed, the site chosen, suitable material gathered together, a foundation laid, work commenced and continued until there arose a complete architectural beauty which future generations have looked upon with admiration. In such a way God fashioned the earth according to his Purpose. He had an aim, an end in view, all the details of which existed in his mind. When He was ready He carried out his resolve forming a temple in which man could worship him in spirit and in truth.

This was not the whole of his design. The temple at Jerusalem, built by Solomon in seven years at great cost of treasure and labour was a structure of rare beauty designed to be the House of God, his dwelling place with men. At its dedication the glory of the Lord filled the whole house, a visible evidence of his acceptance and presence there. Neither the earth nor the temple made with hands were the ultimate aim of the Master-planner. Another building yet was a major part of his design, "a building fitly framed together, growing into an holy temple in the Lord." (Eph. 2.21). Throughout the New Testament are scattered many references to this building, having foundation and chief corner-stones built up into it, each stone seemingly a pattern of the whole, formed to be a temple for the Spirit of God. This is described as "the eternal Purpose of God which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Eph. 3.11).

The real Plan of the Ages is quite evidently not the forming of a world or the building of temples of stone but the forming of character, the building of lives into such beauty and service that each one is an individual temple. Joined together they form one glorious House of God, of which

the temple of Solomon was only a picture. This temple has taken two thousand years for its construction. When it is complete and the glory of the Lord fills the whole House the Eternal Purpose of God will be complete. It will be the admiration of all beholders, not for an age, but through all the ages to come. That glory of the Divine character will shine through every stone of it. It will be more than the Light of the World, it will be the light of all worlds. The intention and aim of its Almighty Builder was an edifice that should glow with the radiance of his Spirit forever. Not only Divine power, wisdom and riches will be seen in its design and the precious treasure of its chief corner-stone but Divine love will shine with undimmed lustre through every immortal stone of its marvellous architecture.

God's purpose is a building of life, a temple not made with hands but by the power of the Spirit. It is presented to intelligent human beings with the invitation to become co-workers with God in its erection, their individual willingness making them, not only labourers together with God but also his workmanship, selected stones in the whole spiritual structure.

People with a purpose usually live tidy lives. In the social and business world, from early years they know where they are going, what they are going to do with life and what they want from it. Their aims and ambitions may take some time to achieve but the determined keep right on until they have attained the desired end, allowing no obstacle to defeat or thwart them in what they have set out to do. These are the successful people who have used all their natural assets to the best advantage without waste of time or energy. Having fixed their goal they have gone straight toward it, using all circumstances to further their own ends. Such people are admired for their drive and initiative by the less resolute who falter in their course or allow themselves to become deflected from their purpose, or who through misfortune have their plans broken beyond repair. Yet others have no purpose whatever. Aimlessly they drift through life wherever the tides and currents of circumstances may carry them. Like boats at sea, rudderless, chartless and pilotless they are at the mercy of all the elements, pathetic flotsam, engulfed at last in some fatal maelstrom or stranded upon a dead shore.

Of all these classes a poet has expressively written—

*"To every man there openeth a Way and ways
and a way.*

The high soul takes the high way;

The low soul takes the low,

While in between are the misty flats

Where the rest drift to and fro."

A thousand choices offer themselves to the time and talent of man. Wealth, fame, honours, social position, prestige, business and scholastic success, are all within the scope of legitimate ambition and purpose. The pursuers of such have enriched the world as well as themselves. Death writes *Finis* to the most successful career, and the finest purpose is either ended or carried on by others in a way altogether different from that of its originator. No earthly purpose long outlasts its author. Some have had the joy of achievement after tempestuous efforts only to succumb to the rigours of its endurance. Others have passed away in a sorrowful sunset having seen their achievements out-dated or destroyed by the ruthlessness of progress. As Gray observed in his classic Elegy—

"The paths of glory lead but to the grave."

Heredity, home-life, environment, education, circumstances, all play a part in the prompting of a choice. Happy and blessed are they who because of the peculiarities of their share in these have heard with unmistakable clarity a Voice behind them saying, "this is the way, walk ye in it." Happy and honoured are they, if so hearing, they have obeyed, allowing God's choice of them to be their choice of him. If they have entered upon the narrow way that leads to life they have become co-workers with God upon a purpose which far from ending at death, attains its grand completion. It will be understandable if partakers of weak flesh and blood should sometimes marvel, even doubt that co-operation, partnership with God in so mighty an enterprise could be the lot of any member of Adam's race. There are no ifs and buts about the Scriptures. With a simple directness the apostles wrote convincingly what they believed to be the truth, the mysterious purpose of God, long hidden from the sons of men but since the advent of Jesus made manifest to those "Beloved of God . . . called to be saints" (Eph. 3.4-5; Rom. 1.7).

In the temple of Jerusalem the court of the Gentiles kept other nationalities separated from the chosen Hebrew race as the court of the Women kept the sexes apart. The Apostle to the Gentiles was chosen to reveal to men that with the death and resurrection of Jesus all such barriers had been abolished. The despised Gentile was now fellow-heir with the favoured Jew; the inferior female was equal in status to the male, for nothing availed in that great temple design

but a New-Creature. "For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus." Baptism into Christ was to be clothed with Christ, to lose all natural distinctions. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free, male nor female, for ye are all one in Christ" (Gal. 3.25-29). The purpose of God was and is that those whom He called should by his grace, so lose themselves in Christ, become so like him, that all merge together into one complete edifice, one in spirit, one in faith, hope and love.

Called to be a saint means more than to be separated from the spirit of the world. It means to live contrary to natural inclinations. They will be choice indeed who are exalted to that high position as living stones in that temple through which the Spirit of God is to shine for all eternity. Not only will they love and worship him with their whole being; they will be pure in heart. They will, through a life-time of co-work with God have become like him in character, re-created in his image, receiving from him the light of holiness and the spirit of Divine love. Like bright jewels upon the dark back-cloth of the world's sin and unbelief they will even now transmit the radiance of a godly character.

"Beautiful, holy souls, into whom in all ages entering, the Spirit of God hath made them friends of God and prophets. These are the joy of heaven, they are the salt of the earth. Every-one of us is better for them, as the dull clods of earth are better for the snowy hills whence the rivers flow, as the stagnant air is better for the pure winds which scatter the pestilences. What would the world be without them? A millionaire, though the world crawl at his feet, is but as the small dust of the balance; but O God! O God! Give us saints!"

So, with impassioned earnestness, spoke a famous preacher in a famous church a hundred years ago.

The value of saints is still high. They are needed now as they have always been, as they always will be. To work with God on this great Purpose of fashioning living, saintly stones for an eternal temple of the Spirit is the only life that counts.

*"The life that counts must toil and fight
Must hate the wrong and love the right
Must stand for God by day and night
This is the life that counts.*

*"The life that counts must holy be
In darkest night make melody
Must wait the dawn on bended knee
This is the life that counts."*

To be continued.

TEN VISIONS OF CHRIST TRIUMPHANT

I. The Ascension

The ten visions of Christ triumphant are contained within the scope of that mystic allegory penned by John the Apostle under inspiration of the Holy Spirit and entitled the "*Apokalupsis*"—the unveiling or the Revelation. The Book as a whole depicts the conflict between good and evil, between the powers of Heaven and the powers of this world, between Christ the Lord and Satan the Adversary, commencing from the time of our Lord's First Advent and culminating at the end of the Millennial Age when evil has been forever banished and "all that hath breath shall praise the Lord". Within this whole assemblage of vivid pictures and highly coloured scenes there shine out like jewels these ten tableaux, each delineating the characteristics of one or another aspect of our Lord's office and work during this period. Five of the pictures relate to the results of his First Advent and five to those of his Second. Between them all they afford an absorbing presentation of what happened, is happening, and will happen in the unseen world after Christ had risen from the dead and ascended into the presence of the Father, throughout this present Age, and until his promised return is fully accomplished and He is the acknowledged King and Shepherd of our terrestrial creation for the purpose of reconciling all, of all generations, who can be reconciled, to the Father, that God may be all in all.

The writer to the Hebrews was inspired to a rare level of insight when he penned the immortal words "*We see Jesus*" (Heb. 2.9). He was not talking of the physical. The disciples before him had seen Jesus physically for three and a half years, and standing on Olivet they saw him still, ascending visibly before their eyes until the cloud received him out of their sight and they saw him no more. They never set eyes upon him again; yet they continued to see him to the end of their days. We who live now, who have never seen him in the flesh, see him by the eye of the mind, and we see him, not so much in manlike form as was his appearance in the towns and villages of Judea and Galilee, but in the guise of his activities and his work, his ministration, and execution of the Father's purposes, as they are revealed to us in the Scriptures. "*Though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now we know him so no more*" (2 Cor. 5.16). And therefore these pictures in the Book of Revelation reveal to us Christ, not as He was, but as He is, and as He will be.

So we come to Vision One, which starts at the beginning and tells of the death and resurrection of Christ. But not as those momentous events were seen by man. That aspect had already been recorded by men who were there at the time, set down as sober history in plain, unvarnished words. When we read those narratives we do so against the scenery and background of this material world and we can visualise the scenes very much as they would appear before our own natural eyes were we also witnesses. Here in the Revelation the story is related from the viewpoint of an observer on the other side of the veil, and for that reason has to be described in the guise of symbol and allegory so that we can understand.

"*There appeared a great wonder in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars*" (Rev. 12.1). A woman, standing resplendent in the full radiance of the sun behind and around her, her feet resting upon the moon, and twelve stars of heaven woven together to form a scintillating crown set upon her head. Here is fulfilment of prophecy and a clear exposition of Scripture doctrine. The promise to Eve in Eden was that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head. Here in Rev. 12 we have the opening scene of the enthralling drama the culmination of which is the achievement of that promise. Here are the Woman, the Seed, and the Serpent.

This twelfth chapter is set at the time of the First Advent. The Woman is Israel; not the hard-hearted, unbelieving apostate generation which was inhabiting Judea and Galilee when Jesus lived on earth, but the ideal Israel of which the prophets had spoken, the faithful "remnant" which God had promised to preserve throughout the generations until Christ should come. That remnant was represented in Jesus' day by all those "that looked for deliverance in Jerusalem" (Luke 2.38), and it was of this "remnant", the true Israel, that the seed which is Christ (Gal. 3.16), the Messiah, came. So, in Rev. 12, the Woman, the true Israel, in the fulness of time gave birth to the Man-child who is destined, in his Millennial reign, to rule all nations with a "rod of iron" (literally, to shepherd all nations with a shepherding club; the Eastern shepherd carried a *shebet*, an iron club with which to beat a way for the flock through undergrowth and to defend the sheep from the attacks of wild beasts).

But the serpent was waiting. The great red dragon stood before the Woman to devour her child as soon as it was born. The serpent-dragon is a symbol of Satan, the arch-enemy of God and man. (It should be noted that in mediæval English of the time that the A.V. was produced "serpent" and "dragon" were synonymous words and either in the A.V. has the same meaning.) The idea of the dragon as the embodiment of the prince of evil goes back to very ancient times—even to the story of the Garden of Eden. The pagan temple of Marduk in Babylon was guarded by eight gigantic *sirussu*, dragons made of burnished copper (the ruddy colour of which gives rise to the "red" dragon here). The power of Satan at the time of our Lord's birth was manifested through the force of paganism, for Rome ruled the world and Rome was wedded to paganism, the worship of false gods. All the enemies of the man-child were pagan or supporters of pagan Rome—Pilate, the priests, Herod—they all served Cæsar and Cæsar was the embodiment and representative of paganism. It was this pagan power which accomplished the death of the "than Christ Jesus".

But the seed was not destroyed! *"The dragon stood before the woman . . . to devour her child as soon as it was born . . . and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne"*. (Rev. 12. 3-5). How much there is in Scripture to tell us of that great truth! Peter, speaking on the Day of Pentecost, boldly declared *"Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ"* (Acts 2.36). The fundamental requirement of God's redemptive Plan had been satisfied—the seed of the Woman according to Edenic promise, the seed of Abraham according to promise, the scion of the house of David according to promise, the Lion of the tribe of Judah according to promise, all have been fulfilled in the person and in the triumphant resurrection of the Lord Christ. The dragon had been frustrated and henceforth, though still active, his ultimate destiny was sealed. Christ had ascended to the right hand of God, there to wait, as the writer to the Hebrews says, until the time comes for his enemies to be made his footstool.

From this point the vision of Rev. 12 goes on to speak of other things, of the efforts put forth by the Dragon to retain his power and inflict grievous harm upon those who in after days would become servants of and followers of the man-child. Not until the end of the Book of Revelation is the Dragon finally disposed of and by that time the whole of the Ten Visions have appeared and given their testimony and run their course.

Vision Two shows something of what happened after the man-child had been caught up unto the throne of God. It reveals the scene in Heaven itself when the triumphant Redeemer returned to the heavenly sphere after his sojourn on earth. *"It became him"* says the writer to the Hebrews in Heb. 2.10 *"to make the captain of their salvation perfect through suffering"*. That is the basis of the heavenly acclamation which greeted the Lord of glory on his entry into his spiritual home. *"Thou art worthy"* they sang *"thou wast slain, and hast redeemed to God. by thy blood, out of every kindred and tongue and people and nation"* (Rev. 5.9). The whole of Rev. chaps. 4 to 6 enshrines what is known as the Throne scene, in which the Almighty himself is depicted holding high court in Heaven to receive and applaud the victorious Christ returning from earth, having triumphed over death and the grave. And because of this triumph he is pronounced worthy to open the book of the future and break the seven seals which kept closed its pages, that He might become the Executor of the Divine Plan and go forth to set in motion and control those forces which are to influence and direct the events of the ensuing world-age. *"The Lion of the Tribe of Judah, the Root of David"*, they sang *"hath prevailed, to open the book and loose the seven seals thereof"* (Rev. 5.5). And angels to the number of millions of myriads answered back *"Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing"* (Rev. 5.12).

So the triumphant Lord took the Book of the Future out of the hand of the Almighty seated upon the Throne, and began to break the seals, one after another. That book was the prophetic record of the Gospel Age, then about to open, an advance written history of events which had not yet taken place. Herein was depicted all those things — wars, famines, pestilences; evangelism, martyrdom and finally world judgment—which the Lord had mercifully hidden from the minds of his disciples during that memorable conversation on the Mount of Olives when they had asked him for the signs of his return. *"Ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars,"* He had said, *"and there shall be famines and pestilences and earthquakes, but the end is not yet"* (Matt. 24.6-7). Long years afterward when John, sitting on the rocky shore of Patmos, beheld this vision, he may have understood more clearly what those words portended. Here in Rev. 5, at any rate, we have a clear picture of the triumphant Lord taking the book and breaking the seals in succession, revealing the hidden pictures inside, pictures delineating things which must surely come to pass

during that long term of years which in the wisdom of God must elapse before the Lord could return to earth to complete the work of world conversion and reconciliation.

Do we see in this vision of the progressively opening book with all its varied scenes a kind of heavenly conference in which all that was destined to come to pass was as it were laid out in detail and discussed, and the time scale determined, that the Lord might know exactly what was to intervene before He must leave the celestial realm for the second time to come to earth. Jesus did plainly tell his disciples just before his death that "*of that day and hour knoweth no man, no not the angels in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father*" (Mark 13.32). Was it at this supreme heavenly session that the secret was imparted to our Lord and that with this book in his hand, He knew, at last, both the day and the hour?

The opening of the book was at least a revelation to the bystander, for John, beholding the vision, was also able to see what was in the book and what he saw is recorded in his sixth chapter. The events and the order of the events followed very closely, albeit perhaps in greater detail, the outline Jesus gave his disciples when giving them the signs betokening his Advent, prior to his death. First came the rider on the white horse with crown and bow, the primitive evangelism of the infant church going out in the power of its commission to teach all nations, and its conquest of paganism three centuries later; then the red horse of war, followed by the black horse of famine and the ghastly horse of pestilence—war, famine, pestilence, the three devastating forces of the Age predicted by Jesus. After that the cries of the martyrs, suffering for their faithfulness to the cause of Christ, and finally the great earthquake and universal confusion of the cataclysmic conclusion to the Age when the rule of man utterly collapses and the way is open for the Son of Man to appear and take the Kingdom. All that, and perhaps more, was shown in the pictures revealed by the opening of the sealed book and perhaps it was from the time of this heavenly session at which such momentous happenings were foreseen that it can be said the history of the Gospel Age actually began.

What does this vision teach us? Does it not make plain that the events of this Gospel Age

King Asa of Judah was diseased in his feet, "*yet in his disease he sought not to the Lord, but to the physicians*". (2 Chron. 16. 12). This is not to say that Divine displeasure is upon those who seek to obtain relief from sickness and physical ailments by means of the skill of the medical profession. In Asa's day the only physicians were the priests of idolatrous faiths and their "cures" were invariably mixed up with the

are under the control of the Son of Man himself? "The Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment to the Son." "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth." The work of the Lord is with the development of his Church during this Age. We know that. The Age is set aside for the calling out and the perfecting of this "people for God's Name" and until that work is finished the Lord's work on behalf of mankind in general cannot commence. We know that also, and since all this is in the hands of the Son, and He is our High Priest and our Shepherd, it would seem from this chapter that He has control over the course of the Age and the events of the Age and all that has to do with the Age, that He might bend all things in this Age and in this world to serve the one great purpose of this Age—the development and perfecting of the Church. That seems to be the spiritual meaning behind this vision of the sealed book. The Lord controls the sending out of the white horse of evangelism, the red horse of war, the black horse of famine, and the ghastly horse of pestilence. He watches over the souls of the martyrs and holds them safely in the sleep of death until the time for their resurrection, and He so overrules earth's political and social affairs that the time of judgment that is to conclude the Age comes to its climax neither too soon nor too late, but just at the time fore-ordained by God. No wonder the angels sang "Worthy is the Lamb... to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing" (Rev. 5.12).

This then is the scene in heaven, enduring through the Gospel Age as the Lamb breaks one seal after another, revealing to angels and men alike what is to come next. To the extent that these mystic happenings can be related to mankind's ideas of time all this has to be placed during the ten days intervening between the Ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, for at that latter time the next vision in sequence takes the stage, the office of our Lord as High Priest, Counsellor, Shepherd, Guide and Helper to the Church from beyond the veil. The third vision, that of our Lord among the lampstands, recorded in Rev. chaps. 1 to 3 and picturing his Age-enduring care for his Church, pictures this.

To be continued.

worship they professed Asa preferred to become contaminated with such rather than go to his God for instruction. It may be remembered that good King Hezekiah, in like case, went to the prophet Isaiah, and he, although not a physician, was evidently guided by the Holy Spirit in the selection of a remedy that proved effective (Isa. 38).

? THE QUESTION BOX ?

Q. *Is it to be expected that the Millennial Temple of Ezekiel's prophecy (Ezek. chaps. 40-48) will be actually built and used when the Millennial Age becomes a reality? (C.B.B.)*

A. Some students hold that it will. When however one recalls the general characteristics of the Millennial Age as outlined in Scripture and the fact that it will be a time when God deals with realities, and forms, ritual and ceremonies are done away, it seems more likely that Ezekiel saw and described a splendid vision which was a magnificent symbol of the principles governing man's relationship to God in the coming Age but not one which depicted things literally to be done.

Ezekiel's vision depicted a Temple more or less after the style of Solomon's Temple at Jerusalem with a ritual of priests and animal sacrifices obviously based upon the Levitical ceremonies of Israel's Tabernacle in the wilderness of the time of the Exodus. If the Temple is to be built as described obviously the ritual has to be performed as well. This involves animal sacrifices, and this must be discounted on three grounds. First if all, the idea of animal sacrifices in an Age when "nothing shall hurt or destroy" and man has regained his primitive harmony and fellowship with the animal creation is abhorrent and out of accord with Scripture. Second, the Lord has plainly stated that, apart from the ritual ceremonies of ancient Israel which were for a definite purpose and limited time, to provide a symbolic picture, He has no pleasure in the offering up of slain beasts. Thirdly, the whole object of these Levitical sacrifices was to picture the ultimate coming and death of our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself a willing sacrifice for the sins of the world. He has now done this; all is in the past. It would be incongruous to go on repeating, to all eternity, the shadows or types of a reality which has already appeared.

Other incongruities in the vision seen by Ezekiel are the presence of uncircumcised foreigners, excluded from the sanctuary; the degradation of formerly apostate Levites, which militates against that full and free forgiveness for the past which is characteristic of the coming Age; the prohibition of the Millennial Temple priesthood from taking a divorced woman or a widow as wife in an Age when there will be neither; the injunction to the priesthood to take care not to defile themselves with dead bodies in an Age when there will be no dead bodies; and

the outstanding fact that the ritual demands the eternal repetition of sin offerings long after the true offering for sin has been made "once for all". On all these counts and others, it must be concluded that the entire vision is a symbol, and nothing more.

This is not to say that there will not be, at Jerusalem, the centre and capital of the world, some magnificent building in which worship and praise to God will be offered throughout the years. There would seem to be every reason why this should be so. But this is a very different thing.

* * *

Q. *What is the origin of the term "Hebrew"?* (R.M.).

A. The earliest mention of the word in the Bible is in the case of Abraham, who is designated "Abram the Hebrew" in Gen. 14.13. It later became a general name for the Israelites on account of their descent from Abraham and was so used throughout their national existence and still is to some extent. But before the emergence of Israel as a nation the term was in general use among ancient nations and appears in Egyptian, Babylonian and Sumerian records as that of a rather elusive people, more or less desert dwellers, who were often in conflict with the established nations of the day—These "Habiru" as they were called seem to have been noticeable between the 19th and 14th BC centuries and therefore coming into prominence just before the time of Abraham. The name is the same as that of Eber, an ancestor of Abraham, who lived about the 23rd century BC and it is usually thought it denotes his descendants, peoples of whom came Jacob and Israel through his son Peleg and the bulk of the Arabs of Arabia through his son Joktan. That Eber was considered in ancient times the forefather of a considerable assemblage of Semitic peoples is clear from Gen. 10.21, where Shem, his ancestor of eight or nine centuries earlier, is described as the "father of all the children of Eber". Much later on, in the time of Moses, Balaam the prophet referred to the coming subjection of the people of Eber by victorious Israel in the last days (Num. 24.24), and this is probably to be referred to the exaltation of Israel as the people of the Lord at the establishment of the Millennial kingdom.

STEPHEN — THE FIRST MARTYR

The man who appears for so short a time on the pages of the New Testament might well have been as prominent as the Apostle Paul himself had he lived. Tantalisingly brief as is the sketch of his character, it is enough to delineate a man of sterling worth and immense potentialities in the service of Christ. And yet, in the unfathomable wisdom of God, his consecrated life was abruptly cut short after not more than a few months' service in the cause of the Faith.

Stephen was one of several outstanding men in the original circle of believers immediately after Pentecost who, although not of the Twelve, were nevertheless recognised by the Christian community in Jerusalem as "of honest report, full of faith and wisdom and of the Holy Spirit". As such he was one of the seven chosen by the assembly to relieve the twelve apostles of much of their more mundane duties such as the administration of the temporal affairs of the church—the giving of alms to the poor, the care of the sick, the general welfare of the believers, and so on. The purpose of this innovation, as explained by the spokesman for the Apostles, was that they themselves might be the more free for the exercise of their pastoral duties, the leading of the church in prayer and instruction, and the ministry of the Word, which included exposition and doctrinal instruction. So the order of deacons came into being — the literal meaning of the Greek word is servant, and this is what the seven were ordained to be, helpers and assistants to the Apostles for the better conduct and the promotion of the work of the Church.

This had to include evangelism, which was of necessity a very important part of the life and activities of the infant Church. "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to the whole creation" Jesus had commanded them, and the history of the Apostles' later activities shows how literally they accepted this injunction and with what vigour they carried it out. But not only the Apostles were evangelists; in varying degree all of their converts took up the torch and spread the message of the risen Christ wherever they went. It is obvious therefore that these seven men would be outstanding in this direction also, and the fact that Stephen is mentioned first in the narrative in Acts ch. 6 might well be taken to indicate that he was accepted as a leader among them just as Peter was the accepted leader among the Twelve.

They were all Hellenistic Jews, born in the

Gentile world, perhaps Syria or Egypt, Greece or Asia, or even Rome, and all with Greek rather than Hebrew names. But they were all Jews, children of Abraham. There was apparently quite a colony of such (always called "Grecians" in the New Testament) in Jerusalem and many of them had become converts. The appointment of these seven was in consequence of a complaint that there was a certain amount of racial discrimination in the administration of benefits, in favour of native-born Jews, and it may well be that Peter and the others encouraged the selection of foreign-born Jews to this newly-created office in order to allay further fears of partiality. At any rate, Stephen, a Jew from overseas, found himself occupying the most important position in the Church next to that of the Apostles.

He was evidently an educated man and possessed of considerable ability and perhaps fluency. At first he became notable for the performance of wonders and miracles among the people. This, of course, was the hallmark of the Holy Spirit at that time and all the Twelve, and evidently some others also, possessed these gifts, necessary at the beginning to demonstrate their possession of Divine authority to represent Christ in the world and speak in his Name. But Stephen also possessed talents which probably none of the Twelve did possess, the power of debating with the educated and learned of this world to a degree otherwise manifested only by the Apostle Paul later on. Acts 8.9-10 tells how he engaged in debate with African and Asian and Egyptian and Roman Jews (the "Libertines" mentioned in this verse were Roman Jews who had been taken to Rome as captives during the many wars of the immediate past, and later granted their freedom and liberty to return to Judea) and what is quite evidently on an intellectual level. In consequence "they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake" (ch. 6.10). It would almost seem as if by common consent the persuasion of the better educated Jews of the Dispersion as against that of the native Judean Jews was being largely left to these men of the same national origins.

A reflection arising from all this is that Stephen must have had much in common with the Apostle Paul as respects ability to talk and debate with the "wise of this world" on their own level. Had he been sent out to the Gentiles, as was Paul, he might well have had just as colourful a career and perhaps just as much in-

fluence on the establishment and the doctrine of the Church as has Paul. Why so apparently a promising and useful Christian life should be prematurely cut short by a martyr's death is one of those questions which it is easy to ask and impossible to answer. One can only say, as did Eli in a different age and a totally different setting "It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth him good".

Stephen's debates with his antagonists, or more correctly, perhaps, his effective presentation of the Gospel against all their arguments, roused them to fury and the determination that at all costs he must be silenced. They hired men to concoct false accusations of blasphemy against him and had him arraigned before the Sanhedrin—the same Sanhedrin which only a few months before had quailed before the iron resolution of Peter and the others over their fixed resolve to continue preaching Jesus and the resurrection. There is no evidence that these Pharisees and Sadducees were any less apprehensive than they were then. The complainants stated their case, the witnesses repeated their fabricated story as required by the ecclesiastical law; all that the High Priest could say after hearing it alleged that Stephen had predicted the destruction of the Temple and abrogation of the Mosaic Law, things which normally would have roused the assembly to fury, was the very mild enquiry "Are these things so?". It was only a few weeks when the same High Priest had let the apostles go free from a similar trial with the supine injunction not to preach Jesus again, knowing full well that his words would be entirely disregarded. It is very possible that Caiaphas was heartily wishing that this trial had not been foisted upon him; there was a power in this Christian evangel which he felt unable to withstand, and provided he could still retain his own position in the sight of the people generally, he would prefer to ignore it.

The foreign-born Jews who had laid the complaint were, however, of different stuff. They were out for Stephen's blood and they meant to have it. One recalls that when Paul was arraigned in Jerusalem nearly twenty years later, they were Asiatic Jews who stirred up the commotion. This particular episode has much in common with that one.

What has been called "Stephen's defence before the Sanhedrin" was a masterly one. He made no attempt to defend himself from the accusations. He did not even answer the question. He embarked straight away upon a recapitulation of Hebrew history in a fashion that immediately attracted the attention of his hearers. He started with Abraham, the venerated father of them all, reminding them of their

God-given calling and privilege inherited from the patriarch. "Men, brethren and fathers, hearken. The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran" (ch. 7.2). From Abraham's first entry into the land of Canaan he passed swiftly to the famine which threatened his seed, the twelve patriarchs who became the fathers of their nation, and the deliverance which came through Joseph by the overruling providence of God. From that he went on to the second great deliverance, that of the Exodus under Moses, another saviour raised up by God. In masterly fashion he showed that Israel rejected the saviour, first demanding of him "who made thee a ruler and a judge" and secondly rebelling against his leadership in the desert and planning to return to Egypt. Then they turned to idolatry, forsaking God who had delivered them from Egypt and worshipping a golden calf. So God gave them up to their desires and yet He was true to his promise and at length He brought their children into the land of promise under the leadership of Joshua and established them as a nation, the nation of whom the assembly before which he stood were the present representatives and spiritual rulers.

So far Stephen had recited history, a history with which all his judges were perfectly familiar and which they were never tired to hear narrated. They were proud of their descent from Abraham and arrogant in their claimed position as the chosen nation of God. The man before them was talking now of the glorious days of David and of Solomon, days when the kingdom extended far and wide, and of the Temple which Solomon had built. They knew of the glories of that Temple before its destruction by the Babylonians and they also knew and took pride in the knowledge that their own Temple, built for them by Herod the king, was an even more magnificent structure. But the complacency vanished from their faces when Stephen went on to recite the very words of Solomon when he dedicated his Temple; "the Most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands". "Heaven is my throne" God had said through the prophet "What house will ye build unto me that can compare with that? What place of rest can you offer that can reach up to my heavenly sanctuary, where I dwell in the light which no man can approach unto, whom no man hath seen nor can see?". That was the drift of Stephen's meaning and his judges were not slow to appreciate the fact. He was getting perilously close to telling them that their treasured Temple and all that was connected with it was as nothing in the sight of God and must one day be swept away as had Solomon's

six centuries before, and they with it. The false witnesses had averred that he had predicted the destruction of the Temple and the end of the Mosaic dispensation and it looked to them that it was this toward which his words were now tending. The interest with which they had listened heretofore evaporated into open hostility and Stephen could not fail to sense the change.

This is, most likely, the explanation of Stephen's sudden change of tone at vs. 51. Up to vs. 50 he was giving a sober and restrained recapitulation of the ways of God with Israel from earliest times. Now he breaks off, almost in mid-sentence, and pronounces a bitter and almost savage denunciation of their hypocrisy and unbelief. It is almost as if he read in their faces that which told him that no matter how eloquently he reminded them of their responsibility before God as custodians of the national mission they were impervious to all that God was waiting to do and to give. There was no hope of their repentance and Stephen knew it. So he gave vent to the feelings which had possessed him all along and he spoke the words of condemnation knowing full well that in so doing he was signing his own death warrant.

"Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears; ye do always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? And they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just one, of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers" (ch. 7.52).

The words were spoken and they could not be recalled. Stung to fury, the members of the Sanhedrin ground their teeth in rage. Within themselves they knew the truth of Stephen's accusation; but to be told of it by this layman was beyond all toleration. Not that at that moment they intended to do anything about it. As in the case of Peter and the others a little while earlier they would probably have admonished Stephen to cease from preaching Jesus and the resurrection, and let him go. They had no power to pass a death sentence—that was vested in the Roman governor who had already shown his contempt for the ecclesiastical controversies of the Jews—and the most they could do was imprison the accused and sentence him to a flogging. And so far there had been no corroborative evidence offered in support of the accusation brought by the two false witnesses, and the Sanhedrin at least observed the formalities of their judicial laws. So they fumed and threatened and for the moment went no further.

Stephen himself resolved the situation. Whether he was in fact vouchsafed a vision of heavenly things, or in the ecstatic state of his

mind resolved his thoughts into a visual impression may be open to debate, but there is no doubt that as he stood there looking upwards he saw something. ". . . he, being full of the Holy Spirit, looked up steadfastly into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God" (ch. 7.56).

A moment's stupified silence, and then a roar of rage and anger. He had uttered the greatest blasphemy possible to a Jew; he had claimed to see God, the God who had once told Moses that no man could look upon his face and live. There need be no further enquiry now; the accused had convicted himself out of his own mouth. For such a crime there could be only one penalty, that laid down in the Law of Moses, death by stoning (Lev. 24.16). It is true that the law in this respect had long since fallen into disuse, and in any case Rome did not allow the passing and execution of the death sentence for any reason by the Sanhedrin. But all that was of no importance at this present moment. In the vehemence of their anger they lost all control of themselves, rose from their seats and dragged their prisoner to a place outside the city walls where they could execute their design without interference by the Roman legionaries. And there they stoned him, the while he called upon God to receive his spirit and forgive his murderers. So Stephen died, the first martyr for the Christian faith.

There is good reason for thinking that Saul of Tarsus, afterwards known as Paul the Apostle, was at least in the forefront of those demanding Stephen's death. His own words in Acts 22.20 and of Luke in Acts 8.1 to the effect that he was "consenting" to his death implies much more than appears on the surface. The word there rendered "consenting" means to agree to a course of action emphatically and with considerable pleasure. The known actions of Saul immediately after the martyrdom are consistent with a bigoted and relentless opposition to all that Stephen stood for and preached. As required by the Mosaic Law (Deut. 17.7) the first men to cast stones at the condemned had to be the accusing witnesses. Ch. 7.58 says that the witnesses, in divesting themselves of their outer garments in order to perform this duty, laid them at Saul's feet. His action in thus guarding their garments was a further tacit approval of all that they were doing. It must have been a bitter blow for Saul when later on, on the road to Damascus, he himself saw virtually the same vision which led to his condemnation of Stephen, and realised that after all Stephen was speaking the truth.

His was a short life in the Christian way, and

yet, who knows, perhaps wonderfully effective and used of God. It might very well have been Stephen's faithful witness, and unflinching courage and faith in the face of death, which so worked on the mind of Saul that he himself, in his turn, surrendered his life to Stephen's Lord

and became that instrument in the Lord's hand which has had so incalculable an effect upon the growth and instruction of the Church in all ages since. Had Stephen not acted as he did, there might never have been an Apostle Paul.

THE SURE MERCIES OF DAVID

*A Study in
Divine Purposes*

"Incline your ear, and come unto me; hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David." (Isa. 55. 3).

What are the "sure mercies of David"? They are the subject of a promise of considerable importance, for the offer is to those who will incline their ears to God, and so find life eternal. This fifty-fifth chapter of Isaiah is a Messianic chapter; there is not much doubt about that, but just because the Messianic Age is the one in which all the good purposes of our God converge together toward their glorious conclusion, it is only meet that we give it our earnest attention, for here there must surely be good and sound doctrine for our own hearts and minds.

This expression, the "sure mercies of David", is evidently either a synonym for the "everlasting covenant" of the same sentence, or something intimately associated with that covenant. This everlasting covenant is very clearly the covenant under which Messianic work is to be conducted; that much is plain from the intimate association of this verse with the remainder of the chapter, which deals with the evangelising work of the Messianic Age. That is the covenant which in Jeremiah is referred to as the New Covenant, the one under which men's hearts are to be changed from hearts of stone to hearts of flesh, and none will need to ask his neighbour if he knows the Lord, because all, from the least unto the greatest, will know him. (Jer. 31. 34). Only in the Messianic Age will that be true. Now David had nothing to do with the making of the New Covenant. It is true that God did make a covenant with David but it was rather a re-affirmation of the original Abrahamic Covenant than one having direct application to the reconciliation work of the Millennium. We cannot say therefore that the "sure mercies of David" are one and the same with the "everlasting covenant". Rather are they the characteristic features of the arrangement by which the everlasting covenant will be carried into effect, and those characteristic features are all pre-figured by

David and his reign back there in the days of Israel.

Let David himself tell us of this. He has enshrined the truths of this matter in the 89th Psalm, and in that Psalm David tells of the promises that God made to him, promises that were fulfilled only to a very limited degree in his earthly life but will be fulfilled in their glorious entirety in days yet to come. *"I will sing of the mercies of the Lord for ever"* he cries (verse 1) *"With my mouth will I make known thy faithfulness to all generations"*. These "mercies of the Lord" are the things of which we are now thinking. The word itself means "loving kindness" and when the adjective "sure" (*aman*, faithful, steadfast) is prefixed we have the "faithful loving kindness" which the Lord has promised David, and through him, the whole world. In this introductory verse David is telling us that the loving kindness and faithfulness of God is to be made known for ever, proclaimed to all generations, an apt way of saying that what he has to tell is intended not only for his own day and people, but also, and much more urgently, for the people of "the Age" the Day of reconciliation which even now is still future. Here in this Psalm is the record of the Covenant God made with David, a covenant so very like the Abrahamic promise in its phraseology that we ought clearly to see that it is but a re-affirmation of the kingly phase of that great Covenant. *"I have made a covenant with my chosen, I have sworn unto David my servant. Thy seed will I establish for ever, and build up thy throne to all generations"*. (verse 3-4). In ecstasy of this revelation of the Divine purposes David goes on to speak of the glory and power of God and the absolute righteousness of his rule. *"Justice and judgment are the habitation of thy throne; mercy and truth shall go before thy face"* (verse 14). So he goes up, step by step, to the lofty height from which he views the "sure mercies", the "faithful loving kindnesses" which are to constitute the salient features of the Messianic Age. A King, reigning in righteousness! An Administration, ruling in righteous-

ness! A Kingdom built upon righteousness! These are the sure mercies of David and these are to be "given" to those who hear and respond to Isaiah's call; those who, thirsting, come to the waters where they may drink and buy wine and milk without money and without price. The kings and the administrations and the kingdoms of this world demand money and sacrifices from the people their subjects. There is nothing to be had "without money and without price"; all must be paid for and oft-times the price is a heavy one. Jeremiah says in another place of the inhabitants of Babylon "the people shall labour in vain, and the folk in the fire, and they shall be weary" (Jer. 51. 58). Those who receive this inestimable gift, the "sure mercies of David" will not be weary, for they are to "go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands" (Isa. 52. 12). Small wonder that David was joyful when he composed the 89th Psalm.

It is in verse 19 that he rises to this theme of the "sure mercies". "Then thou spakest in vision to thy holy one, and saidst, "I have laid help upon one that is mighty; I have exalted one chosen out of the people. I have found David my servant; with my holy oil have I anointed him . . . My faithfulness and my mercy shall be with him, and in my name shall his horn be exalted . . . also I will make him my first born, higher than the kings of the earth. My mercy will I keep with him for ever more, and my covenant shall stand fast with him" (vss. 19-28). This is clearly intended to refer much more definitely to David's great antitype, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, in his office as earth's King, than ever it could to David himself. David, the man, great as was his faith and loyal as was his heart, time and again showed himself a man of like passions with other men, guilty of grievous offences against God's holiness. Only in an illustrative sense can he ever be said to have fulfilled these glowing prophecies. We who look back upon the words from the standpoint of the Christian dispensation see here a vivid word-picture of the future, of the day when Jesus, whose right it is, takes the throne of earth and rules, as Isaiah said He would rule, a King in righteousness. That is the first and the principal of the sure mercies of David.

The Apostle Paul saw this very clearly. When he came to Antioch of Pisidia in company with Barnabas and preached in the synagogue there he associated the fulfilment of this promise with the resurrection of our Lord. "As concerning that he (God) raised him up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption, he said on this

wise 'I will give you the sure mercies of David' " (Acts 13. 34). Christ must needs rise again in the power of an endless life if He is to be given to mankind at his Second Advent to be their righteous and everlasting King in conformity with the terms of this promise. Without the risen Christ the prophecy could not even begin to be fulfilled.

The Divine Plan provides for some to be associated with the Lord Jesus Christ in his kingly work of the next Age. The promise is given to his faithful disciples of this present Age that they shall live and reign with him the thousand years of the Millennium (Rev. 20. 4). The New Testament is so full of this theme, the future work and privilege of the Church of Christ, glorified and joined to him "beyond the Veil", that there is no shadow of doubt and no uncertainty about the matter. The work of the Church, under the direction and guidance of the Lord, will be the teaching and converting and reconciling of mankind. They will come to humanity as benefactors and helpers. They too, then, must be included in the "sure mercies of David". The Church is the promised Administration by means of which the Millennial blessings will reach the people. And Divine promise guarantees that they will be ready for their work when the time comes. There is no possibility of failure; that elect company which God foreknew will have been justified and sanctified and glorified in good time for the commencement of its great work (Rom. 8. 29-30). So is it promised in Psalm 89. "His seed also will I make to endure for ever, and his throne as the days of heaven . . . Once have I sworn in my holiness that I will not lie unto David. His seed . . . and his throne . . . shall be established for ever as the moon, and as a faithful witness in heaven" (Verses 29-37). Notice here how the "seed" and the "throne" are associated together. That is only to be expected, for the faithful in Christ Jesus, the "seed", are to sit with him in his throne (Rev. 3. 21) and both seed and throne are to continue eternally "as a faithful witness in heaven". What rare word of comfort and encouragement is this for the loving hearts who are tenaciously maintaining their loyalty and love for the Lord in the face of discouragement and opposition and persecution to-day. They will be to all eternity "a faithful witness in heaven" testifying to the mighty power and the tender love of our God who has wrought such wonderful things out of such unpromising material.

This is where the Psalm leaves the future. Verses 38 to 51 have no parallel in the future, no place in the prophecy. They voice David's own bitter realisation that the outworking in his

own day was not reaching up to the full measure of the prophecy. And the reason is not far to seek. David himself had proved unworthy. As a type and a picture of his Lord Who was yet to come he filled the requirements and pointed the way for us to follow and observe, but in actual literal truth the glowing words did not attain the limited fulfilment they could have attained in his own day had he himself been more faithful to the principles of righteousness and the duties of kingship. This part of the Psalm does not concern us therefore; we have a King, who although tempted and proved in all points like as we are and like as David was, endured it all without sin, and attained to his Kingship in the triumph of absolute righteousness. We do not need to end our Psalm, as David did his, on a despondent note. We can finish at verse 37 and hold before our mental vision the glorious prospect of the Church, faithful and triumphant, witness in Heaven. The Church is, to mankind, the second of the "sure mercies of David".

What of the third? Solomon, the son and successor of David, dedicating the Temple that David himself was not allowed to build, touched upon the sublime truth that underlies the third. This Kingdom of righteousness which is also included in the offer "without money and without price" to mankind in "that Day" is the Kingdom of which the Temple of God is the centre, and that is why it is going to be so great a blessing to mankind. Ezekiel saw the same in vision, the Messianic Kingdom built around and depending upon the Temple of God as its centre. Out of the Temple is to flow the River of Life and from the Temple comes all the light that illuminates mankind in the Day of Blessing. So Solomon, standing and dedicating the Temple he had built, which prefigured the dwelling of God with men in the day when all tears shall be wiped away, (Rev. 21. 3-4), was moved by the Holy Spirit to associate what he was doing with the promise of God to his father. "O Lord God" he entreated "turn not away from the face of thine anointed: remember the mercies of David thy servant" (2 Chron. 6. 42).

There is only one way to live in peace—it is by leaving to-morrow in the hands of God, and faithfully serving him to-day. Faithfulness to-day is the best preparation for to-morrow. Protect to-morrow by faithful living to-day. We may not boast of to-morrow, but we may boast of God who will take care of the morrow. Faith never boasts about the coming days, but faith rests in God who governs them.

Just as that Temple became a place where God could meet his people, hear their prayers, accept their offerings, pronounce them clean and justified in his sight, and hold them in continuing covenant relationship with himself, so in the future Kingdom for which we look God will do all these things in much more real a fashion than He could do in those far-off days of types and ceremonies. There was no lasting validity in what was done then, for it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats shall take away sin; in the future day men may accept for themselves the ransom-sacrifice of Christ, and repent, and turn to him, and be justified by faith in him, and so be reconciled to God and enter into everlasting life. All these things that Kingdom will achieve, and the whole earth become as it were a golden city dominated by the abiding presence of the Father and the Son, jointly the life and the light thereof (Rev. 21. 23). So the Kingdom is the third of the "sure mercies of David", an abiding evidence of the faithful loving-kindness of our God. And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it; and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it; and the gates of it shall not be shut at all at end of day, for there will be no night there; and they who enter into it are they who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

Entrancing prospect! Is there not here great incentive for us, that we gird up the loins of our minds and resolve to run our race with a greater determination and more constant zeal than ever before, knowing that it is upon the completion of our course that the blessings of this coming Kingdom are waiting. Is it not true that the "earnest expectation of the creation waiteth for the manifestation of the Sons of God" (Rom. 8. 19)? Then let us press forward in hope and expectation that at the completion of our Master's work in us we shall become part of that inestimable blessing which God is preparing for the sons of men, and has promised to give them, saying to them "I will give you—the sure mercies of David."

"What is freedom? Not mere political independence, but the establishment of the Kingdom of Heaven upon earth, the reign of Truth and Non-violence in every walk of life." (*Mahatma Gandhi speaking at Panchgani, India, 19th July, 1945. Gandhi was a Hindu by religion, and therefore his reference to the Kingdom of Heaven upon earth as the requisite for true freedom is doubly interesting.*)

"I AM HE!"

"I AM" is the English rendering of the name whereby God told Moses He was to be known by Israel. "God said unto Moses, 'I AM THAT I AM' and he said 'Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel 'I AM hath sent me unto you'" (Exod. 3. 14). The expression as it is thus rendered does not convey much and it is obvious that a better rendering of the Hebrew is desirable. Modern translators have usually fought shy of doing this; perhaps a natural reluctance to interfere with the Divine Name is responsible. But since this text is related to certain other Scriptures referring to the Deity it is desirable to take a closer look and see what can be derived.

The word translated "I am" is *ahayah* which is the verb "to be" allied to the personal pronoun, so that "I am" or "I be" is correct. The intervening "that" is a word which can mean who, which or that, and has about a dozen varied uses having different degrees of emphasis. It could be "I am, that I am" or "I am, yea even I, am" or perhaps simply "I am, I, am". In any case the majesty and uniqueness of God is indicated by the term, and the fact of his eternal existence, without beginning and without end. "I exist" is the complete definition, but completely to convey the idea in these modern days of precise language something more than the elementary terms of archaic Hebrew is desirable. The term used in Moffatt's translation to define God, "the Eternal", is perhaps the best, and it may well be taken that the real meaning of the Name as given to Moses was "the Eternal" by which name God was to be known. It is related also to the later name *Yhawah* (Jehovah) which can also be rendered "the Eternal". A favourite modern definition is "the self-existing One".

This understanding of the eternity of God is better revealed in the words of the Lord through the prophet Isaiah. "I am God. Yea, before the day was I am He" (Isa. 43.13) or as Ferrar Fenton has it "before time began". Again, "I, the first and with the last, I am He"—here the Septuagint has "the first and to all futurity" (Isa. 41. 14). Then there is Isa. 48.12 "I am He; I am the first, I also am the last" to which the Septuagint adds "and I am forever". Coming to the New Testament, a new term emerges, the "Alpha and Omega". In the Millennial vision of Rev. 21, where God is pictured as dwelling with men, to be their God and they his sons, and God is to wipe away all tears from their eyes, and death is no more, He says "I am Alpha and

Omega, the beginning and the end" (Alpha and Omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, as though we would say A and Z—the Book of Revelation was written in Greek) and again, in Rev. 1. there is evidently a direct reference back to Isaiah "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty". This last phrase is a somewhat involved definition of God's eternity "before time began and to all futurity".

The aspect of this subject which does afford food for thought is the fact that our Lord takes to himself these same titles and uses them as descriptive of his own person. It was in fact this identifying of himself with the Father which ultimately led to his condemnation and crucifixion, even though his judges totally misunderstood his words. It was probably the occasion when the Pharisees took him up on his saying that Abraham rejoiced to see his day which sparked this off. "Abraham is dead" they told him "How could he have seen your day?" "Verily, verily," replied Jesus "before Abraham was, I am" (Jno. 8.58). His use of that expression meant that He claimed pre-existence, that He was more than man, had existed before Abraham and in a sense shared the existence of God. Only God could claim the name "I am" in Jewish theology, so they interpreted Jesus' words as a claim to being God . . . as they did on another occasion, "thou, being man, makest thyself God" (Jno. 10.33) thus they took up stones to stone him, the penalty for blasphemy. Only a few minutes earlier He had told them that they would die in their sins if they believed not that "I am He" and that after they had crucified him they would then know that "I am He", again taking the Divine Name to himself. (Jno. 8.24, 28). But here He gave the clue to his meaning. "I do nothing of myself; as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things. And he that sent me is with me; the Father hath not left me alone, for I do always those things that please him" (Jno. 8.28-29). The oneness which exists between the Father and the Son, a oneness so complete that it is as if mind and thought and action operate simultaneously in both, justified Jesus in taking the appellations of the Father and applying them to himself in his manifestation of the Father to man. "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father" He said to Philip (Jno. 14. 49); Jesus was and is the manifestation of the

Father to men and because He thus represents God to man it is logical that He should assume and use the Name by which God makes himself known to his creatures.

Later on, at the table of the Last Supper, Jesus used the Divine Name again, this time to his own disciples. He told them of things yet to come, "that when it is come to pass, ye may believe that I am He" (Jno. 13.19). The fulfilment of his prediction was to be, to them, the proof of his relationship to the Father.

But more than this: Jesus, speaking to John by the medium of the visions of Revelation, consciously identified himself with the Name and attributes of God as given through Isaiah. In his final message to his Church, enshrined in the latter part of the 22nd chapter, He declares himself "I am the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last" (Rev. 22.13) and at the beginning of the visions, introducing himself as it were to John, He says "I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last . . . I am he that liveth, and was dead, and behold, I am alive for evermore" (Rev. 1. 11, 17). Herein is the distinction between the Father and the Son. The Father, God the Creator and Sustainer of all things, does not die, cannot die. The very idea is unthinkable. But the Son did die; He died for man, rising again from the dead by means of the mighty power exerted by the Father (Eph. 1.20), and is alive forevermore. And it is in the fact of that resurrection that we can perhaps perceive the underlying basis of this adoption of the Father's distinctive titles by the Son.

It cannot be denied that upon his resurrection and return to the heavenly sphere our Lord was endowed with an exaltation and a name superior to that which He had enjoyed before. It is difficult to visualise in what manner the One Who was with the Father before the world was, his agent in all the works of creation, by whom all things were made, could be exalted to even higher status, but so it is. Phil. 2.9 states quite plainly that "God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name, that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow . . . and every tongue confess, that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the

Note on Psa. 19.4.

The Septuagint, Vulgate, Ethiopic and Arabic Bibles give a different twist to Psa. 19.4, speaking of God's glory in the heavens; "in them hath he set a tabernacle (dwelling) for the sun". These versions have it "in the sun he has set his tabernacle; and he comes forth as a bridegroom out of his chamber." The implication is that the dwelling-place of God is in the sun; as a statement of theology this could not be admitted for

Father". Heb. 1.4 likewise speaks of his obtaining a more excellent name than the angels in proportion to his superior status to theirs. In Rev. 3.12 the Lord promises the overcomer that He will "write upon him the name of my God . . . and my new name". Does this mean that following our Lord's earthly life and its consequences there is a relationship, an intimacy, a closeness of association which was not the case before, something perhaps which would justify the declaration of Eph. 4.10 that He "ascended far above all heavens that he might fill all things" whereas the Father himself claims "do not I fill heaven and earth?" (Jer. 23.24). It is remarkable that in this context the Father addresses the Son as "God": "Thy Throne, O God, is for ever and ever" (Heb. 1.8), and this is spoken prophetically in Psa. 45. The following phrase in both cases is in the vocative and should properly read "therefore, O God, thy God hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows". It must also be observed that the Rider upon the White Horse of Rev. 19, our Lord in his role of the One who overthrows evil at the end of this present Age, is referred to as "King of Kings and Lord of Lords", a title which would normally be expected to be the prerogative of the Father.

The logical conclusion from all this is that our Lord is so much one with the Father that He shares the Name and dignity of the Father. Even although the Apostle Paul preserves the essential differentiation between the Father and the Son when in I Cor. 15.24-28 he says that at the end when sin and death have been finally vanquished and mankind are ready to enter into the eternal state, Christ will deliver up the Kingdom to the Father, and the Son himself shall also be subject to the Father, that God may be all in all, there will still be that oneness between the Father and the Son which will warrant the application of the Divine Name and prerogatives to the Son. Perhaps, after all, the clearest and most accurate definition we have, if only we can realise the fact, is that given by our Lord himself, when He told his disciples, (Jno. 16.27), "I came out from God. I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world; again, I leave the world, and go to the Father".

a moment but as a poetic simile it is very forceful. God oversees all that takes place on earth and travels round it every day that He might witness all the deeds of men. "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good" (Prov. 15.3). A similar poetic sentiment is encountered in Psa. 104, in which God clothes himself with light, rides on the clouds and walks on the winds of the wind.

BIRTH OF BIBLE ARCHAEOLOGY

The light now shining upon Bible records from the inscriptions and relics of ancient nations is little more than a century old. One after another, discoveries are announced to-day shedding further light upon the Scriptures and confirming to an increasing degree the truth of their statements. It is not that Christians need any such confirmation to buttress their faith; our confidence in the Word of God is rooted in experience, experience of the Father's care and faithfulness, experience of the power of the Holy Spirit and the shepherd-guidance of our Lord Jesus Christ; experience of the adequacy of the Divine Word both in the affairs of daily life and that "the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto every good work". We do not need further confirmation for ourselves. But we do find use for this additional testimony when it comes to expounding the Book to others. And much of what is being discovered to-day does illuminate and explain the historical portions of the Bible in a manner that would be impossible otherwise. The labours of archaeologists and historians are really of great value to us and we do well to hold them in esteem for their work's sake and to make use of what is discovered, to our own progress in knowledge.

The history of modern archaeological research in its relation to the Bible may very fairly be said to have commenced with two important discoveries in the Middle East. One was the discovery of the "Rosetta stone" in 1798 and the other the decipherment of the "Behistun inscription" in 1847. The one yielded the key to the understanding of the ancient Egyptian records and the other to those of Babylonia, Assyria and eventually ancient Sumer, the principal lands with which the Hebrews were concerned and with which Old Testament history is principally involved.

Towards the end of the year 1798 the French Emperor Napoleon was campaigning in Egypt, having just been defeated by the British Fleet under Nelson. There was nothing very creditable in Napoleon's presence there; he was unashamedly out for conquest, and he failed. But the wrath of man was made to praise God in a very remarkable way. One of Napoleon's artillery officers named Boussard was stationed at a place called Rosetta, near one of the western mouths of the Nile. Whilst there he discovered an inscribed slab of black basalt four feet long by two feet wide, bearing an inscription in three langu-

ages. The attention of Napoleon was directed to this "find". Now Napoleon, unlike many of his modern emulators, possessed a healthy respect for scientific research and knowledge. He had the inscription copied and the copies sent to various universities and learned societies in Europe. The scholars got busy.

One of the languages on the tablet was already well known and understood—it was Greek. Another was known as the everyday language of Egypt in olden times, the "demotic" or popular writing of the people. But the third was written in the mysterious hieroglyphics of ancient Egypt, the language in which so many records had already been discovered and could not be interpreted because no man living understood the characters in which that language was written. The last writers of hieroglyphic lived in the reign of the Roman emperor Diocletian, about A.D. 290, and soon after the end of the third A.D. century the last man who knew how to read that strange writing of pictures and symbols, of crowns and little birds and mystic signs, had gone to be with his fathers and the secret was lost to mankind.

The fact that this one stone bore a threefold inscription, in three languages, at once inspired the thought that the record might be the same in all three; it was in fact a "trilingual" inscription. The first task was to translate the Greek text, a matter of no difficulty; this was accomplished by several experts during the next few years, working more or less independently. It was found that the inscription was the record of a decree issued by priests of Egypt about two hundred years before Christ to commemorate the accession to the throne of Ptolemy V Epiphanes. It now remained to apply this translation to the hitherto incomprehensible hieroglyphics with the object of discovering the meaning of each different sign and so constructing an alphabet, the first step to achieving an understanding of the language. This was a work of great difficulty and it was not until about twenty years later that Prof. Young in England and Prof. Champollion in France succeeded in deciphering the majority of the signs and so laying the foundation of modern Egyptology.

The knowledge thus gained gave indirect testimony to the truth of the Scriptures. It was found, as years passed by, that the latter part of the Book of Genesis, and the other books of Moses, abound in Egyptian words, allusions and phrases.

This fact helped to refute the assertion increasingly being made by critics that these books had not been written until the time of the Babylonian Captivity. The expressions used are such as would naturally be employed by a man brought up and living a great part of his life in Egyptian surroundings, as was Moses. The study of ancient chronology was greatly illuminated by the deciphering of the hieroglyphics of the Rosetta stone; it became possible to read what are known as the Turin Papyrus and the Abydos Tablets, records of Egypt's Pharaohs from the earliest times. For the first time the names of Pharaohs of Egypt familiar to Bible readers had their historic character revealed from sources outside the Bible. In a very real sense, therefore, the discovery of this unique tablet at Rosetta in 1798 has made its contribution to our knowledge of God's ways in ancient time.

* * *

A thousand miles east of Rosetta, on the ancient and still existing road which links Baghdad in Iraq with Teheran in Iran, there is a stupendous precipice of rock, four thousand feet high—the blunt end of a range of hills. The rock is called Behistun, a name which means in the native tongue “the place of God” and from time immemorial it has been accounted holy. Babylonian, Persian and Greek armies have passed and repassed that sheer cliff on their missions of conquest or in hasty retreat. Merchants from days when the world was young have pitched their camps at its foot. And about five hundred years before Christ the great Persian king Darius—the one who gave permission for the Temple building operations to be resumed in the days of the return from Babylon (Ezra 5. 1-17) caused a long inscription recounting his military victories to be chiselled upon the smooth face of the rock a hundred feet above the ground. He had the work executed with great care, for he wanted his inscription to endure for many years. The rock was carefully smoothed and polished, the lines of writing and the curving sculptures done by skilled craftsmen; then the finished work was painted over with a varnish so hard and enduring that it has protected the greater part of the inscription for over two thousand years, unto this day.

In the year 1835 Henry Rawlinson, a political assistant to the Governor of Kermanshah, a Persian town not far from Behistun, set to work to copy the inscription. The young enthusiast was destined to become one of the world's greatest archaeologists in after days, but the service he rendered the world in this, his first great achievement, is one of the most momentous in all the history of research in Eastern lands. Having climbed to the inscription, a matter of some

difficulty, he found that it was written in three languages, like the Rosetta stone which had been discovered forty years earlier, but whereas that stone had been written in Greek and Egyptian and became the means of unlocking the secrets of Egyptian hieroglyphics to the modern world, this inscription at Behistun was written in Persian, Median and Babylonian. In 1835 only Persian was understood and that very imperfectly. The Babylonian inscriptions and tablets which were being found in such profusion in all the lands of the East were still completely unreadable; it was Rawlinson's work on that day that afforded the clues necessary to an understanding of the Babylonian cuneiform alphabet and symbols and so made possible the facility with which those tablets are read to-day.

By the year 1847 the task of decipherment was complete and from then on the knowledge gained was applied to thousands of cuneiform tablets already existing in the world's museums and the collections of scholars. Progress was slow; the correct translation of many signs and terms has been arrived at only in quite recent years; but for a full century now it has been possible to read of the lives and achievements of the fellow citizens of Abraham, of Moses and of Daniel, for Babylonian cuneiform was the written language of all Western Asia for a span of two thousand years and the histories of the times were written down in those queer little wedge-shaped characters. It is certain that much of the early part of the book of Genesis was thus written, and when Abraham left Ur of the Chaldees he would assuredly have taken many such tablets with him.

Rawlinson had to copy the inscription by hand, for photography had not been invented in his day. In 1904 two twentieth century archaeologists, R. Campbell Thompson and L. W. King, of the British Museum, climbed the rock and photographed the writing. They found remarkably few errors in Rawlinson's work of sixty years previously. In 1946 an American expedition revisited the place but added no further information to that already known. The Behistun inscription had done its work in making it possible for men to read the voluminous written records of Assyria and Babylonia which, recovered from the burning sands and ruined cities of Mesopotamia, have done so much to make the Bible a living book to us.

To-day we have the Babylonian stories of the Flood and of the Creation; the Assyrian record of Sennacherib's siege of Jerusalem in the days of Hezekiah; the invasion of Canaan by Joshua and the Israelites; Nebuchadnezzar's building of great Babylon, and many others, indelibly im-

pressed on imperishable clay tablets, safely reposing in the world's museums and colleges, giving their testimony to the truth of the Bible story. And the Bible accounts stand as purer, nobler, and more exact and accurate, by contrast. Our knowledge of earth's history has been immeasurably extended until we can now trace the movements of the sons of Shem and Ham back to within a few centuries of the Flood. We can appreciate more vividly the atmosphere in which the lives of Abram, Daniel, Ezekiel, Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther were spent. And this knowledge that has come to us had its beginning a hundred and forty years ago when young Rawlinson scaled that cliff out in Persia and

copied the writing that had defied the wind and rain of twenty-four centuries.

Small wonder then that a nineteenth century writer, Dr. Samuel Kinns, wrote in 1891, "*There cannot be the least doubt that Sir Henry Rawlinson was raised up by the Almighty to be the pioneer in this great and glorious work, and was specially endowed with courage and wisdom for the undertaking, combined as they were with a belief that the Bible is a revelation from God to man*". That is an important point. Rawlinson was a Christian; what he did, he did to the glory of God, knowing that his work would make the Bible better understood, and God blessed his endeavours.

THE HORNS OF THE ALTAR

A Meditation on
Psa 118.27

How stirring to the Christian soul are the words of this beautiful Psalm. What searching thoughts they provoke! Composed by one of the sweet singers of Israel in days long gone by, and spoken in such wise that they seem to refer to *his own times, how much meaning there is them, when the Holy Spirit illuminates them, in the mouth of the Lord Jesus. "The stone which the builders refused is become the head-stone of the corner."*

If these words were written following the return from Babylon, and just after the rebuilding of the Temple, how beautifully descriptive this may be of one particular stone, seemingly out of place everywhere in the temple walls, and thus refused and rejected by the builders. until the temple is all but finished—and lo, when the topmost row is being laid, the ungainly stone finds a place as the head-stone of one of the corners. Such a state of things might more easily come about when "re-building" a temple, from the piled-up debris of a former structure, than on erecting an original structure. Next in order after the erection of the Temple would come the dedication and the subsequent sacrifices. "*Bind the sacrifice with cords, even to the horns of the altar*" — that would be the language of true devotion, as soon as the Temple had become the Sanctuary and Dwelling-place of the Lord God. But the Holy Spirit has made deeper use of these words than that of a mere eye-witness of the re-dedication services of a rebuilt Temple.

The Word of God shows Jesus to be the Stone which, rejected by the Jewish polity-builders, will eventually become the Head Stone of the Corner when the Lord rebuilds the walls of Zion.

After extorting from their own lips God's judg-

ment upon the unfaithful husbandmen (Matt. 21. 41), He asks them "*Did ye never read the Scriptures 'The stone which the builders rejected is become the head of the corner; this is the Lord's doing and it is marvellous in our eyes'*" (v. 42). The Apostle Peter gives us valuable aid in identifying both the "Stone" and the rejectors thereof, when he writes "*To whom coming . . . a living stone, disallowed of men, but chosen of God and precious*" (1 Pet. 2. 4). Jesus was that stone in the primary sense, whom the Jewish builders rejected. In the secondary and larger sense, it was a Spiritual Messiah over which they stumbled and were disobedient. They looked for a Messiah in the flesh. Unlike Paul, they never came to say "Though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet henceforth know we him no longer" (2 Cor. 5. 16). Paul had once looked for Christ after the flesh—a human Christ—yet henceforth because his eyes had been opened he was now looking for a spiritual Messiah.

Thus Psalm 118 in its deeper sense is a Psalm descriptive of Jesus as the Christ, and incidentally of all those who are baptised into him. That gives us our bearings then for applying the binding of the Sacrifice to the horns of the Altar. Behind the earthly sacrifices of bulls and goats which were laid on the Altar, there is a picture of the better sacrifices, and of the antitypical altar of sacrifice. Whatsoever was placed on the altar was devoted to God. Either it was to be utterly consumed by fire; or a portion was burnt, and another portion was reserved for the priest; or a third measure, a portion was burnt, and another taken by the priest, and still another taken and consumed by the offerer himself. The fire consumed God's portion in some cases, the

fire and the priest (who was God's representative) did so in others, and when the offerer took a portion it was as the guest of God. Now all these means of disposing of the sacrifice shows how exclusive the claims of the Altar were. "*Behold Israel after the flesh, are not they which eat of the sacrifices partakers of the Altar?*" (1 Cor. 10. 18). That which is devoted to God, and placed on the altar, is no longer to be accounted of common use. Whosoever thereafter partakes thereof, is made holy thereby. It would be accounted sacrilege of the grossest kind, and lay the offender open to the severest penalties, to take of such altar-flesh, and use it improperly or when unclean. Everything that was devoted to God, whether of necessity, as in sin-offerings, or of freewill, as in thank-offerings was brought in whole, or in part, to the Altar. In placing such sacrifice on the Altar, it was, as it were, placing it in God's hands, which were accounted open and outstretched to take it and to receive it.

"Given to God" was the all-pervading thought in the mind of everyone who brought his "gift" to the Altar.

This aspect of God's Altar among Israel shows us how serious and solemn a matter it is to approach and present a gift to the Most High God. It was a unique favour indeed to be permitted to do this. To approach the presence of Majesty and offer a gift worthy of a King is accounted a great honour among men. How much greater honour to approach Eternal Majesty and ask him to accept and utilise something which poor, imperfect human flesh may wish to offer him, to be used in his service. Many men link themselves up with earthly movements, and count it an honour to do so, if royalty bestows its patronage or approval upon the movement. Now think of God's "movement"—that is, his Plan of the Ages, his Plan of Redemption—and who, with love and charity in his heart for his fellow-men in adversity, but would rejoice to have a part, if only a little part in that great work? Ah, yes! that would be easy if it took place just because of humanitarian impulses—if it were a matter of joining in with God in "doing something spectacular"—of doing something for angels and men to see! But God's way is not just that way. He is most certainly seeking

"co-workers", but they are not invited to be "co-directors". God requires the complete surrender of the whole being—heart, mind, soul and strength—to his Sovereign Will—and for this surrender, the Altar is the symbol. The Altar stands for the full consumption and absorption of all placed thereon. Only ash remained when the fire had done its work. In eating the part allotted to him, the priest was only sharing with the Altar. And it is because God interposes the Altar between himself and those who would like to "lend him a hand", that so few ever reach the position of being "co-workers" together with him. Blessings unspeakable and favours innumerable flow to others, through those whom God does accept into "co-worksership", but He bestows his gifts through none who are afraid of, or who "cheat", the Altar.

God's Altar is the contrast to the world's pedestal, but He that goes by way of the Altar will reach beyond the stars—and the outcome of his choice will be eternal. If there are times when the consequences of our choice seem to fret and irritate us, and when, because our lives are lived in quiet backwaters, we look on and see our fellows racing to the front amongst men, take the cords of devotion again, and bind the sacrifice more firmly to the horns of the Altar. Make your new cords daily, new resolves, new affirmations, new pledges, and say to the Lord that till his due time you will wait, and will be fully submissive to his Way. The words "*Not as I will, but Thy will be done*" make a fine chord. "*Choose Thou my way O Lord; myself I cannot guide*" make another—and so on.

If it makes life a narrower thing, a restricted environment, remember, there is not much room on the top of the Altar—it is a narrow way, but it leads to the greatest achievements because it is God's own way. When therefore the flesh struggles for more liberty; or if you feel at any time that things in God's plans are going slow; that expectations are not turning into realisations quickly enough, bind the sacrifice down again. Tie it up to the power, the horns, of him who sanctifies the Altar; and let him help to hold it where the fires can "eat it up", all that God has graciously condescended to accept from your hands.

And what does anxiety do? It does not empty to-morrow of its sorrow, but it empties to-day of its strength. It does not give escape from evil, but it makes us unfit to cope with it when it bursts upon us. It does not bless to-morrow, and it robs to-day. Every day has its own burden, which is quite heavy enough for the day's

strength. Sufficient for each day is the evil which properly belongs to it. We shall be wise if we do not add to-morrow's weight to to-day's load, nor drag the future into the present, where there is no place for it. The present has enough to do in looking after its own concerns.



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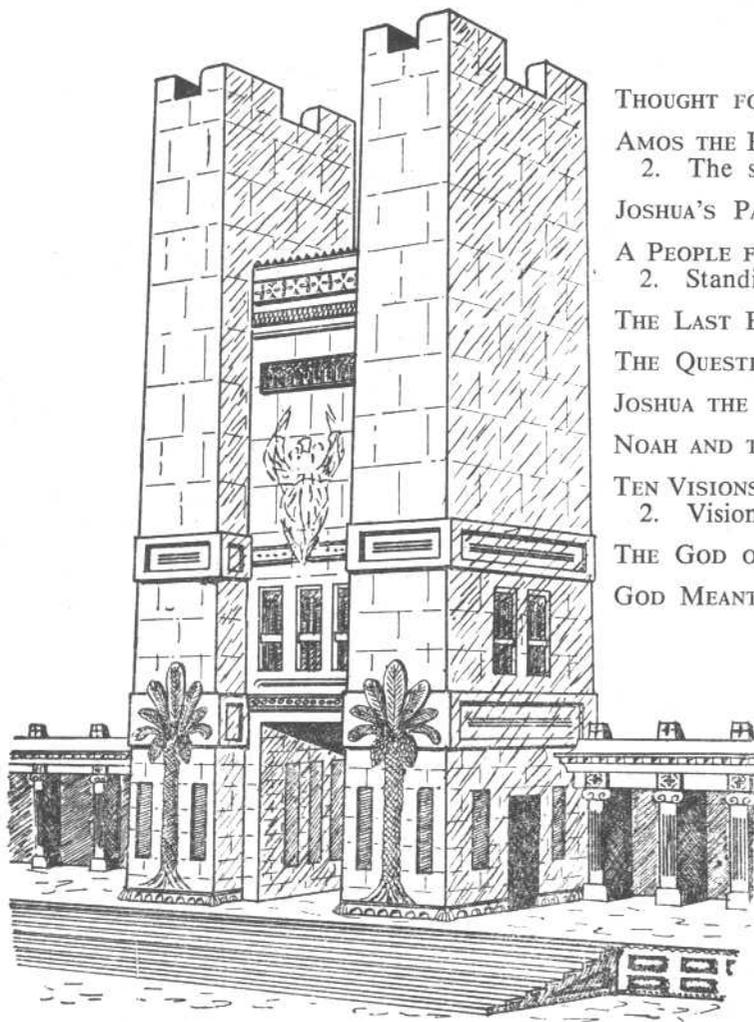
Thou, therefore, endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ

Published March 1st

Next issue May 1st

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

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Thought for the Month

"The conversion of the world to Christianity is more distantly remote than ever, with only 7.7 per cent of its total population being Protestant Christians, as compared with 12 per cent in 1925. The world has only one hope left—the personal return of the Lord Jesus Christ to reign in righteousness and peace."

So said a leading Christian journal in its editorial some twenty years ago. Assuming that the figures were correct, it would seem that the time is upon us when our Lord's question "When the Son of Man cometh, shall He find faith in the earth?" is definitely and terribly answered. Despite all the evangelism of the past and present it ought to be clear to every thinking Christian that the world is not going to be converted without some form of Divine intervention. The Gospel is being preached, and none of the work put in by Christians will be wasted; it will bear fruit, but not so much in this Age as in that which is to come when the Lord Christ takes to himself his power and reigns in the world of men in fact. Then, and not until then, will the glory of the Lord cover the earth as the waters cover the sea. That is why the hope of the Second Advent is so important a factor in Christian life. The evangelising now going on does not cease at the end of this life; it expands immeasurably in that future day when, in the words of Revelation, the saints of this Age "live and reign with Christ a thousand years". During the whole span of the Messianic Age every dedicated Christian, "changed" to be with Christ in the heavens, will be busier than ever turning men and women from sin to serve the living God. So far from finding only a mere 7.7 per cent responsive, it is much more likely that far less than 7.7 per cent will fail to react to the call of the Gospel; the Kingdom of Christ on earth is destined to be gloriously successful in the reconciliation of "whosoever will" to God.

NOTICES

The Memorial. Those readers who hold a Memorial service on the anniversary of the Last Supper are advised that the date this year is Tuesday April 10, after 6 p.m.

Coming Conventions. YEOVIL. Week-end May 5-7. Details and programmes Mr. P. W. Chislett, 108 St. Michaels Ave., Yeovil, Somerset.

Blaby. Sat.-Sun. 26-27 May at Blaby Social Centre. Details and accommodation from A. Charcharos, 55 Greenacres Drive, Lutterworth, Leics., LE17 4TN.

Warrington. Sat.-Sun. 14-15 April (Easter) in Masonic Hall, Winmarleigh Street, Warrington. Details and accommodation Mr. E. Haslam, 39 Downs Drive, W. Timperley, Altrincham, Ches. (061 969 5487) or Mr. J. Phillips, 64 Georges Crescent, Grappenhall, Warrington, Ches. (Warrington 64140).

Glossary of little-known terms in this issue

BEROSSUS Learned Babylonian priest in Temple of Bel at Babylon, c 275 BC. Wrote history of Babylon now extant only in extracts in later writers.

IBN HAUKAL Arab traveller 902-968 AD. Visited all lands Egypt to Siberia and wrote "Oriental Geography".

JULIUS AFRICANUS Christian traveller, historian and theologian of Emmaus in Judea, c 160-250 AD. 5-volume history Creation to his own day. First great Bible chronologist.

MASUDI Arab historian and traveller, 10th Cent AD. Wrote a world history.

NICOLAUS OF DAMASCUS, Syro-Greek historian, c 30 BC.

Gone from us



Sis. - Winnard (Warrington)

Sis. M. Moore (London)



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

AMOS THE HERDSMAN

2. The Six-fold Judgment

Amos 1.3—2.3

He stood there, this young prophet from Judea, in the court of the idol sanctuary at Bethel, in the presence of king Jeroboam II of Israel and the High Priest, burning with zeal to deliver his prophecy. The ten-tribe nation of Israel was the principal target of his denunciation although Judah also was to hear her condemnation from his lips. But first of all there were six neighbouring peoples destined to have their fates proclaimed, Syria, Philistia, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, Moab; all had offended and all must pay the penalty. It is a remarkable thing that although each of these nations had been permitted by God to oppress and harry Israel as part of Israel's retribution for her apostasy from the Covenant, they must still pay the penalty for their unrighteous acts. "The wrath of man shall praise thee" sang the Psalmist (Psa. 76. 10) and although there is a little doubt as to the precise meaning of that particular text, the principle behind the expression as it stands in the AV. is certainly a sound one. God uses the wrath of man to work out his purposes just as He uses the cataclysms of Nature—volcanoes, lightning, monsoon rains,—to contribute to the well-being of the earth. But even so, the wrath of man must then bring its own retribution for "whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap" (Gal. 6.7). So Amos commenced the discharge of his mission by pronouncing Divine judgment upon Israel's guilty neighbours.

Six such nations are involved; Syria (Damascus), the Philistines (Gaza), Tyrus (the Phoenicians), Edom, Ammon and Moab, encompassing Israel on the north, west and south. Their crimes and resultant judgments are described in the beginning of the prophecy from chaps. 1.3 to 2.3.

"Thus saith the Lord: For three transgressions of Damascus, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof: because they have threshed Gilead with threshing instruments of iron" (chap. 1.3). Damascus was the capital city of Syria, and the Syrians were almost constantly at war with Israel. Gilead, one of the most fertile and prosperous areas in Israel territory, was particularly vulnerable to their attacks, and it was because of the Syrians' ferocity towards the peaceable Israelites of Gilead that the penalty was declared, a penalty that would not be revoked. "For crime after crime of Damascus I will grant them no reprieve" is how the NEB puts it and this is the meaning of the term "for three transgressions, and for four" which appears in the

AV. as prelude of the judgment passed on each of these six nations. "I will send a fire into the house of Hazael" (king of Syria at the time of Amos) "which shall devour the palaces of Ben-hadad" (the preceding king; see 2 Kings 6.8). "I will crush the great men of Damascus, and wipe out those who live in the vale of Aven, and the sceptred ruler of Beth-Eden—and the people of Syria shall go into captivity to Kir, saith the Lord" (ch. 1.5 part NEB).

Aven was the district in the mountains well north of Damascus, and Beth-Eden the extreme eastern part of Syria on the Euphrates. The whole of the Syrian people were to be exiled to Kir. The prediction was fulfilled not more than some fifteen years later when Tiglath-Pileser II of Assyria subjugated Syria and took the entire population away for resettlement in the land of Kir (2 Kings 16.9) the location of which is in some doubt but in all probability in the area nowadays known as Kurdistan.

Now comes the sentence upon the Philistines. These people were settled on the sea-coast of Canaan as far back as the time of Abraham. From the days of Joshua to those of David they were oppressors of Israel and although David broke their power they were still a thorn in Israel's side until the Babylonian captivity. Gaza was one of their principal cities, Ashdod, Ashkelon and Ekron three of the others. "For crime after crime of Gaza, I will grant them no reprieve, because they deported a whole band of exiles and delivered them up to Edom". The land of Edom lay on the trade-route which came up from south-western Arabia (Sheba) to Tyre, from whence the merchant vessels of Tyre sailed to the countries of Europe. The Edomites therefore had become a nation of traders. Slaves were always a profitable line of merchandise, and here it would seem that prisoners taken by the Philistines on their forays into Israel were sold to the Edomites and ended up perhaps thousands of miles from their native land. Judgment is given. "I will send a fire"—symbol of invasion and war—"on the wall of Gaza, which shall devour the palaces; and I will cut off the inhabitant from Ashdod, and the prince from Ashkelon, and turn my hand against Ekron: and the remnant of the Philistines shall perish" (ch. 1.7-8). The sentence began to be executed thirty years or so after Amos when Sennacherib the Assyrian ravaged their land; successive invaders decimated the Philistines until Alexander the Great four cen-

tures later obliterated them as a nation from the earth. *"The remnant of the Philistines shall perish, saith the Lord."*

Next is the turn of Tyre, the notable trading people known as the Phoenicians. From their stronghold on the sea coast north of Israel their ships went to every part of the known world and even to the American continent; this latter fact they kept a jealously guarded secret from all the other Mediterranean nations. At the first Tyre and Israel were firm friends, linked by a treaty of friendship. Hiram, king of Tyre was "ever a lover of David" and much of the material for Solomon's Temple was provided by the Tyrians. After Solomon's death the friendship cooled and the marriage of Ahab, king of the ten-tribes, to Jezebel, daughter of the then king of Tyre, with the gross idolatry which she introduced into Israel, only served to widen the breach. They too were guilty of selling Israelite slaves to Edom, despite the long-standing treaty, the "brotherly covenant", of ch. 1.9, and they too incurred the same sentence of war and destruction. *"For crime after crime of Tyre I will grant them no reprieve, because they delivered up the whole captivity to Edom, and remembered not the brotherly covenant. But I will send a fire on the wall of Tyre, which shall destroy the palaces."*

The sentence was not executed at once. The Tyrians successfully withstood the Assyrians and the Babylonians for something like four hundred years but were finally conquered and the city completely destroyed by Alexander in 332 BC. The one-time greatest merchant city in the world became a mere fishing village, a "place for the spreading of nets" as Ezekiel scornfully predicted (Ezek. 26.5) and never rose again.

"For crime after crime of Edom" announced the prophet *"I will grant no reprieve, because, sword in hand, they hunted their kinsmen down, stifling their natural affections. Their anger raged unceasing, their fury stormed unchecked. Therefore will I send fire upon Teman, fire that shall consume the palaces of Bozrah"* (ch. 1.11-12 NEB). The antagonism of Edom to Israel is evident throughout the Old Testament. Esau himself lived in peace with his brother Jacob, but after Jacob's descendants returned from Egypt the brother-nation was hostile. On the way to the Promised Land Israel was refused passage through Edom and had to go another way. David subdued them and added Edom to his empire but two hundred years later they revolted and remained independent until Roman times. At the time of Nebuchadnezzar's capture of Jerusalem the Edomites actively assisted the Babylonians in the looting and depopulation of Judea but after that the fortunes of war gradually reduced their

power until by the time of the First Advent what was left of them became absorbed into the Jewish nation and Edom was no more. Teman and Bozrah, cities of Edom, had long since disappeared.

Another of Israel's brother-nations next hears the burning words of Amos. Ammon, descended from the patriarch Lot, brother-in-law of Abraham, possessed the rich grazing lands east of the Jordan, but not content with a peaceable pastoral life they were from earliest times continually in conflict with Israel. Their great crime was the invasion and annexing of Israel's own rich lands east of Jordan. *"For crime after crime of the Ammonites I will grant them no reprieve, because in their greed for land they invaded the ploughlands of Gilead"*. (This is the meaning of the metaphorical expression "ripped up their women with child" in the AV, alluding to the rounded pasture hills of Gilead) *"Therefore will I set fire to the walls of Rabbah,"* (their capital city) *"fire that shall consume its palaces, amid warcries on the day of battle, with a whirlwind on the day of tempest; then their king shall be carried into exile, he and his officers with him"* (ch. 1. 13-15 NEB).

As with the Philistines and the Phoenicians, the national existence of the Ammonites was brought to an end by Alexander four centuries after Amos' day.

The last of the six judgments is that of Moab, perhaps the bitterest enemy of them all. *"For crime after crime of Moab I will grant them no reprieve, because he burned the bones of the king of Edom into lime. But I will send a fire upon Moab and it shall devour the palaces of Kirioth; and Moab shall die with tumult, and shouting, and with the sound of the trumpet. And I will cut off the judge . . . and slay all the princes"* (ch. 2. 1-3).

Moab, like Ammon, was descended from Lot and therefore racially akin to Israel. Nevertheless there was constant warfare between them, interspersed with occasional periods of friendship. Their influence on Israel was always bad and a source of the idolatry which constantly afflicted Israel. With all of this it is rather difficult to understand the reason given for the Divine condemnation of Moab, particularly since no other reference to such a proceeding is to be found in the Old Testament. No commentator seems to have made any valid suggestion beyond surmising that it may have something to do with the incident recorded in 2 Kings 3.21-27. On this occasion, some eighty years before the time of Amos, Jehoram of Israel with Jehoshaphat of Judah made common cause with the king of Edom to quell the rebellion of Moab, which at that time

was subject to Israel. The Moabites were defeated and retreated to their well-nigh impregnable fortress town of Kiriath (now Kerak). Realising that total defeat awaited them, the king of Moab adopted the desperate expedient of sacrificing his eldest son, the heir to the throne, as a burnt offering to the Moabite god Chemosh, on the city wall in full sight of the besieging armies, in the hope that Chemosh would thus be placated and deliver his people. The horror aroused by this act was such that the Edomites and Israelites raised the siege and returned to their own lands.

This is not what is said in the present text of Amos; both Massoretic and Septuagint agree in the rendering as given in the AV. There is, however, one hypothesis which could make sense of the passage. It may be that half a dozen words in the relevant sentence have dropped out of the original text at a very early date, before Massoretic and Septuagint were differentiated. Such omissions do occur. If the expression originally read "because he burned the bones of *his son in the sight* of the king of Edom into lime" then Amos could very well have referred to the incident in 2 Kings 3 and this act on the part of the king of Moab be counted the greatest sin laid to the charge of that nation. Nothing of what the Moabites had been guilty in the past could have equalled this and the Lord gave this instance to Amos as the supreme evidence of the depravity of Moab. Like their neighbour nation Ammon, they too fell victims to Alexander and were no more as a distinct people.

At this point there is a natural break in the thread of Amos' prophecy. Judgment had been pronounced on six nations and all of them were enemies of Israel; all of them had laid violent hands on the Lord's anointed. It can hardly be doubted that the listeners received the message with considerable satisfaction. That the foes of Israel were to be well and truly punished for their misdeeds was good news indeed. There was probably a swift reversal of feeling when Amos went on to decree judgment upon Judah and Israel for their own misdeeds. But for the present the emphasis is upon the six.

In history the predictions were fulfilled at various times during the ensuing seven centuries. Syria suffered first, at the hands of the Assyrians, barely a generation after Amos. Philistia, Tyre, Ammon, Moab, all came next, in the war between Alexander of Greece and Darius of Persia which led to the universal empire of Greece in 332 BC. Finally Edom disappeared under Rome shortly before the First Advent. By the time Jesus appeared in Judea and Galilee this part of the prophecy of Amos had been fulfilled.

There could, however, be a secondary fulfilment. Although the words of the Hebrew prophets almost always bore direct relation to the events of their own time and had to do with the failings and sins of their own people, the fact that these books have been preserved by the Holy Spirit for so many centuries for the instruction of the people of God in subsequent generations leads to the conclusion that they have a message for Christians just as vital as was the message to the prophet's own people. Usually the teaching is by way of analogy; there is a likeness between the position then and the words spoken then, and the position now and the fitness of the words to that position now. In this particular instance there can be traced a correspondence with the Divine judgments which at the end of this Age will surely come upon every aspect of this present world-order which have been and still are the enemies of the Christian in his endeavour to maintain his loyalty and allegiance to Christ. Each of these six nations is characteristic of one particular aspect of "this present evil world". Thus Syria, more than any of them, was the warlike nation, continually sending in her troops to harass Israel, just as militarism in all modern nations, and particularly the despotic totalitarianism of some, results in the oppression of those who name the name of Christ. The Philistines were a cultured and artistic people; they came originally from Crete which up to the time of Moses possessed a unique civilisation of a high order, curiously reminiscent of our own twentieth century civilisation. Philistia could well picture the attraction and allure of the cultured and pleasant things of this world to the Christian. Tyre, the nation of merchants, is fittingly representative of the commercial powers of to-day, a threat to every Christian who allows himself to become entangled in the web of money-making for its own sake. Edom, the blood-brother of Israel, well prefigures the snare of the social life, whilst Ammon, the pastoral agricultural people, the appeal of the workaday world with all its interests and pre-occupations and obligations. Finally comes Moab, the most intensely religious of all the six, but a religion which was focussed upon a false god, a god who demanded human sacrifice and whose service involved debasing and degrading rituals. One of the greatest enemies of those who would know and serve Christ is presented in systems of false and debasing theology which present God in a guise far removed from his true character and inculcates standards far below those which are truly his.

So Amos may well have a message for our own day. Every aspect of every force and power in this world which is in opposition to the orderly

development of the people God is training for his future purpose is to come before the bar of his justice and be condemned by his judgment. The nineteenth chapter of Revelation depicts the forces of evil in this world, whatever they may be, gathered together to oppose the One who sallies forth from heaven with the powers of heaven behind him, and all those forces are *defeated and liquidated*. The fire of Divine judgment which Amos declared should come forth to devour those nations of his own day will be

revealed a second time to devour all in this present world-age which has its prototypes in those peoples whom Amos denounced by name. In the days of Amos the judgment was long in coming, but it came at last. Likewise it may seem in these days of the ending of an Age, when the world seems ripe for judgment, that it is long in coming; come it will, and when it comes, it will be *final*.

To be continued

JOSHUA'S PASSOVER

*Lessons from
long ago*

"And the children of Israel encamped in Gilgal, and kept the passover on the fourteenth day of the month at even in the plains of Jericho." (Josh. 5. 10).

A year to be remembered; the year of entering into the land! Full forty years had they wandered in the waste howling wilderness, scorched by day and frozen by night, afflicted by dangers and perils innumerable, until it must have seemed that God had quite forgotten them. But now it was all over; the trials and tribulations of the day were ended, the river lay behind them, and they were in the Promised Land. Now all was going to be well with them.

Of course it did not turn out to be like that and we who read about these happenings of old know full well that even now, thirty-four centuries later, Israel still "hath not obtained that which he seeketh for". But for the time being we are going to limit our vision to that of Israel at the time of crossing Jordan. We will share with them in that Passover which Joshua commanded them to celebrate directly they set foot on the soil of the Promised Land and we shall seek the spiritual teaching which lies behind the momentous feast which marked the end, as the first Passover marked the beginning, of their pilgrimage.

It is probable that there had been no Passover for forty years before this. Only the circumcised could partake (Exod. 12. 48) and none save those who came out of Egypt had been circumcised. During the long period of wandering to which the people had been condemned because of their unbelief and lack of faith at the time of the sending of the twelve spies, they had not troubled to circumcise their children. (Josh. 5. 5). In consequence, now that the wanderings were ended, none under forty years of age were circumcised. This flagrant disregard of the central feature of the covenant is a matter of wonder; one is

tempted to ask why Moses and Aaron were so apparently lax in their administration during that forty years. It is a question that cannot be answered. We know that Israel kept the Passover at Sinai one year after leaving Egypt; after that there is no certainty until the children of Israel have crossed Jordan and Joshua is commanding them all to be circumcised in order that they keep the Passover in the land. It may well have been that a few of the more devout did bring up their children in the desert in the nurture and fear of the Lord, circumcising them the eighth day and sharing with them in the annual feasts and "holy convocations", and that the rest were indifferent. The energies of Moses and Aaron, and the few who laboured with them, must have been entirely spent in the heavy task of controlling the general destinies of this mighty host of nearly three million people; it would have been a physical impossibility to ensure the individual "orthodoxy" of every one, and if the solemn feasts were observed at all it was probably by the minority. For all practical purposes therefore it may be assumed that there was no national Passover celebration during the thirty-nine years that elapsed between Sinai and Jericho.

There were, then, three great Passover celebrations in the history of Israel's journey to the Promised Land. First came that in Egypt, at the time of their departure from the dominion of Pharaoh. Next came that at Sinai, when they entered into a covenant with God and became a royal priesthood and separated people. Finally came that in Canaan, after they had crossed Jordan and had actually entered into their inheritance. It is impossible not to see in this a striking resemblance to the course of the Christian Church, and, too, of each individual believer. The first great event in the journey from "Egypt" to "Canaan" is Justification. That comes to us after we have believed but before we have left

the world. In the darkness of this world's night we have light in our hearts; the sprinkled blood ensures our acceptance in God's sight and our deliverance from the condemnation that is on the world. *"There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus."* Justification by faith is an indispensable preliminary to our entering the wilderness journey which will lead us to the heavenly Canaan, just as that first Passover must of necessity be accepted and eaten before any Israelite could cross the Red Sea and escape from Egypt.

Twelve months later Israel was at Sinai, and the second Passover was observed. There they entered into a solemn covenant with God which made them a consecrated people, separated from the world and dedicated to the purposes of God for all time. Israel after the flesh has been a separated people ever since. Not even their own faithlessness and shortcoming has altered that. Though they have denied him, repeatedly, yet He has abided faithful, and the mark of Sinai remains on Israel still. That is a fitting picture of the second great step in the Christian's progress—Consecration. The second Passover, associated as it was with the making of the Covenant, is paralleled in our case by our own entering into a "covenant by sacrifice". Like Israel of old at Sinai, we too have become members of a Royal Priesthood, a Holy Nation, to show forth the praises of him who has called us out of darkness into his marvellous light.

But, again like Israel, the making of that covenant with God is only the beginning, not the ending, of our wilderness journey. Israel spent something like three months getting from Egypt to Sinai. After about nine months at the mountain they spent another thirty-nine years getting to Canaan—most of the time dwelling at Kadesh, on its borders, waiting for all the adults who left Egypt to pass into death in conformity with the Divine decree (Num. 14. 29-34). The spiritual is a true likeness to the material. We come to the issue of consecration very soon after our justification, but there is a lifetime of learning the lessons God would teach us before we enter the Land of Promise, the heavenly Canaan. Like Israel at Kadesh, we dwell for long almost within sight of the golden land, yet we are rigidly excluded from its joys until all that is of the old nature, of "Egypt", is consumed and replaced by that which is born in the desert of our "wilderness experiences". It is then, and only then, that God says to us, as Moses did to Israel *"Ye have compassed this mountain long enough; turn you northward"* and we come to the final phase of life's experience, the crossing of Jordan.

The Psalmist expressed these sentiments in a manner which is wonderfully applicable to the experience of the Church, when in *Psa. 107* he allowed his thoughts to roam over this sojourn in Kadesh. "Hungry and thirsty" he said of Israel "their soul fainted in them—they wandered in the wilderness—they found no city to dwell in. Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble and . . . he led them forth by the right way". It must be confessed that he rather idealised Israel at the time for they were in Kadesh as punishment for their unbelief. But even so, the picture is that of a loving and all-wise Father who understands the delinquencies of his erring children and is solicitous for their welfare even whilst He must chastise them for their own ultimate good. So it is with the Lord's followers now. In so many ways do we come short of his glory and the ideal He has set before us, and He understands and sympathises and despite our failures brings us at last to our desired haven. They rebelled against the word of God, says the Psalmist, and ignored his exhortations, and so they fell down into the darkness of uncertainty and doubt; yet He brought them up out of the darkness and set their feet on the right road again. In so many ways these failures of Israel are repeated in our own lives, but He delivers. "O that men would praise the Lord for his goodness and his wonderful works to the children of men" is his triumphant refrain. So in the end, after all the shortcomings and stumblings and deviations from the way, the people of the Lord come into that "afterward of peace" to which He has been guiding them all the time. And the Psalm ends with the Divine counsel "Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the loving kindness of the Lord".

But in the meantime we do well to remember that "Kadesh"—where the Israelites spent at least thirty-seven of their forty years' wanderings—means 'Holy'. Whatever the condition in which our Lord has seen fit to leave us as we seek to make our calling and election sure, no matter how often we seem to fail in our profession, it is a condition which in his sight is "holy", because it is there that we are being fitted for the glory of his presence "in due time".

So then, at last, like Joshua's hosts, we cross Jordan into Canaan, and immediately partake of our third Passover, our Glorification. For Israel it was glorification in a material sense; they had arrived in the Promised Land after long years of wandering and now God would be always with them. For us it is the same; we shall enter into his Presence where there is fulness of joy, taking our place beside that right hand where there are pleasures forevermore.

Justification — Consecration — Glorification. These three great steps in the Christian's life and progress are well forthshown in the three great Passovers associated with Israel's journey from Egypt to Canaan. And the story of the third one yields even further analogies for our instruction.

This Passover was different from the two previous ones. *"They did eat of the old corn of the land . . . and the manna ceased on the morrow after they had eaten of the old corn of the land; neither had the children of Israel manna any more; but they did eat of the fruit of the land of Canaan that year."* (Josh. 5. 11-12). Throughout the forty long years of Israel's necessity, from Elim to Gilgal, the Red Sea to Jordan, the departure from Egypt to the entry into Canaan, the manna came consistently and regularly. It never failed. *"He gave them bread from heaven; man did eat angel's food"* sang the Psalmist many years later. But on the day of that Jordan Passover the manna ceased, for the people began to eat of the fruit of the land.

So it is with us. While yet we linger on this side the Vail, the spiritual manna of our Lord's providing will be our constant portion. It began to come just so soon as we turned our backs upon Egypt and began to walk in the ways of the Lord. It will continue without ever failing until the very moment we cross Jordan and need it no more. There will be a day when we shall drink of the fruit of the vine, new, in the kingdom of our Father. We shall not need the manna then.

Joshua's Passover must have been a wonderful time of rejoicing. The first Passover was one of gladness at the thought of deliverance from Egypt but it must have been mingled with some apprehension of the unknown, some fears of the difficulties and dangers awaiting them in the desert. The second Passover would have brought a certain holy joy mingled with solemnity at the thought of the covenant and all its privileges, but again there would be the knowledge that endurance and toil would be demanded of all who would reap the reward of that covenant. The

third Passover was different. All the hardships and dangers were in the past, all the fears and apprehensions dispelled. God had brought them into the land—their land—and now all would be well. *"The Lord hath done great things for us; we are glad."*

So it will be with us. Our first Passover of Justification, our second Passover of Consecration, involve much of hardship and testing of faith, and calls for determination and endurance. Oft will we fall by the wayside, and pick ourselves up, and continue in the way pointed out for us by the guiding cloud. But the third Passover of Glorification is the attainment of our goal, of our heart's desire. As we sometimes sing, in our services of praise, *"The toils of the road will seem nothing, When I come to the end of the way"*.

The golden dream did not last long for Israel, for they were still living in history, and faith soon failed, and unbelief returned, and consequently it was not long before they were fighting the Canaanites, instead of enjoying the land as a free gift from the Almighty, which would have been their portion had their faith held. With that development we are not concerned. With Joshua's Passover the picture afforded by the wilderness journey is completed and the curtain falls. Israel's subsequent experiences in the land yield other pictures and teach other lessons with which we at the moment are not concerned. Suffice it that we, at this Memorial season, take fresh courage from the pageantry of Israel's journeyings of olden time and reflect that, just as they entered their Promised Land at last, so we, if we hold fast the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end, will receive that inheritance promised to us and reserved in heaven for us. We have lived on the manna for many a long year and we shall sustain our lives by its aid for a while yet; but the day will assuredly come when we shall gather together without the manna—for we shall indeed eat of the fruit of the land of Canaan that year.

"Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name." This expresses adoration, appreciation of Divine goodness and greatness, and a corresponding reverence. In addressing our petition to the Lord our first thought is to be, not a selfish one respecting the interests of others precious to us, but God is to be first of all in our thoughts and aims and calculations. We are to pray for nothing that would not be in accord with the

honour of our Heavenly Father's name; we are to wish for nothing for ourselves, or for our dear ones, that He would not fully approve and commission us to pray for. Perhaps no quality of heart is in greater danger of being blotted out amongst professing Christians than this thought of reverence for God."

C. T. Russell.

A PEOPLE FOR A PURPOSE

*Thoughts on the
Call of the Church*

2. Standing Fast

"Ye are a chosen Race, a Royal Priesthood, an holy Nation, a People for a Purpose; that you may declare the perfections of him who called you from darkness into his wonderful light" (Diaglott I Pet. 2.9).

Success in any kind of business requires a constant study of ways and means. Self-discipline, training and single-minded devotion in the chosen field of attainment are the means by which victories are won. In all spheres of human activity the dedicated gather to discuss work, methods and ideas, to compare notes, to stimulate effort. They think, talk and live in the atmosphere and language of a consuming purpose. The desire to achieve, to excel in their chosen course dominates thought, speech and action. Their aim is not only to get to the top but to stay there. In the world of sport the athlete must keep himself in top form. In business and the varied trades, arts and sciences the participants must keep abreast of all that is new, constantly setting fresh targets and continually endeavouring to achieve better results.

History is a witness of man's struggle to achieve. All biography is the story of the human will battling against desperate odds, overcoming obstacles and handicaps which have appeared insurmountable and formidable, that a selected purpose might be fulfilled. For the perishing laurels of earth men will endure hardship and discipline. They will sacrifice time, money, comfort and pleasure in a strict training. With concentrated zeal they will keep their eye upon the prize amid the keenest and fiercest competition. For unsubstantial rewards, the fickleness of public favour, the transient light of fame, they will dare all, risk all, solve problems and overcome difficulties with a courage, tenacity and painstaking diligence which commands admiration. Mistakes and misfortunes can mar or halt any career in mid-stream, turning the finest dreams and ambitions into a barren waste of bitterness and regret.

The crown of life which God offers to those who choose to work with him upon his purpose is no empty bauble. It is a prize well worth the striving, an honour to be earnestly coveted, a position so enduring that Jesus often concluded his many parables illustrating its joys with the chagrin of those who would fail to attain the glorious office of permanent association with him in the Kingdom of Heaven. Neither mistakes nor misfortunes can spoil this career for both are, by

the power of God, made to serve the purpose.

In any work, confidence is a prime essential to success. The prize must be a certainty and its attainment a possibility. A modicum of self-confidence is necessary, for the prizes of life seldom go to the timid or the wavering. Courage, staying-power, determination and the will to hold on when the less resolute drop off in doubt or despair are valuable assets to any candidate for high office, honours, success or victory.

The Word of God makes it abundantly clear that there is a prize, a high-calling, a lofty position offered and open to those with the heart and courage to "so run that they may obtain" (I Cor. 9.24-25). "Be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee a crown of life" (Rev. 2.10).

Faith makes reward possible. There is a toughness and strength about faith which enables its possessor to stay the course, to surmount obstacles, to believe the impossible. To the hardy soul, the very hardness of the way is a challenge. Every setback is a call for greater energy and determination. It is easy to give in to difficulties, to allow handicaps to drag back, to be resigned to defeat, to accept that a thing cannot be done, but faith will come up out of every struggle, prepared to go on undeterred, to live and fight the hard way, laying hold upon the promises of God as upon the mighty Rock which endures unmoved all the currents of change and the force of circumstances.

"If ye be Christ's then are ye Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise" (Gal. 3.29). To be of the lineage of Abraham is to have inherited a mighty faith. This man who was given two great titles, "The Father of the Faithful" and "The Friend of God", holds a high place in the purpose of God because of his unstaggering faith and unwavering loyalty. At the behest of God he forsook all that was familiar and doubtless treasured, going out into the unknown, a wanderer, a pilgrim, an exile, trusting in promises that seemed impossible of fulfilment. Time and nature were against him. Circumstances tried him but he remained "strong in faith," being "fully persuaded that what he had promised he was able to perform." (Rom. 4.21).

The emphasis was upon "He". His was an implicit trust in the power and wisdom of One whose omnipotence he freely acknowledged, whom he worshipped and served with unquestioning devotion. If He said so then He could and would. Events proved that He did, so justifying

the faith of this founder of a race, and providing a stout anchor for the hope and courage of those who were to follow on as members of an illustrious household.

Even when his hope was realised, he was asked to give up, by his own hand to slay his heart's treasure, to sacrifice his dream of future blessings. Without question, with intelligent loyalty to him who had made certain rich promises, he prepared to surrender the most cherished fruit of his faith without yielding any of the confidence in him who had given and who now asked him to give up. It was no impulsive gesture, no spur-of-the-moment decision, but the act of a reasoning courageous faith which led him to the farthest point of renunciation, still believing in the rightness of God's judgment, in his willingness and ability to do the impossible (Gen. 22.10-12; Heb. 11.17-19).

The attitude of the three young men cast into the fiery furnace provides another classic example of the tough, unwavering quality of genuine faith "Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us . . . but if not . . . we will not serve thy gods" (Dan. 3.16-18). This is not merely faith assured of deliverance from the threat of evil. It is unwavering, unyielding loyalty though the very worst should happen. "But if not" prefaces a steadfast purpose, a strong determination to hold on without doubt or question if the choice be life or death. To such souls the greater calamity was to let go of God. With that other grand hero Job, their language was, "Though he slay me yet will I trust him".

It is this same quality of faith, hard and crystal clear, formed to stand the eternal years, which God seeks to develop in the living stones of his Temple. Life provides the raw material. By willing co-operation with God the power is acquired which turns it into everlasting use and beauty. To hope against hope, to renounce in silent submission what is most cherished, whether it be wealth, plans or dreams of usefulness, health, home or one dear to the heart, is to show that strong family trait which has marked every member of the household of faith. Should all doors close, all escape routes be stopped, desired blessings tarry until deferred hope clouds the spirit, the healing miracle prayed for with tears never occur, the life appear empty of service, yet the courage and loyalty of a great faith will say as did the Saviour, in his darkest hour, "Thy will be done". Overcoming faith, the faith which, with rock-like hardness, endures all the changes of life with steadfast courage, unwavering loyalty and uncomplaining acceptance, is the quality God seeks in his jewels, those temple stones prepared and perfected by unlikely means for a lofty pur-

pose.

As in every other profession there are failures, so faith is halted by doubts and weakness of the mind and flesh. Such temporary discouragements are common. Those who have made the career of the Spirit their choice have this advantage over the pursuer of the natural ambitions; God stands engaged to help in every need those who work with him. None can fall below the everlasting arms. However oft they stumble those arms will set them on their feet again with infinite compassion. "The steps of a good man are ordered of the Lord: and he delighteth in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the Lord upholdeth him with his hand" (Psa. 37.23-24).

Are any weak or discouraged? "My strength is made perfect in weakness." He gives the work and the strength. To admit weakness, to confess discouragement, is a prelude to the comfort of the rest in God. Do obstacles block the path to progress? There is nothing that divine wisdom and power cannot remove or surmount. "With God all things are possible" (Matt. 19.26). His presence goes ahead clearing the path (Prov. 4.11-12). Faith stepping out finds stones rolled away, waters held back, closed doors miraculously opened and threatening troubles, if not altogether removed, at least deprived of their sting. Do handicaps impede? He sets men free to serve him. The bondage of sect breaks down before him. The chains of creed fall off. He will have men to live for him unhampered by crippling dogmas or party shibboleths. Hindrances to active service are not always handicaps. They may be the very means by which He shapes a living stone for its place. There are infirmities of the mind, deep-rooted prejudices, obstinate private opinions which hinder the free flow of the holy, transforming spirit, which hold some as in a vice, which drag back from that full intercourse with God which fits a soul for his eternal Presence. "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free". (Gal. 5.1). There is no bar to entry for this prize. Do any lack education? He has not chosen the wise but the foolish to confound the wise. Do any lack wealth? He has not chosen the rich, but the poor—rich in faith (Jas. 2.5). Do any lack nobility? He has chosen the base, the despised for his purpose that the glory of the workmanship may be all his. Are any conscious of colour or social caste? The Lord is no respecter of persons. He looks not on the outer man but upon the heart. There is no inferiority before God the Father. There is only the human being with a capacity for learning, a faculty of progressing, of growing, of being moulded and shaped into a stone of

spiritual beauty, of the quality which will endure forever. He overrules the mistakes of those who trust him, making their human frailty work within them a more transparent beauty. The misfortunes of life become the means of rubbing off the earthly dross. The weariness of sickness and the feebleness of old age are but the polishing rags in his hand by which He adds the last bright lustre to his work.

Lest any should doubt or falter the Scriptures are strewn with encouragement. "Consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus, who was faithful to him that appointed him." "Consider him, lest ye grow weary and faint in your minds." Moments come to all when it seems impossible that the ordinary life, faulty and frail, should ever be fit enough to share in the same place with the great High Priest. His example seems so far to out-shine all human

effort as to defy imitation. It is when we look at others who have fought the good fight, who have left behind them a splendid record of steadfast faith and unwavering, patient endeavour, that the desire grows and the determination hardens, to follow them as they followed Christ.

"We learn the greatest of all lessons when we mark in a struggling soul the triumph of the grace of God, when we see a man weak like ourselves, erring like ourselves, enabled by the force of a sacred purpose to conquer temptation, to trample on sin and selfishness, to rear even upon mistakes and failures the superstructure of a great and holy life."

This was written of the apostle to the Gentiles, who wrote for others *"Therefore my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord."*

To be continued

THE LAST ENEMY

"The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death."

What an enemy!

Reflecting back over childhood days when youthful vigour made life joyous, and our hearts were filled with joy and gladness for the fruitful seasons God gave us, we indeed thought how good it was to be alive. When we played in the woods, and walked in the lovely lanes, we indeed thought "God is good."

*Yes, God is good—in earth and sky,
From ocean depths and spreading wood,
Ten thousand voices seem to cry:
God made us all, and God is good.
The sun that keeps his trackless way,
And downward pours his golden flood;
Night's sparkling hosts, all seem to say—
In accents clear, that God is good.
The merry birds prolong the strain,
Their song with every spring renewed;
And balmy air, and falling rain,
Each softly whispers: God is good.
I hear it in the rushing breeze;
The hills that have for ages stood,
The echoing sky and roaring seas,
All swell the chorus: God is good.
Yes, God is good, all nature says,
By God's own hand with speech endued;
And man, in louder notes of praise,
Should sing for joy that God is good.
For all Thy gifts we bless Thee, Lord,
But chiefly for our heavenly food;
Thy pardoning grace, Thy quickening word
These prompt our song, that God is good.*

Even in our groaning condition we feel life is sweet. What must the life more abundant be, which Jesus said He came to bring? What un-

seen, and unknown, good things God has in reservation for those who love him!

Man indeed will bless the day he was born when he does his Maker's Will.

Bitter must be the thought that man was only to enjoy these good things for a few years or so. Such would have been man's lot, had not God in his great love sent his Son to taste death for every man.

*"Thou didst not spare Thine only Son,
But gav'st him for a world undone,
And freely with that Blessed One,
Thou givest all."*

Thanks be to God who giveth us the victory. What a Victory, over the bitter enemy, death.

What is death?

Close your eyes a while and visualise the last look of Nature in all its beauty. The last look at the sun, moon, and stars. The last strain of music: organ, bands or the sweet song of the birds: the last lovely meal of food, with all its sweetness: the last sweet kiss, and handshake, and the last Good-bye.

O, what an enemy!

We indeed should bestir ourselves to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling. Our Saviour was so conscious of the bitter enemy that He offered prayers and made strong crying unto him who was able to save him from death. "Whosoever shall call upon the Name of the Lord shall be saved."

*"Lives again our glorious King,
Where, O death, is now thy sting?
Once He died our souls to save:
Where's thy victory, boasting grave."*

Hallelujah!

"Salvation is free."

? THE QUESTION BOX ?

Q. *In what sense does our Lord need to be present in an unseen manner at his Second Advent? (J.L.L.)*

A. We suffer from the disadvantage that as human beings we cannot understand or visualise how matters are conducted "behind the veil" in the spiritual or celestial world. Clearly it is possible for our Lord to conduct the whole of his Millennial work from his place in heaven without having to return to earth "geographically", so to speak, to do it. His Divine power must be adequate for this, for He has "all power in heaven and earth". We are told that in his resurrection glory and power He "fills all things", and one might argue that He is omnipresent and the question of location does not arise. But we must attach some real meaning to his own words that He was to go away and at the end of the Age "come again". His ascension visibly from Olivet was intended to convey to his disciples the idea that He was there and then ascending into Heaven to his Father—even though the cloud that received him out of their sight could not have been more than five thousand feet away and Heaven must surely be farther away than that! It does seem that Jesus intends us to understand that his presence at his Advent is of a different nature or different in degree from his presence with his Church during the Age ("Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the Age"). It hardly seems consistent with the glory and office of the Divine Christ that He appears visibly among men and maybe here the facts concerning the appearances during the forty days between his resurrection and ascension are helpful. He was still present on earth ("I am not yet ascended to my Father"), yet He was already raised to the celestial order of being in a glory which transcended all things in heaven and earth. During that forty days He was visibly present in the sight of men only for short periods and each time in a different body, recognised not by physical appearance but some familiar gesture or habit of speech. (The conclusion is irresistible that these "appearances" were of the same order as those of angels in O.T. days—the three who appeared to Abraham for example — celestial nature clothed in a momentary body of flesh in order to be visible to, and communicate with, men.) One might ask, What was He doing the rest of the time when not visible? The condition could be the same now. He can be present, in a sense we frankly are not able to visualise because of our inadequate knowledge, unseen because "in the

spirit", maybe influencing and guiding the course of world events so as to bring about the prophesied climax to the Age right on God's due time, and watching over the interests of his Church, the remaining body of believers on earth, at what is becoming an increasingly difficult time for them. Admittedly all this could be done from Heaven, by "remote control", so to speak; also it is true there is the Scriptural picture of the Rider on the White Horse being revealed from Heaven in the last great conflict. But against that there is also the definite fact that He comes FIRST, to take away his Church, and AFTERWARDS to reveal himself to the world for the world's salvation, the winding up of the affairs of this Age, and the inauguration of the next, the Millennium.

* * *

Q. *What is the meaning of the phrases "many are called, but few are chosen" "They that are with him, are called, and chosen, and faithful." (Matt. 22.14. Rev. 17.14)? Does this imply a second selection by our Lord after the original call? (B.C.S.)*

A. The explanation here is that the word *eklektos*, rendered chosen, does not mean chosen in the sense of a random selection from among the called ones, but choice, i.e. picked out as being the best of those called. In this context it means that although many are called to the High Calling of God in Christ Jesus, not all of those called answer the call, or continue in the way, or manifest that complete devotion and consecration to the Lord which alone justifies him in accepting them at the end as associates and joint heirs with him in the work of the future. Of all those to whom the call comes, a relative few are ultimately found worthy.

This of course does not mean that the others are lost. It must be realised that there are two aspects of God's dealings with men. The first, the formation of the Christian Church which is to be associated with Christ in the heavens and in his work to all eternity, is a selection from amongst mankind in general. That end having been achieved, at the end of this world-age, when all such will be united with their Lord in the heavens, all who remain, in whatever state of unbelief they may be, will go on into the next Age during which God will complete his work with them so that by its end all men, with the exception of the wilfully and avowedly unregenerate, will pass into the eternal state and achieve their own destined place in Divine creation.

JOSHUA THE COURAGEOUS

Moses, the greatest man in Israel's history, is rightly credited with having led the twelve tribes out of Egypt, welded them into a nation in the wilderness of Sinai, and brought them to the borders of the Promised Land. He did not take them in; the task of invasion and conquest needed the leadership and energy of a younger man and Moses was now a hundred and twenty years old. So the Lord's choice fell upon Joshua.

Joshua must have been at least seventy years of age but various deductions from the history make it probable that, like his fellow-soldier Caleb, he had passed his eightieth year. Against the normal life-span of those days that was equivalent to a mature man of forty-five or so to-day. Forty years as commander of Israel's warriors in the desert fitted him admirably for the task.

Joshua first appears in the narrative immediately after the Exodus, when the warlike Amalekites of Sinai threatened the migrating people. Moses chose him to select and lead the fittest of the men of Israel to form a defence force and repel the attackers (Exod. 17). To such good effect did he do this that the Amalekites were defeated with heavy losses. The battle of Rephidim was the first military engagement in Israel's history and Joshua was the precursor of all those valiant Israelis who from that day to the present have led their troops into battle and emerged victors. The valour and invincibility of the Israelite fighter has become well-known and proverbial in our own day; it started with Joshua.

His almost fanatical loyalty to the older man emerges in one or two casual incidents in Exodus. Perhaps the most noteworthy is the one when the elders of Israel were gathered in conference with Moses and two of them, Eldad and Medad, instead of participating, stayed behind in the camp and infringed upon Moses' prerogative by themselves expounding the Lord's instructions to the people. A messenger came with haste and told Moses what was going on. "*My lord Moses, forbid them*" cried Joshua impetuously, aghast at this invasion of his leader's rights. One can almost see his hand tighten on his sword-hilt as he sprang forward, eager to be the bearer of the prohibition. Perhaps, that day, he learned a great lesson from Moses' unruffled reply, and his look of quiet understanding and perhaps affection. "*Enviest thou for my sake? Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his spirit*

upon them" (Num. 11.28). It might be that those words began to teach Joshua that many in Israel were destined each to serve God in some particular manner and not all in the same fashion. Each member of the body would have a particular function and his was to be a soldier.

Eighteen months later he was, all unknowingly, put to the test. The nation had left Sinai and completed its journey; it was now encamped at the border of the Promised Land. God had promised that if they would go forward in faith He would go before them and nullify any threat from the Canaanites and other dwellers in the land. They would have no need to fight; their entry was secured. Almost certainly acting upon the basis of this assurance, Moses deputed Joshua to lead a party of twelve leading men, one from each tribe, to reconnoitre the land thoroughly and bring back a full report on the inhabitants and their towns, the characteristics of the countryside, whether pastoral, wooded or mountainous, and the nature of its crops and produce. His object evidently was to plan the occupation of the country in an orderly manner so as not to interfere more than necessary with the existing population and to settle his people in areas where they could best find subsistence. So the party set out, and ranged without interference over all the country and among all its people, two hundred miles from north to south and fifty from west to east, and returned after forty days with their report.

A sad day, that was, for Moses. Ten of the twelve investigators, whilst confirming that the land was indeed all that had been promised, eminently fitting for Israel's home, "flowing with milk and honey", were panic-stricken at the sight of the people and the defenced cities they had seen. "*The people be strong . . . and the cities are walled and very great . . . we be not able to go up against the people; for they are stronger than we*" (Num. 13). Their faith had evaporated and they no longer believed that the Lord had power to bring them into the land as He had promised.

Two voices were raised against the clamour, those of Joshua and his comrade Caleb. Their faith, at least, had held fast. "*The land . . . is an exceeding good land. If the Lord delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it to us . . . rebel ye not against the Lord, neither fear ye the people of the land . . . their defence is departed from them, and the Lord is with us.*

Fear them not". But the people, ever ready to believe the bad news rather than the good, ever ready to embrace fear instead of faith, began to stone them, and to talk of choosing another leader to replace Moses, and to return to Egypt and the slavery from which Moses had delivered them.

And so Joshua, the captain of the Lord's host, the champion of all those valiant fighters who had defended Israel against every enemy they encountered in the wilderness, had to stand by and see all his trusted warriors dissolve into a mass of blubbing children, fearfully apprehensive of an imaginary peril which the Lord had told them did not exist, ready to abandon the high hopes with which they had left Egypt and the knowledge of all the miracles the Lord had wrought on their behalf in the desert, and go willingly back to the servitude from which only a few years previously they had besought the Lord to deliver them. He was, for the moment, a general without an army; more than that, a pilgrim whose goal had dissolved into a chimera at the very moment of attainment. The Promised Land was so near, and yet so far. He had spent forty days exploring its hills and valleys, its towns and villages, and came back to Moses in high hope that very soon now he and his would be settled down in their new and everlasting home; now he looked across the desert landscape with the complaints of faithless Israel still sounding in his ears and wondered what Moses, and what the Lord, would do now.

He did not have long to wait. The Lord gave sentence. Because of their unbelief, because of their complaint that they were doomed to perish in the wilderness, the Lord decreed that precisely this would happen to them. That entire generation which came out of Egypt, every man from twenty years of age and upward, with the exception of Joshua and Caleb, would die in the wilderness. The entry to the Promised Land would be postponed for forty years until they were all dead. And their children, mostly born in the wilderness, would be the ones who would enter the land. *"All those men which have seen my glory, and my miracles . . . and have not hearkened unto my voice; surely they shall not see the land which I swore unto their fathers . . . ye shall not come into the land, save Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun . . . but as for you, your carcasses shall fall in the wilderness . . . in this wilderness shall they be consumed, and there shall they die"* (Num. 14, 22-35).

It was a terrible end to the high hopes with which Israel had set out from Sinai only a few months previously, buoyed up in the strength of

the Covenant God had made with them. *"All that the Lord hath spoken will we do, and be obedient"* they had said then. Now all that was lost; they had renounced their faith and their God, and there was nothing left. And still the lesson was not learned. In their arrogance they now determined to attack the Canaanites and take the land by storm without the leading of God. Where they were not prepared to trust God to be their defence they were now prepared to trust the power of the sword. So they went up, and were soundly defeated.

Joshua, of course, was not with them. As a soldier, he must have had faith in the power of the sword. But he had still greater faith in the power of God, and without the conviction of Divine leading he would not move.

So, for some thirty-eight years, the veil is drawn over Israel's history. They dwelt in the wilderness of Kadesh, tending their flocks and growing their crops, living a hard and austere life in the desert, always within sight of the Promised Land they had lost by reason of their own lack of faith. And Joshua, watching the men of his own generation passing into death, becoming fewer and fewer in number, gradually became conscious of a new factor. A new generation was growing up around him; young men, hardy men, sons of the desert with iron constitutions and strong physique, clear of vision and keen of hearing. He would not have been a soldier had he not begun to surmise and calculate within himself what he could do with an army of such men if he went in the conviction that God had called him to such course of action.

Surmise must have hardened into certainty when, at the end of those thirty-eight years, and Israel had left Kadesh and was encamped in Moab near the eastern frontier of the Promised Land, he was, one day, summoned to the presence of Moses. He found his leader standing before a great concourse of Israelites in company with Eleazar, High Priest of the nation, who was arrayed in his priestly robes of office. Joshua stood rigid as Moses laid his hands upon his head and began to speak. Dimly Joshua realised that he was being formally pronounced the Lord's choice for leader of Israel in succession to Moses, that he was destined to cause the children of Israel to inherit the Land of Promise. He was being commissioned to lead them into the land. Eleazar the priest was seeking the Divine endorsement by means of the Urim and Thummim, that strange method of determining the Divine will which was normal in Israel. And the people, as people always do in such circumstances, shouted their approbation. Joshua looked at them and saw among them many of those young men

who he knew would make first class warriors and perhaps began to sense something of the conflict that was to come. The Lord was going to use him! But he was not a legislator like Moses; he was not a priest like Eleazar. He was a soldier; his life had been spent leading men defending the host of Israel from its enemies. So, in some manner not as yet clearly understood, the occupation of the land was not going to be the simple process it could have been at the beginning. It had got to be won by force of arms after all. Joshua was conscious that even his new army of youthful warriors was not imbued with that sterling faith he would have liked to see. There were still serious flaws in the characters of the men of Israel. For a reason he was not yet able to understand, there was going to be fighting before the promise could be fulfilled, and he, Joshua, was chosen to be the leader. He squared his shoulders and strode out in front of Israel, head lifted up and eyes searching Heaven as though looking for the celestial guidance he knew he would need.

A few weeks more and Moses was dead. Joshua was the undisputed leader, the welfare of Israel in his hands, to make or mar. From this moment he was the military strategist, the man of war. To what extent he was justified in his belief that God had commanded and commissioned him to exterminate the inhabitants of Canaan may never be known; the fact remains that with passionless ferocity he did direct a campaign of slaughter which left wide areas of the land depopulated and open to the invading Israelites. In the early chapters of the Book of Joshua the Lord reiterates several times that He himself would go before them and give them the land; there was no talk of warfare and fighting. Later on the chronicler alleges that Joshua was acting under the express command of God. He was not the only conqueror who believed that he was carrying out Divine orders in his career of conquest; most of them have made the same claim. One has to realise that Joshua was a stern monotheist, that he knew only too well the dangers inherent in a native population so steeped in idolatry and moral corruption as were the then inhabitants of Canaan and he certainly could conceive of nothing more acceptable to the God he worshipped than their complete annihilation.

In that he failed. When the carnage and destruction was over and Israel were masters in the land there were still plenty of the native peoples left. And as both Joshua and Moses had foreseen, they became a snare to Israel and their idolatry poisoned the moral fibre of the "chosen nation" for centuries afterwards. Joshua had

done his best but it was not enough. He was, after all, only a soldier and he understood only a soldier's way of doing things. It might have been better had he used his undoubted security of leadership to insist that Israel entered the land in the manner God originally ordained—peaceably and in faith. Perhaps that would have saved all the bloodshed. It would certainly have been a more effective shield against the moral decadence around them while the Lord himself proceeded to eliminate the Canaanites by natural decay, "by little and little" as He had said at the first.

Joshua was, of course, a man of his times. War, pillage, rapine, destruction were the accepted hazards of life in his day and survival usually went to the one who got his blow in first. It is not appropriate to apply the standards of to-day to the world of Joshua's day—the more especially since to-day's standards are degenerating more and more definitely toward those of his. And Joshua was one of only two Israelites still living who could remember the days of Egyptian slavery. The land of Canaan into which he was about to lead his people was still an Egyptian province and under Egyptian control. Jericho, so soon to be captured and destroyed, was a frontier fortress garrisoned by Egyptian soldiers. That fact may help to explain why, although that timely earthquake threw down the walls and allowed the town to be captured without striking a blow, the ruthless Israelites slew all the inhabitants and burnt the whole place to the ground. In a sense it was a delayed retribution for all they had suffered at the hands of the Egyptians through all the weary years of oppression. And having had their first taste of blood, perhaps Joshua and his legions forgot the assurances of their God and went on in the strength of their own right arms—and God let them do it. It has been said of old time that God always answers a man according to the idol he has in his own heart. Perhaps that is how it was with Joshua; perhaps he was a too successful soldier.

His noteworthy attribute was loyalty. Loyalty, first to Moses and above all to God. He never swerved from his unflinching faith that God would fulfil all his promises; to God he owed all his allegiance. Something like ten years' arduous warfare was his lot after Israel had entered the land; that meant that whilst most of the people selected their little tract of land and settled down to a pastoral or agricultural life, building their farms and homesteads and enjoying a comfort they had never known before, Joshua and his forces were continually scouring the country engaging the enemy in battle and enduring all the vicissitudes of what we to-day would call a

guerilla campaign. But at the end there was no word of regret or complaint. When at last he began to feel the onset of old age and knew that his time of active service was nearing its end—he must by then have been at least in his nineties—he summoned a great conference of the nation at Shechem, in the geographical centre of the land, and there he delivered his last message to his people. He recounted the history of the nation and its fathers, from the days of Abraham in Ur of the Chaldees to the deliverance from Egypt. He reminded them of their experiences in the wilderness of Sinai and how the mighty hand of God had brought them into the land in which they now dwelt. He repeated the story of the conquest, the great deeds by which their possession of the land became assured, and then he reminded them that all this was by the providence and the power of God. So he exhorted them to continued faithfulness, reminding them that the penalty of transgressing the Covenant was the loss of all that they had achieved and a return to slavery under their enemies. He called them to witness that he had faithfully discharged his commission and never faltered in his faith in God. And having gained from the people their solemn promise that they would always serve

God and God alone, he recorded all these things in the holy books of the nation and set up a monument at Shechem to remind the generations to come of the solemn compact there and then made.

That was the end. The Bible gives him a very simple epitaph "*And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died, an hundred and ten years old*" (Josh. 24.28; Jud. 2.8). No mention of his achievements, no fulsome praise of his sterling faith and loyalty to the One he served. Joshua was called by God to carry out a commission. He performed his duty nobly and well; he did as both the Lord and Moses predicted of him, "cause Israel to inherit the land". He was, as both the Lord and Moses exhorted him to be, "strong and of good courage". And having established the people of the Lord in the Land of Promise, his active and perhaps ruthless spirit passed quietly into the keeping of One who knows best of all how to evaluate the work that has been done and the spirit in which it was rendered, and in the day yet to come use that same loyal heart in works greater by far than Joshua ever accomplished in the deserts of Sinai and the fields of Canaan.

REPENTANCE

"*God now commandeth all men everywhere to repent*" (Acts 17.24, 30-31; 3.19-25).

To some from among those in this attitude of repentance God calls again. To these selected ones a very special consecration is shown, involving sacrifice. Those responding to his invitation are granted strengthening power by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, a quickening spiritual influence causing a "begetting", making alive (Eph. 2. 1, 5, 6), to the Divine Nature. It is the same Spirit received by Jesus at thirty years of age, when He was baptised at Jordan (Mark 1.9-11). From the time of begetting a new being is gradually developed to the glory of immortality, each member of this heavenly family being fully resurrected in the Father's own due time. By such the blood of atonement was received at consecration. Mankind's call to repent of sin now is according to their understanding. The weak condition of the entire race, through the long course of sinfulness since Adam's fall prevents anything but partial appreciation. Yet man has some conscience; knowledge of right and wrong

is measurably possessed and the Word of God helps to enlighten them. Such as believe in the atoning sacrifice of Christ Jesus can look forward, accepting the promise of forgiveness (Acts 3.18, 19, 21) and full deliverance from death by willing obedience in the coming Age.

It seems relevant to these two types of calling to remember that children of believing consecrated parents are reckonedly set apart to the Lord from birth. It would appear obvious that such young ones are not in Christ but share in the favour of looking forward, by repentance, either to coming into Christ at an age when the Father may see fit so to call them or to perfecting under the New Covenant, in which case the prospect of the young is an earthly one (Eph. 6. 1-3). Such are not asked to sacrifice. We know whatever the Father is prepared to grant will fully satisfy all receiving—all will rejoice in the glory of perfection and their wondrously beautiful environment—forever secure in the love of the Father and his ever Beloved Son and sons on every plane when all is made new.

"To find the Maker and Father of this universe is a hard task; and when you have found him it is impossible to speak of him before all people."—*Plato*

A fish in the Thames—afraid of perishing? A mouse in a granary—afraid of starving? All things are ours, and above all "My grace is sufficient for thee". (*P. E. Thomson*)

NOAH AND THE FIRST CITY Appendix 3 to the "Story of the Deluge"

A humourist—or possibly a cynic—once defined history as “the consolidation of doubtful tradition into undisputed fact”. That remark has proved a truism in the case of the alleged activities of Noah after his egress from the Ark. Hoary with age, some of these legends have lingered through the centuries, reappearing in different localities, repeated and believed to this day.

The credit for much of this latter must go to the Chevalier Chardin, a credulous Frenchman who travelled in Armenia in 1671 and recorded in his *“Journal of Travels”* (1711) all that the monks of the Armenian Church had to tell him—and that was plenty. The Armenian Church was founded in the 3rd century. Many centuries later they decided that the mountain thirty miles from their centre at Etchsmiadzin was in fact the Mount Ararat of Genesis and that the Ark was still there on its summit. In the early 14th century and onward they began to tell this story to various European travellers who came their way, adding that the village of Arghuri on its slopes was founded by Noah when he emerged from the Ark. How they knew all this does not readily appear since the Flood was a long time before the 3rd AD century and Ararat was not—and is not now except to Western Europeans—the true name of the mountain. But the Chevalier duly noted all this in his little notebook and when he got to the (present) Russian town of Nakhidshevan seventy miles away and the monks there informed him, contrary to what he had just been told, that their town was actually the one which Noah founded, that its name signified “the Place of Descent” (from the Ark) and that they possessed a piece of the Ark and the tomb of Noah to prove it, he put that down also. To buttress their claim they took him to the neighbouring town of Marand south of Lake Urmia where was the tomb of Noah’s wife, whose name, it appeared, was the fairly modern one Marian, hence the name of the town. All of which assertions have been quoted and copied from one Christian periodical to another ever since.

Upon the other hand it is true that legends usually rest upon a basis of fact and this is of importance to the Scripture student. Many Old Testament personages and narratives formerly dismissed by critics as mythical have in more recent times been established as perfectly historical. A search into the origin of these stories

about Noah might therefore be of some value.

During the 13th to 15th centuries there were a good many travellers—mainly European government officials on missions to the Far East—who passed through Armenia on their journeys, and were regaled by the monks with the story of Ararat. This was the commencement of the identification of this particular locality with the Genesis story. First came the Venetian Marco Polo and the French Franciscan Friar William of Rubruk, followed by Friar Odoricus (Italian) and Jordanus Catalini, Bishop of Colombo, with Ruy de Clavijo of Spain bringing up the rear in the 15th century. Each of these included in his book of travels what he had learned about Ararat and this fixed the idea in Western minds. It was perhaps unfortunate that the local people in their enthusiasm showed these worthies several other towns beside those above-named as being the one founded by Noah, so that we have in addition to Arghuri and Nakhidshevan the one-time mediæval town of Surmari (meaning Saint Mary and now the village of Surmalu forty miles north west of Ararat), the present Russian village of Nakhchevan, then a flourishing city fifty miles north-west, another one called Naujua ten miles from Surmari, and a ruined city (of which no traces now remain) on the west flank of Ararat shown to Clavijo. Various names such as Calmarin, Cemanum, Cemaorum, were recorded by some of these travellers to designate these places. It might possibly be thought that the choice of six towns for the site of the one allegedly built by Noah rather weakens the force of the argument.

Out of all this two clues emerge. One goes back to Arabic historians of the 9th/10th centuries AD and the other to Josephus.

Long before Mount Ararat was connected with the Flood story the mountain held by the Jewish, Christian and Moslem peoples of the Middle East to be that of the Ark’s landing was Mount Djudi, at the point where the River Tigris crosses from Turkey into Iraq, about two hundred miles from Mount Ararat. This belief dates from the time of the First Advent and probably several centuries before that and is still held by the Middle East peoples generally. Arabic and Jewish travellers and writers of the 9th to 11th centuries recorded the same type of legend about Mount Djudi as their Armenian counterparts did five centuries later. Thus Masudi and Ibn Haukal in the 10th century said that Noah built a village at

the foot of Djudi called Thamanim (Arabic for eighty—the Koran says that eighty people were saved in the Ark on Mount Djudi) and that the village still existed in their own day. The village of Hasana, in the same district, claims at the present time to be the one founded by Noah, and still exhibits his vineyard, which still produces grapes. Two other villages, Ain Sufni and Sheik Adi, claim to be the building place of the Ark. The names Calmarin, etc., associated with Ararat, have been recognised to be attempts to Latinise the Arabic Thamanim (Hebrew Shamanim), indicating that the Ararat legend was derived from the earlier Djudi one.

The second clue is the assertion that the name Nakhidshevan means "the place of descent". This is evidently founded upon a statement by the Jewish historian Josephus of the First Century. He says (Jos. Ant. 1.3.5) "*After this the Ark rested on the top of a certain mountain in Armenia... the Armenians call this place Apobaterion, the Place of Descent, for the Ark being saved in that place, its remains are shown there by the inhabitants to this day*". This word is derived from *Apobathra*, steps or ladder for disembarking from a ship, a gangway, and *Apobasis*, the act of disembarking. But Josephus was alluding to Mount Djudi, which was in the Armenia of his day. This is evident from his further description of the country in which the Ark came to rest.

But just as the Ararat legends are not met with prior to the 13th century, so those relating to Djudi are not found before the Christian era. Still earlier writers tend to place the celebrated mountain farther south. Nicolaus of Damascus, in the 1st century BC, spoke of a mountain in Armenia beyond Media, called Baris, (Greek for "boat"), on which the Ark rested. This places the site somewhere in northern Iran and the mountain Al Baris (modern Elburz). The Book of Jubilees, 150 BC, says the Ark grounded on Mount Lubar in the land of Ararat (Armenia is the Greek equivalent of the ancient name Ararat) and Lubar is most likely a corruption of Al Baris. Julius Africanus in the 2nd AD century placed the mountain in Parthia, which in his day occupied the same region. Berossus the Babylonian historian, in the 3rd century BC, had it in the vicinity of Babylon and said that that city was built by the Sumerian equivalent of Noah, taking his information from ancient Babylonian records no longer extant. The Mount Nisir of the 8th century BC Assyrian accounts is two hundred miles south-east of Mount Djudi. All the indications are that in pre-Christian times the site of Noah's landing was believed to be in southern Iraq or north-western Iran. Once again there

appears the same type of story. The town of Nuhavend in Iran is claimed to have been built by Noah (Nuh is the Arabic form of Noah and "avend" means a building). It has to be remarked though that several Arab notables in mediæval times also bore the name of Noah. The natives of Sulimania in eastern Iraq claim direct descent from Noah. A range of mountains in Iran is called the Kuh-i-Nuh, the mountains of Noah (Chardin said this was applied to Ararat but he was mistaken). The Iranian town of Isfahan was built by Ispahan the son of Shem. The Ark was built at Kufah in Iraq, and so on. That the sons of Noah each built a town near the mountain is asserted in the Book of Jubilees.

The "land of Ararat" in ancient times referred to the whole of the mountainous area from Turkey to almost the head of the Persian Gulf. Hence the mountains due east of Babylon were in the land of Ararat, and are so referred to in the Book of Jubilees, 150 BC.

The whole edifice of these legends seems therefore to be traceable back to the four earliest writers whose records remain, Josephus (AD 90), Nicolaus of Damascus (30 BC), the "Book of Jubilees" (150 BC), and Berossus (275 BC). The latter three concur that the place was in the extreme south; only Josephus places it at Djudi. The first three give the mountain a name associating it with a ship or the disembarking from a ship. Three speak of a town being erected near the mountain by Noah or his sons. Only Berossus give a recognisable name to the town; he says it was Babylon.

Of all the early writers Berossus was the only one who had access to, and was able to read, the ancient Sumerian and Babylonian tablets relating to the Flood. What he has written, and what such tablets as have been recovered in modern times have revealed, is in accordance with the Scripture. The Genesis account says that the Flood survivors came from the east and built Babylon. Berossus says the same. The Sumerian "King Lists" say that the first city-state to rule Sumer after the Flood was Kish, six miles from the known site of the Tower of Babel. In Gen. 11 the people aspired to "build a city and a tower". Research has shown that Babel (Babylon) was originally a religious centre and a neighbouring town housed the general population so that Kish and Babel together might well have been the project described in Gen. 11 and the first united centre of population. In which case the Genesis record and the Babylonian tablets both agree that after the Flood the survivors left the mountain, and coming from the east, found a fertile plain and built Babylon. All the later stories stemmed from that.

TEN VISIONS OF CHRIST TRIUMPHANT

2. Vision 3—"I am with you"

The first part of this exposition showed chapter 12 of the Book of Revelation as picturing the birth of Jesus, the "Man-child" who ascended into Heaven and the presence of the Father despite the enmity of the Devil, followed by the vision of chapters 4 and 5 in which the risen Christ opens the Book of the future and reveals what is to happen during the Age which interposes between his First and Second Advents. Now the story passes on to the third vision.

This third vision is of such surpassing interest and importance, that it is given the honour of first place in the Book of Revelation. From the 10th verse of chapter 1 to the end of chapter 3 the majestic picture unfolds, the picture of the spiritual presence of the Church's High Priest in the midst of the successive generations of his Church. "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the Age" was his promise (Matt. 28. 20). On the eve of his death He assured his disciples that his presence would be with them in the power and influence of the Holy Spirit (John 14.16-18 and 16.7-16). "I will not leave you orphans" He said; "I will come to you". Here in Rev. 1 to 3 is the symbolic tableau depicting that coming and that presence. The wonderful manner in which so many different symbols are assembled together to inculcate the lesson of our Lord's constant watchcare over the members of his Church has been a comfort and strength to Christians in all ages.

The presentation here is one of Christ, resurrected and glorified but still bearing the indications of past humiliation and suffering, ministering to the needs of all those who in every century of this Age have become his faithful followers. Says John, alerted by the Divine Voice from heaven (ch. 1.10-11) "I saw seven golden lampstands and in the midst of the seven one like unto the Son of Man". John had known Jesus in the flesh as the Son of Man, and he also knew of the prophetic Son of Man seen by Daniel in the vision of the Last Judgment, a majestic king coming in the clouds of heaven into the presence of God to receive his Kingdom. This was the same Son of Man, but the setting was different. This was not Jesus as the Man of Nazareth, neither was he the victorious king of Daniel. The Son of Man in the vision which appeared to John was arrayed as a Priest, and He is shown in the act of ministering as a Priest. That is evident, for He stands within a circle of lamp-

stands, indicative of Temple and Tabernacle ritual, and only a Priest could enter the sacred apartment in which the seven-branched lampstand gave its light, and only the Priest might tend those lamps that they continue to give their light to all in that apartment—and in Levitical ritual only the under-priests could enter that apartment and those under-priests are representative of the Church of this Age, no one else. So in this vision the resurrected Lord stands ready to minister Divine light and life, Divine favour and blessing, to those who are consecrated with him and to him in the service of God. When John saw that awesome yet radiantly splendid figure he knew that he was witnessing the fulfilment of words he had heard while Jesus was still with them "I will not leave you orphans. I will come to you".

But He was no priest of the Aaronic order. The garments in which He was arrayed were not those with which John was familiar in connection with Aaron, and the characteristics of glory, power and wisdom which are evident are not characteristic of the sacrificing and dying priesthood of Aaron. The writer to the Hebrews gives a clue to the understanding of this vision. "They" (the Aaronic priests) "truly were many priests, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death." (Each priest died at length and had to be succeeded by another.) "But this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood" (Heb. 7.23-24). The Priest we see in the first chapter of Revelation is one who continues to all eternity, the minister of a Priesthood which will never pass away, unlike that of Aaron which did come to an end when the time for sacrifice and offering had ended. This Priest is one like unto Melchisedek, the royal priest of the days of Abraham, a Priest upon his throne, ruling and ministering Divine favour eternally. Because of that He is able to minister in power to his faithful ones and execute judgment upon the unfaithful. Therefore this One who claims "I am he that liveth, and was dead, and behold I am alive forevermore" (ch. 1.18) has the white hair of maturity, the flaming eyes of penetrating insight, the voice of many waters in its oversweeping gentleness reaching into the recesses of every heart. His feet, like brilliant molten metal in the furnace, are burning with zeal to set out on the great work amongst mankind for which He suffered and died. The two-edged sword issuing from his

mouth is one of piercing truth, the truth of God, illuminating the minds of his own, and one of swift and unerring judgment upon his adversaries. His countenance, like unto the sun shining at meridian day, brings to mind the prediction of Malachi, who promised that the Sun of righteousness would arise with healing in his wings—the sunbeams of the rising sun (Mal. 4. 2). The full glory of the Divine presence is now spiritually manifest to all whose minds are receptive to the influence of the Holy Spirit. All these things are characteristic of the present manifestation of our risen Lord to his Church.

This great High Priest is our shepherd. In all the affairs of daily life He is at our side, ministering and helping, sustaining and strengthening, exhorting and encouraging; and when it is necessary reproof and chastening. That is one of the great lessons of these celebrated messages to the seven churches in Asia. It is usually and rightfully held that this long passage in chaps 2 and 3 with its seven-fold exhortation is intended primarily to picture the condition of the Church in this world throughout the entire Christian Age, a compendium of seven successive periods of church history, each period manifesting its own particular characteristics, its own virtues and failings, and our Lord's particular commendation or reproof for each. But in a quite distinct and separate field of thought, it is undeniable that these messages also contain valuable instruction applicable to the believers in any and every generation from Pentecost onwards, to the end. All of these messages are for each and every one of us and contain valuable counsel and encouragement, coming to us as such from our Lord himself.

So John, listening to the majestic voice of his exalted visitant, represents the entire Church upon earth, of all generations, in communion with the One who had promised to be with us always to the end of the Age, receiving that spiritual guidance and instruction which only our risen Lord can give. This is the background of the vision and the messages to the seven churches are for our acceptance and our benefit.

The first message is that to the church at Ephesus, not much more than twenty years old when these words were uttered. "*Repent, and do the first works.*" Repentance is the first stage in our progress towards God. It is a continuing demand too. We need first to repent and come to God in loyal submission, accepting Jesus the Saviour in our hearts and lives, being justified by faith in him and in his redemptive work. Only after this can we take the further step of consecration and dedication of life to God which alone can give us entry into the communion and

community of the Church on earth. Appropriately enough, therefore, repentance is the first exhortation. But here in Revelation 2 the Ephesians were already disciples and had already passed that first stage. The repentance to which they were exhorted was a repentance for shortcomings and failures in their Christian lives. That is necessary for Christians of later times also. The fact that "*if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous*" (1 John 2.1), does not remove the necessity for sincere repentance for failings and shortcomings, once one's eyes have been opened to them. This Ephesian message is timely for all.

The second message is equally certainly the second step of the Christian life, that of consecration. This is where the outcome of a consecrated life maintained to the end is simply stated. "*He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death*" which, taken in conjunction with the Divine principle that death is the inevitable end of the irrevocably unregenerate, is just another way of saying that the overcomer will achieve immortality. The primary exhortation comes in Rom. 12.1-2 "*I beseech you therefore, brethren, that you present your bodies a living offering, your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind . . .*". This is the commencement of a Christian life which may involve hardship, persecution or suffering according to the conjunction of outward circumstances in the individual case; but even if so, the message comes as it did to the early church at Smyrna, "*Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer . . . be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life*" (ch. 2.10). That phrase has become a kind of watchword to Christians of every period in history; it stands as the epitome of the course and consequence of a consecrated life pursued consistently and unflinchingly to the end. This is an encouragement and a promise of the outcome of consecration faithfully maintained. As such, it is a message to all at any time in the Church's history.

Logically one would expect the third message, that to the Church at Pergamos, to dwell upon the conditions of the consecrated life, the process of sanctification. That word means "to make holy" and it implies the whole continuing process in life whereby the believer is being "*made meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light*" (Col. 1.12). Turning aside from the rather theological tone of the expression and its supporting texts, sanctification really means being made like Christ and this is the purpose and aim of the Christian life. That implies a turning away from much of the aims and ideals

and interests of this world in preference for the things of the Spirit, and this, it would seem, is where many in the Church at Pergamos had failed. They held the doctrine of Balaam, who minded earthly things, and were not completely separated and cleansed from those things of this world which are deleterious and antagonistic to Christian progress. So there was the call to repent of these things, and reform, or judgment—the two-edged sword—would come. But some there were who had held fast and not denied the name of Christ, and these were approved. It is a solemn thought that the preference for the things of this world over the things of God is a denial of Christ's Name, but so it is. The one who takes to himself the Name of Christ does so in full knowledge of the dictum "as he is, so are we, in this world" (1 John 4.17) and must needs pursue the same course and live the same life and be devoted to the same ends. Jesus was no ascetic, but he was completely and utterly devoted to the Will of his Father. Whatsoever He did was done to the glory of God. Those who assume the name of Christ must lead the same life and manifest the same standards. This is the essence of the Christian calling.

The fourth message is a warning against false teachers. Thyatira was not and is not the only Church to suffer from that scourge. We suffer from it still in our own days. It has always been true that grievous wolves enter in among the Lord's sheep, not sparing the flock. The pity of it all is that the position is so often tolerated. They did in Thyatira. "Thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce my servants" (ch. 2.20). One would have thought that if the splendour of the vision of the Lord in the midst of the lampstands, ministering to his Church, was properly appreciated, false teachers would be quickly recognised and rejected. It is not so; perhaps it is because the spiritual things are seen dimly at best and the earthly and carnal things so much more plainly by contrast. It is always difficult to divorce Christian standards from everyday worldly ethics, as witness the problem so many sincere Christians have in accepting Jesus' exhortation to love one's enemies, or the enthusiasm with which a converted military officer or film star or noted athlete is hailed and prominently featured just because of the outward appeal of the military rank or the screen or sporting world fame. These things have to be faced as facts and we all do well to learn that erroneous doctrinal teaching is not the only kind of false teaching in our midst and may not even be the most dangerous.

In the message to Sardis there is the pitiable

spectacle of a Christian community which has so far lost its first love that it is spiritually dead. It still retains the name of Christian, but that is all of Christianity that it has left. There is little that even the Lord can do. He can only exhort to awakening, to repentance, to a revival of their early enthusiasm, to a fresh attempt to attain true unity with himself. The Lord does not seem very sanguine; "if therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee" (ch. 3.3). That sounds suspiciously like the unhappy and hopeless situation of unheeding man in the days of the ending of the Age. "As it was in the days of Noah, they knew not, until the Flood came and took them all away, so shall it be in the days of the Son of Man" (Matt. 24.37-39). The same fault, the same ending. The message of Sardis is one that calls us to be watchful and hold fast that which we have. "I will come on thee as a thief", silently, unobtrusively, and yet surely and with a terrible finality. The same words are applied very definitely to the time of our Lord's Second Advent and come with redoubled force to those who believe they are living in that period; "ye know neither the day nor the hour—therefore, be ye always ready". The life of sanctification, of setting apart to the purposes of God, is one that demands continual watchfulness lest at any time the believer lets slip the things that he has seen and heard.

One of the most vital factors in Christian fellowship is stressed in the next message, that to Philadelphia. That factor is brotherly love. The word Philadelphia means "brotherly love" and it is significant that the Church in this city is the one to which the Lord gave his greatest commendation. Christians are members one of another, and all are members of Christ. "Because thou hast kept the word of my patience" He says "I will also keep thee from the hour of temptation" (ch. 3.10). Is it because we learn well this lesson, our fellow-membership in the Divine family, that we are immune in the hour of trial? Not because God interposes in some miraculous manner, but simply because those who live their lives in the fellowship and love of their brethren, always ready to "lay down their lives for the brethren", have thereby developed a character and an outlook that is proof against the destroying influences of time, of disappointment, of disillusionment? "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren" (1 John 3.14) That is no empty phrase. Entrance into this family relationship in Christ infuses a vitality that has power to withstand much that would otherwise corrupt and destroy. The sure knowledge that we love the brethren

and are loved by them yields a grace and strength which is of inestimable value in the life, leading to breadth of vision and a tolerance of the weaknesses of others, making each one more and more a child of the Father in heaven and more fitted for the Church's future work of service for all mankind.

So to the final word, that to Laodicea. As might be expected, this is a personal word to each one. Many have fallen by the wayside; their love has grown cold. Others are in that indeterminate position, neither hot nor cold. None of these are of any use to the Lord in the purpose He has for the Church. That august body must be composed of sincere, true-hearted ones who have remained faithful through all the vicissitudes of life and at life's end are found ready, "called, and chosen, and faithful". The rest He must reject; whatever station in the eternal state they may attain hereafter, they are manifestly unfitted for the High Calling of the Christian Church. But for those who have maintained their loyalty the position is vastly different. All the long progress from repentance through consecra-

tion and the sanctification of Christian life, all the experiences with false teachers and holding fast to the faith, leading up to the heights of brotherly love with those who are the true-hearted disciples of Jesus, bring us at the end to the position where we recognise the knocking of Jesus at the door of our hearts and with rejoicing we open the door and let him in. Like the two disciples on the way to Emmaus, we learn to walk with Jesus and then to sup with him "*Behold, I stand at the door, and knock. If any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me*" (ch. 3.20).

The climax of our understanding of this vision of the Son of Man in the midst of the lampstands is reached when we appreciate that in this Age He is working within our hearts. He wants to come in, and make of each one of us a new creation, all glorious and perfect within, that He may at the end present us faultless before the glory of the Father's presence with exceeding joy.

To be continued.

THE GOD OF HEAVEN—AND EARTH

We live in the days when astronauts are exploring extra-terrestrial space, when men are becoming increasingly concerned with what are known as "unidentified flying objects", and many people are anxious to learn what lies beyond the bounds of this planet. Astronauts are literally "sailors in space", and as such are breaking the bounds which until recently have limited men's movements. Their journeys take time, and plans for much longer excursions into space are conditioned by the fact that we humans age with the passage of time.

The activities of astronauts or cosmonauts bring into sharp focus two attributes of God which are closely related to one another. The term "omnipresence" is more or less self-explanatory, but "immanence" is more obscure, and when applied to God means "permanently pervading the universe".

The universe is sometimes referred to as a "cosmos", an orderly or systematic whole—as opposed to "chaos". The world, which is but a tiny speck in the universe, is under the influence of Satan, who has been permitted to take control for a season; under his rule it is in a state of dreadful chaos which affects us all to a greater or lesser degree. However, it contrasts sharply with the rest of the cosmos which the Almighty Creator permanently pervades. All this provides

the students of metaphysics with an abstraction about which they can theorise endlessly, but how does it help us poor humans to cope with the problems of everyday life?

God declares that as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are his ways and thoughts higher than ours; this world would seem to preclude any possibility of our probing the depths of his omnipresence and immanence. However Isa. 57.15 does just this. "*Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit*". How can this be? According to John 1 Jesus was and is the *Logos*, the revealer, and he has given us an insight into the omnipresent and immanent God. Through him we are able to approach God as our Father; not a remote God dwelling only in the heaven of heavens, but a God who loves his children to draw near to him; not at a mercy-seat located in a tent and sanctified by the blood of a bullock, but by a new and living way consecrated with the blood of Jesus, and we are urged to draw near with a true heart and full assurance of faith.

Where, in the midst of all the chaos which threatens us, can we find that mercy-seat? The hymn writer reduces this profound truth to the simplest terms!

*Jesus where'er Thy people meet,
There they behold Thy mercy-seat;
Where'er they seek Thee Thou art found
And every place is hallowed ground
Could I be cast where Thou art not,
That were indeed a dreadful lot,
But regions none remote I call,
Assured of finding Thee in all.*

God does not need to come down to us, for He pervades the universe, but if we would meet him, we need to raise our minds and hearts above the chaos which surrounds us. And being contrite and humble in heart we can find peace and tranquillity in the presence of him who is the God of heaven . . . and earth.

GOD MEANT IT

This title comes from Gen. 50.20 which reads "God meant it unto good", but, in order that the full import can strike us with maximum force, we will for a while put a full stop after the word "it". God meant it.

In the life of Joseph we have an illustration of how adversity has played a part in God's purposes. We see a pathway of sorrow trodden by our Lord, his people and the whole world of mankind, planned by One whose works are known unto him from the beginning. To all these God meant it; He has been working out his designs. God long ago selected the life of Joseph as an illustration to give comfort to those who rely on his promises. A consideration will reveal (1) how God deals with individuals; (2) what Joseph had to experience and (3) the effect on the Egyptians and Joseph's brethren, portraying the experiences in the world of mankind and Israel which will bring about their salvation.

God gave the boy Joseph two dreams of glory but at that time he little thought what sufferings he would have to go through before they were fulfilled. He was just a lad when he was sold as a slave and thirty years old when he became ruler of Egypt. In our Lord's case it was different; he knew the cost of his glory and that it would be attained only by way of the cross. His followers also know that their crown is dependent on their carrying his cross.

Can we trace a correspondence between our experiences and those of Joseph? He was sent by his father to carry gifts to his brethren and bring back news of their welfare. He found them but was seized and bound. Their intention was to kill him but Reuben intervened and he was put into a pit where there was no water. Later his brethren said "we saw the anguish of his soul" (Gen. 42.21). If someone had said to Joseph when he was in that pit "God meant it" he would have said "Impossible"! Only when looking back after many years could he realise that God meant it, but this was just as true at the time he was suffering. There may be times in our lives when our well meant desires to bring blessings to others

result in our motives being misconstrued, and sometimes we are restricted by circumstances, and at such times let us say "God meant it, not for punishment but for my good".

The brothers' plan to kill Joseph and Reuben's desire to rescue him from the pit were changed by a band of Ishmaelites coming by, to whom he was sold. The brothers were quite confident that they would never see him again once he was sold into Egypt but God was in all this, first in Reuben preventing him from being slain and then in the arrival of the Ishmaelites. God meant him to go to Egypt. What were Joseph's feelings now, wrested from his father and faced with a life of slavery, deprived of all rights? His was indeed a dismal prospect. One thing certainly would not enter his mind, that God meant it. At the time this would be unthinkable, yet it was the true position. If we look earnestly for our Father's hand we shall see him tempering our experiences just as this was God's way of bringing Joseph to Egypt. In the experience of Paul he was taken to Rome, ostensibly as a prisoner of the Romans, but he said that he was the prisoner of Jesus. We too should learn, even when we cannot penetrate his dealings, to say "God meant it".

God's hand is revealed in Joseph's life when he was purchased by Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, captain of the guard. He was not resentful but did his best in difficult circumstances and thus won the respect of his master. He could not know what would be the outcome but he acquiesced in the will of God. He became chief steward but his strict adherence to the principles of truth and righteousness brought him into conflict with Potiphar's wife and he was sent to prison. The ways of God were mysterious and beyond his comprehension and if he could have been told by an angel while he was in prison that God meant it his perplexity would have been increased. If he could have understood what God was doing how much easier it would have been, but he did not rebel against his hard lot and God gave him favour with the governor of the prison. So too God softens our experiences that we are

not overwhelmed. Joseph's fellow prisoners, Pharaoh's butler and baker, had dreams which Joseph interpreted and the butler promised to remember him when he was released. Each day Joseph would expect a message of deliverance but days, weeks, months and years passed. Hope deferred maketh the heart sick, yet God's purpose was still going on; even here God meant it.

At last Joseph was brought into the king's presence and he was raised to the highest exaltation in the land. We see the previous links in the chain; the pit, the slave traders, Potiphar, the prison dreams, Pharaoh's dreams which to the casual observer were just chance, but here was no luck or fate even as in our lives these things have no place. In each grief and each weary waiting God meant it, so to those who love God all things, without exception, work together for good. Jesus said (John 11.40) "Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldst believe, thou shouldst see the glory of God?". If we belong to God, this is the sure outcome of every adversity or sorrow. God's hand is at work and if we believe we too shall see the glory of God. These light afflictions, lasting but for a moment, will work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

We must clarify this, for there is a difference between "God meant it" and "God caused it." God did not cause the spiteful brethren to seek to slay Joseph nor did he cause Potiphar's wife to act as she did, but God knew it would happen and if He had not meant it He could have prevented it. He knew these things would work out for Joseph's good.

In our Lord's experience we read in John 19. 10-11 that he said to Pilate "Thou couldest have no power at all against me except it were given thee from above; therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin". In some respects this was true but God did not compel Pilate to pronounce the sentence of death; the rabble and the chief priests influenced him to pass this sentence and the responsibility rested upon them. Jesus knew that their wickedness could do only what the higher power would permit. They were responsible, but God allowed it and that he did so proves that God meant it. Acts 2.23 reads "Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain". God knew how the Jews would act and He overruled; He did not cause it but God meant it; their evil passions were made to work out the Divine purpose. They could do no more. God raised him up, as verse 24 says; it was not possible that he should remain dead. Jesus said (John 18.11) "The cup which my Father

hath given me"—my Father—not Judas or the rulers of the nation, but God had poured the cup. Joseph was rejected by his brethren.

Jesus came to his own and his own received him not.

Joseph was sold to the Gentiles.

Jesus was handed over to the Romans.

Joseph was sold for the price of a slave.

Jesus was sold for thirty pieces of silver.

Joseph was taken from prison and was made chief ruler.

Jesus was raised from the dead to the Father's right hand.

Joseph was able to save the Egyptians and give them bread to sustain life.

Jesus said "I am the bread of life".

Joseph said "God did send me before you to preserve life" (Gen. 45.5).

Jesus came into the world to become the life giver.

Joseph's brethren bowed before him and received forgiveness.

Jesus. Of him it is written "they shall look upon Him whom they have pierced."
(Zech. 12.10)

The unfolding pattern in both type and anti-type reveals that God meant it. In all the disciplines of life we must see God's hand overruling. If we think our troubles are due only to human malevolence we could become bitter but there is a truer perspective, for God is in control so that what comes through the malice of men only reaches us through the protective screen of God's will. We learn to rest in his will so that we can say "whate'er my Father doeth must be always best".

To-day many ask Why, if God is love, does he permit so much cruelty? Much of this is due to man's inhumanity to man and they blame God for their own wrong doing and greed. Why does not God intervene, has He no interest in humanity? Without a knowledge of the future we would not understand. It was only later that Joseph could look back and say that God meant it. When mankind is restored they will understand and say "Lo, this is our God, we have waited for him". Then only will men look back and realise that this was an education that they may inherit the kingdom prepared from the foundation of the earth. As the Egyptians brought their wealth and themselves to Joseph to buy food so mankind will offer themselves to the antitypical Joseph and they will understand the lessons of life's experiences and never again depart from God's law.

Now take away the full-stop and complete the sentence. "God meant it unto good." God sent it—God meant it!



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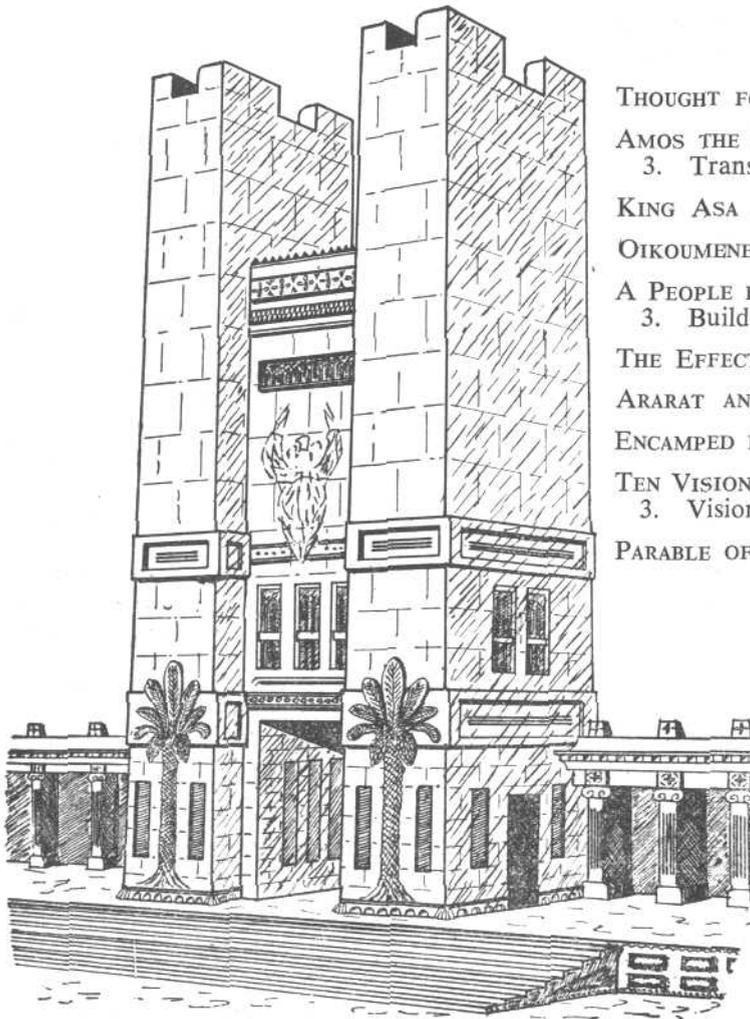
Thou, therefore, endure
hardness as a good
soldier of Jesus Christ

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

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Thought for the Month

"None of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself" (Rom. 14.7).

A principle increasingly neglected in our day—neglected, because to so great an extent this present generation has not been so taught. Today it is a case of each man for himself, and the weakest goes to the wall. A current example is the ever-prevalent industrial unrest with its recurrent demand for more money backed up by action which cannot but redound upon the old, the sick and the poor. It is easy to criticise but not so easy to find a solution which is fair and equitable to all parties. The issue is between running the world on the principles of selfishness or those of love. If the former, then every man grabs what he can and closes his mind to the plight of the less fortunate; even so he is never really satisfied. If the latter, then each man's interests are being looked after by every other man, and the result cannot be other than eminently satisfactory. And behind all this is another consideration. The human race upon earth can only continue an orderly and adequate existence by recognising the interdependence of men upon each other. What is called the "balance of Nature" in the world of living plants and animals is true of mankind as well. Each must contribute to the common welfare and each

should receive his or her share from the common store. The earth is capable of bringing forth enough for all, even in this modern day of increasing population, but only if every man plays his part. At present many do not. While the rule of selfishness continues many will not. Therefore some, usually the weakest, must go short. That is true within a nation some of whose citizens strive to acquire a disproportionate share of that nation's wealth and products; it is also true of an entire world in which some nations use their power and knowledge to gain for themselves all they desire of the earth's resources at the expense of less able nations who must then go short. So we have the spectacle of abounding plenty in one nation whilst another nation starves.

All this is well known and admitted. What is not so readily admitted is that nothing can change this state of things until the rule of man is replaced by the rule of Christ. "Self-preservation is the first law of Nature" is an old cliché but it is an untrue one. The first law of Nature is that enunciated by Jesus "Do unto others as ye would they should do unto you". When, in the coming Messianic Age, that precept is accepted and put into action, the world's troubles will disappear.

Coming Conventions

Blaby. Sat.-Sun. 26-27 May at Blaby Social Centre. Details and accommodation from A. Charcharos, 55 Greenacres Drive, Lutterworth, Leics., LE17 4TN.

Chesham. Sat.-Sun. 9-10 June at the Malt House, Elgiva Lane, Chesham, Bucks. Details and accommodation from Mr. F. Binns, 102 Broad Street, Chesham, Bucks., HP5 3ED.

Gone from us

— ❁ —
Sis B. Hills (London)
Bro. J. Humphrey (London)
Bro. J. Williams (Yeovil)

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

AMOS THE HERDSMAN

3. Transgressions of Israel

Amos 2. 4-16

"For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still." So did the prophet Isaiah, half a century after Amos, intone his lament over the inevitable fate of Israel, a fate which Amos was now about to declare in the ears of all Israel as he stood in the idol sanctuary at Bethel. He had just pronounced Divine judgment soon to fall upon the six neighbour nations; now it was the turn of Judah and Israel. The nation had dwelt in the Promised Land for something like seven hundred years and for the major part of that time they had served God either partially or not at all. At first they had leaders, "judges", in the main resolute, God-fearing men who did their best to guide their people in the right way; but in between consecutive judges there was almost always a "falling away" into godlessness. Later they had kings, men of the line of David who occupied the throne as the earthly representative of God, the true king of Israel. Sometimes they were righteous men, but mostly they were oppressive, grasping tyrants, who cared little for the welfare of the people they ruled and nothing for the laws of God. In not a few cases they led the people into open idolatry and flagrant violation of the Mosaic covenant. So God raised up prophets, men who were guided and inspired by the Holy Spirit to wean the people from their misdeeds and persuade them back to their true allegiance. Amos was one such, but by his time the rot had gone so far that it could not be remedied. He could only tell them of the coming disasters which they had brought upon themselves by their own heedless course.

He turned first to Judah, Judah the two-tribe kingdom which had received so much at the Lord's hands in being made the custodian of the Temple and its worship and the seat of royalty. Jerusalem the holy, the sacred city, the royal city, the city of peace, lay within its territory. Here, in those brief times when all Israel was united in sincere worship of God, all the tribes came to render homage and participate in the annual sacred feasts and ceremonies. Here, if anywhere, should it have been that God was worshipped continually in spirit and in truth. "Praise waiteth for thee, O God, in Sion; and unto thee shall the vow be performed" sang the Psalmist "O thou that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come" (Psa. 65. 1-2). "In Judah is God known; his name is great in Israel." "Our feet shall stand within thy gates, O

Jerusalem . . . whither the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord, unto the testimony of Israel" (Psa. 76.1; 122.2-3). But all that was in the days of David when the kingship was new and the nation united and enthusiastic. The Lord had promised that David's throne would endure for ever and his people know only prosperity and well-being, but they ignored and forgot that all this was conditional upon their own allegiance to God and his laws. They forswore their allegiance and flouted the laws, and now, only two centuries after David, not more than seven or eight generations, they were to reap the consequences. So Amos declared the wrongdoing they had wrought and the penalty they must suffer.

The accusation was short and succinct. They had spurned the law of the Lord; they had failed to keep his commandments; they had allowed themselves to be led astray to the worship of false gods (ch. 2.4). The whole added up to apostasy, an apostasy which went right back to the beginning. Amos was not talking only to his own generation; his denunciation went back to include past generations, even to the times when Israel took possession of the land. The Old Testament includes sufficient detailed cases. Right at the beginning Jonathan the grandson of Moses allowed himself to be made the first High Priest of a renegade sanctuary in the territory of Dan (Jud. 18) where God was worshipped under the visible figure of a silver ox. (In later days the custodians of the oracles altered the name of Moses to Manasseh in Jud. 18.30 to avoid their revered leader being associated with so disgraceful a proceeding.) Then, not much later, Gideon, that great champion for God, instituted a centre of worship in his own tribal territory in competition with the national centre at Shiloh where stood the Mosaic Tabernacle. In the days of Rehoboam, successor of Solomon, the Israelites built "high places" in the land, ostensibly for the worship of God (I Kings 14), but these degenerated quickly into idol shrines. Sometimes the kings were evil and sometimes they were good, but in both cases the high places remained, mute witnesses to national apostasy. Good king Josiah destroyed them and endeavoured to bring his people back to God, but then it was too late. Less than thirty years was to run before the blow was to fall on Judah.

So Amos pronounced judgment. Because of this persistent unfaithfulness the penalty of the

Covenant was to be enforced. "I will send a fire upon Judah, and it shall devour all the palaces of Jerusalem" (ch. 2.5). It was the same judgment that came upon the entire six surrounding nations, but this time upon the people of the Lord. Chosen nation and unique people they might be, but they were not exempt from the consequences of sin on that account. In that respect they were no different from the nations round about, for "there is no respect of persons with God" (Rom. 2.11). And Judah had greater responsibility. The peoples round about were born and lived their lives in measurable ignorance of God; Judah and Israel were, between them, recipients and guardians of the oracles of God. They knew his Law and they had seen his miracles and experienced his power in deliverance. They had less excuse. And they suffered accordingly.

The "fire upon Judah" was, of course, war. The fulfillment began fifty years later when Sennacherib the Assyrian invaded Judah and took some two hundred thousand captive before the angel of the Lord, in response to the faith of king Hezekiah, intervened and destroyed the Assyrian army, thus saving Jerusalem. A last chance of repentance for Judah, perhaps? If so, it was of no avail. Hezekiah's next two successors on the throne were evil men and they led Judah into even grosser idolatry. Manasseh the king was taken captive into Babylon, but even this did not deter Amon his son from following the same evil way. Then came the Egyptians in the days of Josiah and Jehoahaz, and following them the Babylonians in those of Jehoiakim and Zedekiah, a continual state of invasion and war desolating the land during the space of a hundred and twenty years, until finally Nebuchadnezzar the Babylonian destroyed Jerusalem, its palaces and its Temple, just as Amos had foretold, and took the remaining people captive to Babylon. The land which nearly a thousand years earlier had seen the conquering hosts under Joshua entering and taking possession now saw the last pitiful remnants of the once proud nation driven like beasts into hopeless servitude. "How doth the city sit solitary, that was full of people" lamented Jeremiah, the prophet who so vainly tried to avert the calamity by exhorting the people to repentance and faith; "she that was great among the nations, how is she become a slave" (Lam. 1.1).

Amos turns now to Israel, the ten-tribe nation. Her judgment was to be executed first, her land desolated and her captivity effected a century before that of Judah, but Amos leaves Israel to the last because it is against Israel that the main burden of his entire prophecy is directed

and all that has gone heretofore has been by way of preliminary. Up to this point the men and women in that idol temple at Bethel would have listened smugly if not with secret satisfaction at the prospect of Divine chastisements shortly to fall upon all their enemies. Their complacent expressions were quickly swept from their faces when the youthful prophet faced them with the ominous words "for crime after crime of Israel, I will grant them no reprieve" (ch. 2.6). Amos laid three stated crimes to their charge, three headings under which could be included all the evil and apostasy of which they had been guilty. Here at this point the prophet declares each crime in turn.

"They sold the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair of shoes. They grind the heads of the poor into the earth and thrust the humble out of their way" (ch. 2.6-7). The latter phrase is the N.E.B. rendering and is preferable. This is an allusion to that provision in the Law of Moses (Lev. 25) by which a debtor could be sold into slavery or a poor man sell himself, but the contract was only to last until the next year of Jubilee (the fiftieth year, when all lands and properties reverted to their original owners). The implication here is that a kind of trade had grown up, founded on this custom, whereby men and women in Israel had become objects of barter and sale for private profit, which was a long way from the original provision intended solely for the satisfaction of a debt. So the poor, the innocent, the humble had become the helpless prey of the soulless rich in complete negation of the original conception which viewed all Israelites as brothers. Here is to be seen all the elements of sordid commercialism and social injustice which is so fearfully rampant in the world to-day.

"A man and his father will go in unto the same maid, to profane my holy name" (ch. 2.7). The reference here is to pagan ritual-worship of the most depraved kind. The word rendered "maid" in the A.V. is *kedeshah*, which denotes a priestess-prostitute attached to a pagan temple. The underlying principle was that the woman yielded what was most precious to her as a sacrifice to the god or goddess, and that by a kind of "sympathetic magic" the act would result in renewed fertility of crops and flocks and herds to the benefit of the community. A more accurate rendering of the sentence would be "Son and father resort to the same *kedeshah* to the profanation of my holy name". The practice was expressly forbidden the daughters of Israel (Deut. 23.17), nevertheless a burning passage in Hos. 4. 12-14 shows that this sin was rife in Israel. Thus did Amos seize upon the

most degraded element in pagan ritual to condemn the whole system of pagan idolatry into which Israel had fallen.

"*And they lie down beside the altar on garments seized in pledge, and drink wine at the expense of those they have mulcted, in the house of their god*". (ch. 2.8). This was the third charge. Again it relates to the oppression of the poor, and it introduces an element of unctuous hypocrisy. The Law of Moses provided that if, as security for a loan, a poor man was required to surrender his warm outer garment, it was in any case to be returned to him when evening came; he would need it for warmth through the cold Eastern night (Exod. 22.25.27; Deut. 24. 10-13). Here was a condition in which the creditor not only failed to return the garment, but used it for his own comfort whilst performing his ritualistic observances at the idol altar—which may very well have included the sin just previously referred to. Not only so, but he caroused with intoxicants in that same temple on the usury he had extorted from those same poor debtors. The whole picture is that of the unprincipled exploiter of the poor, flaunting his ill-gotten gains and his own indulgence under the cloak of respectability in the temple where such things were the normal custom.

These three sins pictured the whole gamut of iniquities for which the Lord was about to pass judgment on Israel. But first He had something to say.

"*Yet I—even I—destroyed the Amorite before you, whose height was like the cedars . . . yet I destroyed his fruit from above, and his roots from beneath. Also I brought you up from the land of Egypt, and led you forty years through the wilderness, to possess the land of the Amorites. And I raised up of your sons for prophets, and . . . for Nazarites. But ye gave the Nazarites wine to drink, and commanded the prophets, saying 'Prophecy not'*" (ch. 2.8-12).

Against the three crimes of Israel for which they stood arraigned before him the Lord set three great things He had done for them in times gone by. He had delivered the nation from Egypt in the time of Moses, led them for forty years through the wilderness and brought them to the borders of the Promised Land. He had eliminated the Amorite inhabitants of the land to the extent that Israel could enter and conquer, he had given them prophets to encourage them in the right ways and warned them against the wrong. He had played his part and fulfilled all his promises, had been a Father to them and treated them as his children. They had repaid him with ingratitude, heedlessness and rebellion. They had refused to heed the counsel of his

prophets, misused them and in many cases killed them. They had shamefully treated those among them who were of a different mind and had dedicated themselves to God—the Nazarites—and compelled them to forswear their vows of dedication. They had in every way proved themselves unworthy of all that God had done for them. And God had done all that could be done for an unresponsive people. Later on He was to say to Isaiah "I have spread out my hands all the day unto a rebellious people, which walketh in a way that was not good . . . a people that provoketh me to anger continually, . . . these are a smoke in my nose, a fire that burneth all the day . . . when I called, ye did not answer; when I spake, ye did not hear: but did evil before mine eyes, and did choose that wherein I delighted not" (Isa. 65.2-12). All that was true in the days of Amos also, so sadly true that the Lord had to express himself as weighed down in spirit by the burden of their sins.

"Behold" He says "*I am pressed under you as a cart is pressed that is full of sheaves*" (ch. 2. 13). There is some doubt respecting the grammatical construction of the words. It is uncertain whether the meaning is that Israel is pressed down with the weight of sin like a harvest-wagon laden with sheaves of grain, or that God is burdened down in heaviness at the knowledge of their sin. The N.E.B. has it "I groan under the burden of you as a wagon creaks under a full load" and it is very possible that this is the true sense of the passage. God is not an angry, vengeful Deity, a savage "tribal god of the Hebrews" as some would have it. He is the contrary, a loving, tender and all-wise Father ever seeking the welfare and happiness of the creatures his hand has made. It is because sin and the way of sin can only lead to unhappiness and disaster for those creatures that He takes every step necessary to convince men of that fact; so it must be from time to time that a sharp lesson is necessary and men allowed to reap the consequences of their own folly. But even so He is ever ready to save and deliver before man has gone too far to be recovered. So in the fulness of time it became possible to inscribe on the pages of history the never-to-be-forgotten words "*God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life*" (John 3.16). After all those years of disobedience and disloyalty, rebellion against and renunciation of God, He was still conscious of the weight of an infinite sorrow that such things should be, and, too, without doubt, that He must inflict chastisement that men might ultimately be reclaimed. So, with heavy heart, speaking in human terms, and with

sad reluctance, again speaking in human terms, He told them what must surely come to pass.

"Therefore flight shall not save the swift; the strong man shall not rally his strength; the warrior shall not save himself; the archer shall not stand his ground; the swift of foot shall not be saved; nor the horseman escape. On that day the bravest of warriors shall be stripped of his arms and run away."

"This is the very word of the Lord" (ch. 2. 14-16. N.E.B.).

That meant military defeat, total and complete. There had been a time when these things had been true of the people that invaded Israel and in their faith and trust in God the warriors of Israel had stood still and watched all these things happen to the enemies who had come to despoil them. Not many generations previously good king Jehoshaphat had sallied forth with his army and his priests, singing the high praises of God, to face the invaders from Moab and Ammon and Edom. *"Ye shall not need to fight in this battle"* he told his people. *"The battle is not yours but God's. Stand ye still, and see the salvation of the Lord"*. And Israel stood still on the heights and watched, while the invaders fell out between themselves, and began to battle with each other until not one of them was left (2 Chron. 20). It could have been the same again, had there been the same faith. But times had changed; the people were of different mind, and when the Assyrians came upon them not many years later they found a nation defenceless and dispirited, trusting in gods which were unable to deliver, and so the Assyrians carried them all away.

What is the moral behind all this for to-day? The same basic sins are rife, much more exceedingly rife in modern society. Indifference to, and flagrant disobedience of, Divine law is a commonplace. In many quarters, and increasingly so, honesty and fair dealing, kindness, generosity and charity, are despised as signs of weakness. There are children who grow up not knowing, because they have never been taught, the meaning of the word honesty. With each succeeding generation the standards of Divine ethics recede farther into the background. The words of Amos 2.4 become increasingly true as time goes on. The second sin, soulless commercialism, which seeks to enrich the few at the expense of the many, is manifest to-day as never before. *The masses are deluded into believing that things are being done for their welfare which in reality serve only to bring them more into bondage to the world system which is being created. The poor, whether of the "third world" or of the dominant nations, are pressed relent-*

lessly into the dust as in the days of Amos, and none heed their cries except the God of all justice, who is by no means heedless, even although his plans for their eventual full salvation have yet a span of time to wait whilst the essential prior experience must work itself out. Then that against which Amos voiced his most trenchant condemnation, idolatry and idol worship, is rampant to-day as never before. Science, wealth, power, pleasurable indulgence, permissiveness and depravity of every description, these are the gods and the worship of this present Age and these will bring this world to its end just so surely as the same things in principle but on a smaller scale brought Israel to its end in the days of Amos. As it was then, so it is now, there will be no escape. "The swift of foot shall not escape; the bravest of warriors shall be stripped of his arms and run away". The same principles in operation will bring about the same end. Thank God that the same is true of the eventual outcome. At the close of his prophecy Amos shows that at the end of time God will restore those victims of the judgment incurred by their own foolishness, that by reason of the lesson well learned they will enter into a blessed afterward in which they willingly and enthusiastically achieve a state of loyalty to, and co-operation with, God that will ensure their everlasting happiness. So too will it be with this modern world; the position is not really hopeless. After judgment comes blessing. The nations will, one day, eschew the immoral principles which govern human society to-day and embrace anew the life that is of God. "The ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads. They shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away" (Isa. 35.10).

"This is the very word of the Lord" (ch. 2.16).

The grammatical case here indicates an extreme of emphasis—this is a very solemn utterance. All that has been said beforehand is spoken with a due consciousness of its gravity and import. The Lord has spoken and there can be no reversal. These things shall surely be.

This is the end of the first section of Amos' prophecy. Perhaps, at this point, he turned and walked out of the idol sanctuary at Bethel, leaving king, priest and people to ponder over the significance of his message. But he was to come back. Maybe before many days had passed his stalwart figure was to be seen again, his voice uttering the next of five more denunciations before at length the High Priest felt compelled to retaliate.

To be continued

KING ASA AND THE PROPHETS

King Asa was a good king — the best that Judah had known since the days of David his great-great-grandfather, whom he strongly resembled in so many ways. Like David, he combined a resolute and fervent faith in God with a pronounced flair for military strategy. To him God was a God of battles and would always fight for Israel the while they maintained their faith in him. As with David, too, he experienced the attentions of prophets who alternately praised or condemned him according to whether he acted in harmony with the expressed will of the Lord or against it. His reign had its shadows, but in the main it was one of light. The kingdom of Judah knew more happiness under his rule than had been their lot since the early part of David's reign a century earlier.

Asa succeeded to a kingdom which had already lapsed from the high state of religious fervour and zeal it had known under King David. Then, the people held fast to the Divine promise that the throne of David would endure for ever and Israel remain the channel of Divine blessing and enlightenment to mankind. But that was three generations ago. Since then, Solomon, whose long reign had commenced so auspiciously, had died leaving a land covered with the appendages of pagan worship, which his son Rehoboam in the south, and the rebel leader Jeroboam in the north, had intensified so that by the time Asa came to the throne there was apostasy from the faith inside the kingdom and enemies on the borders waiting to invade. Asa was the first of the kings who tried to stem the tide.

His first move was to restore the worship of God and eliminate paganism. He knew that the enemies of the nation were poised to attack but he put first things first. He believed, and declared his belief, that if the nation put itself right with God then there would be Divine protection. So the historian records his initial achievement. *"Asa did that which was right and good in the eyes of the Lord his God. For he took away the altars of the strange gods, and the high places, and broke down the images, and cut down the groves; and commanded Judah to seek the Lord God of their fathers, and to do the law and the commandment"*. (2 Chron. 14. 2-4). This last phrase can only mean that the observance of the covenant, with the attendant Passover celebration and Day of Atonement sacrifices, had fallen into disuse. It was going to be some time yet

before all these things could be restored, but at least the king had made a start by removing the systems of false worship which pervaded the land, with, of course, their associated apostate priesthoods, the presence of which was a powerful influence constantly drawing the people away from the standards of uprightness and leading them further into sin. Their true reconciliation to God and the Covenant was to come as the next stage. There is a picture here of all mankind at the end of this Age and the beginning of the next. Before the standards of righteousness can be set before men and the long process of advancement to human perfection and reconciliation to God be achieved there must first be effected what in the Book of Revelation (ch. 20. 1) is called the "binding of Satan", that he may "deceive the nations no more", and the suppression of all evil forces and powers in the world, so that men may set out on their upward climb towards the heavenly city without that handicap.

But Asa was a realist. He knew that he stood in imminent danger of attack by his enemies. His faith in God was strong, as strong as can be the faith of any Christian today, but he was a man of his times and his faith envisaged the power of his God exerted to the aid of his own strong right arm, which he himself must exert as testimonial and demonstration of his faith. "Trust in God and keep your powder dry" is a modern sentiment which Asa also held although not in those precise terms. And so, having done all that could be done for the present in cleansing the nation from its moral defilement, he set about playing his own part—the part he considered the Lord would expect him to play—in the defence of his country against its threatening invaders.

According to ch. 14.6 the Lord gave him a breathing space for ten years during which the land "had rest". That expression means that the reformation of the nation was sincere and some definite effort being made to conform to the terms of the Covenant. Asa used those ten years to build fortified cities — we would call them frontier fortresses—and equip an army of half a million men trained in combat. And at the end of the ten years Zerah the Ethiopian invaded Judah from the south with a million men and three hundred chariots.

Despite the enemy's overwhelming superiority in numbers, there is no doubt that these half million Israelis could have given a very good

account of themselves, as they have done in similar circumstances in much more recent times. But in Asa's mind this half million was only an auxiliary defence, something material with which to face the enemy. His true defence was the Lord, and this he declared to his troops. *"And Asa cried unto the Lord his God, and said, Lord, it is nothing with thee to help, whether with many, or with them that have no power. Help us, O Lord our God, for we rest on thee, and in thy name go against this multitude. O Lord, thou art our God: let not man prevail before thee"* (ch. 14.11).

How the Lord discomfited the invaders is not recorded; it is only said that He did, and that they fled, and Israel gathered much spoil. In the days of Samuel a similar exhibition of faith brought about the enemy's defeat by means of a great hailstorm; two centuries after Asa the army of Sennacherib was decimated by a sudden pestilence. Probably here also the Ethiopian forces were routed by some unexpected phenomenon of Nature.

As the triumphant victors returned in jubilation to Jerusalem they were met by a prophet of God, Azariah the son of Oded. (ch. 15.1). There was yet a century or more to run before the earliest of the prophets whose writings appear in the Old Testament came upon the scene, but previous to them there were men of like characteristics who proclaimed the true faith to an oftentimes heedless people. This Azariah was one such. Like all of his fraternity, he claimed and exercised the right to stand before kings and pronounce praise or blame according to the king's faithfulness to God or the reverse. In this case it was to be praise. But coupled with the praise was the everlasting warning: *"Hear ye me, Asa"* he said to the king—there was no respect of persons with the prophets any more than there is with God—*"the Lord is with you, while ye be with him: and if ye seek him, he will be found of you: but if ye forsake him, he will forsake you"*. Israel, he went on to say, had been a long time without the true God, and without a teaching priest, and without law—the Law of Moses. A pitiable descent indeed from the high hopes entertained a couple of generations previously when Solomon had dedicated the splendid Temple he had built to the glory of God, and all the people *"bowed themselves with their faces to the ground upon the pavement and worshipped and praised the Lord, saying, 'for he is good, for his mercy endureth for ever'"* (2 Chron. 7.3). But, went on Azariah, *"when they in their trouble did turn unto the Lord God of Israel, and sought him, he was found of them"* (ch. 15.3-4). That seems to indicate that Asa had

carried the people with him in his reforming zeal, and that the nation had returned to allegiance to God. Consequently there was a great upsurge of national feeling and a wholesale repudiation of false gods, culminating in a notable Feast of Pentecost at which the nation solemnly re-affirmed its acceptance of the Mosaic Covenant. It was a noteworthy day for Judah, one which they celebrated with *"shouting and with trumpets, and with cornets, and all Judah rejoiced at the oath: for they had sworn with all their heart, and sought him with their whole desire: and he was found of them: and the Lord gave them rest round about"* (ch. 15. 14-15).

For the next twenty years the nation enjoyed peace and prosperity. Time and time again is it exemplified in the history of Israel that when the national, no less than the individual, life is guided by the principles of religious faith and respect for Divine law the result is an orderly, contented and prosperous society. Only when the disruptive factors of personal greed and social injustice are allowed to gain the upper hand does the community degenerate into a rabble of conflicting interests, leading eventually to anarchy. There lies the moral for today. As in the days of Solomon and Rehoboam, the attainment of a high level of material wealth and power has led to self-indulgence and selfishness, with increasing rejection of the self-discipline of religious faith on the part of an increasing number, leading more and more into anarchy, *"every man's hand against his neighbour"* as the prophet of old had it. It is to be feared that the present-day world will not learn the lesson any more than did Israel, until, as He did with Israel, God allows the whole edifice of human society to crumble into ruins and then steps in to make a fresh start. He promised He would do that with Israel when they had ruined their own nationhood; the same promise applies to the rest of the world, and both promises will be redeemed together in the coming Messianic Age which is to succeed the dissolution of the present world system.

So the people of Judah had peace from the fifteenth year to the thirty-fifth year of Asa, the Temple, cleansed and re-dedicated, and adorned with treasures of gold and silver so that it regained the magnificence it had enjoyed in the days of Solomon, again becoming the centre of the nation's worship.

But in the thirty-sixth year there came a challenge from outside. Baasha, king of the northern ten-tribe nation, began making ominous moves on Judah's northern frontier. He evidently had plans to invade Judah. Not that there was

cause for apprehension on that account. He had at most a few hundred thousand men. Twenty years earlier Asa had witnessed the overwhelming defeat of a million Ethiopians, hardy trained warriors, at the hand of the Lord, whilst all that Asa and his men had to do was to look on. One would think with that memory in mind Asa would exercise the same faith in face of this new menace and expect the same results.

Inexplicably, he did not.

To what extent he listened to the counsels of advisers who, softened by years of peace and prosperity, did not set the same store by faith in God as he himself had done twenty years previously, is not known. Whether he himself had become worldly-minded or less in tune with God during the passage of these years is likewise not known. Perhaps he had. Perhaps a lifetime as king over a prosperous people had measurably dimmed what we today would call his spiritual perception. At any rate the high pinnacle of faith which he had so courageously mounted in those days of the Ethiopian invasion were not in evidence now. He did not, this time, go to God and say "we rest on thee, and in thy name we go against this multitude". Instead he turned to more material means of defence. He stripped the Temple of its gold and silver treasure—which in theory, having been offered to God, were sacred to, and the property of, the Deity—and sent them to Ben-hadad king of Syria as a bribe to induce him to launch an attack on the ten-tribes from the north and so draw them away from his own frontier. The ruse worked; the ten-tribe people found themselves attacked in the rear and abandoned their plans to invade Israel.

Why did he do it? Why this singular loss of faith when a precisely similar situation had been so easily and satisfactorily resolved by God in his previous experience? There is one factor which is not always taken into account. Unlike the Ethiopians, the ten-tribe nation was a part of Israel, God's chosen people, despite their present apostasy joint-heirs with Judah of the Divine commission to be a light to the nations, to declare God's salvation to the ends of the earth. Did Asa cherish a secret fear that although God might readily oppose and defeat the alien Ethiopians He would not so proceed against his own people of the ten-tribes? Was that the nagging apprehension which drove Asa to invoke the earthly whom he knew could afford the necessary aid? If so, here is another instance of how the natural mind can go grievously astray in trying to apply human standards and human knowledge to the things of God. "Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?"

is, and was then, a Scriptural dictum which Asa could, and should, have taken to himself and left the issue of this invasion threat to God as he had done before.

The king probably congratulated himself upon the outcome of his stratagem, but not for long. He received a visit from another prophet, Hanani. This time he was not congratulated; the message Hanani brought him was decidedly unwelcome. "*Because thou hast relied on the king of Syria, and not relied on the Lord thy God, therefore is the host of the king of Syria escaped out of thine hand. Were not the Ethiopians and the Lubims a huge host, with very many chariots and horsemen? Yet because thou didst rely on the Lord, he delivered them into thine hand Herein thou hast done foolishly; from henceforth thou shalt have wars.*" (ch. 16. 7-9).

True to the prediction, Asa had no further peace; wars and threats of wars with Syria, despite the bribe, filled the remaining six years of his reign. It was his own fault. He had despoiled the Temple of God to buy the help of a human ally who turned out in the end to be just another enemy. The golden years of his reign were brought to an end by his own act.

Hanani suffered for his candour. The king, in a rage, put him in prison and that is the last that is heard of Hanani. But Asa suffered also; two years before his death he became "diseased in his feet, until his disease was exceeding great" but even in this he did not seek the Lord but had recourse to physicians, which in that day and age meant allying himself with the exponents of magic and dark arts, the only physicians of his time and nation. It does seem that despite his earlier stalwart faith Asa did, regrettably, end his life on a much lower level of kinship with God. The early prophet commended him for his faith but the latter one condemned him.

It is a solemn thought that maybe material prosperity and a life of ease can constitute a more severe test of faith and constancy than one of adversity and suffering. The harder life develops the stronger character. But in the last analysis it is "he that endureth to the end" who is saved. Our Christian faith must survive not only the alternate periods of prosperity and adversity which may come our way, but also the disintegrating influence of time. Instead of the goal becoming nearer and brighter as the years go by, to some it recedes and shines more dimly. There are those whose love waxes cold before they reach the end of the way. Sometimes they wonder if, after all, God is so all powerful or so actively interested in the welfare of his creatures as they at first believed. Against all that come

the stirring words of Hanani, spoken to king Asa on this historic occasion, and standing as an ever-present reminder of our Lord's attitude toward each one of us; "the eyes of the Lord

run to and fro throughout the earth, to shew himself strong on the behalf of them whose heart is perfect before him".

OIKOUMENE—THE WORLD A study note

Several Greek words are rendered "world" in the New Testament and each one has a distinct meaning. Sometimes to know just what meaning is intended makes all the difference to one's understanding of the text. So it is with this one in Hebrews "Unto the angels hath he not put in subjection the world to come, whereof we speak". (Heb. 2. 5). The Greek word here is *oikoumene*, and this word had a very special meaning in the days of our Lord. It denoted that part of the inhabited earth which was known to the Greeks and Romans. They knew that quite possibly there were other lands and peoples as yet unknown to them, but the "oikoumene" was that part which they did know. A quotation from the Greek geographer Strabo bears on this point. (Strabo lived at the same time as Christ and wrote his books on world geography whilst Jesus was a boy at Nazareth). He says "By this term" (*oikoumene*) "we mean only that portion of the temperate zone where we dwell, and with which we are acquainted. But it is quite possible that in the temperate zone there may be two or even more habitable earths (*oikoumene*) especially near the circle of latitude which is drawn through Athens and the Atlantic Ocean" (*Strabo's "Geography", Book 1, chap. 4: 6*). America, Australia and the Far East were all unknown in Strabo's day; he came very near to guessing of their existence in the above quotation.

When therefore Luke tells us that there went a decree from Cæsar Augustus that *all the world* should be taxed (Luke 2. 1), he meant the Roman world. So with his statement in Acts 11. 28 that there should be great dearth throughout *all the world*; the cry of the persecutors "these men that have turned the *world* upside down are come hither" (Acts 17. 6), and of the Ephesians "Great is Diana of the Ephesians, whom Asia and *all the world* worshippeth" (Acts 19. 27). The kingdoms of the *world* shown to Jesus in his temptation (Luke 4. 5) were the kingdoms of the Roman world; likewise in Acts 24. 5 Paul's accusers declared him a "mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the *world*", and Paul, quoting from Psa. 19. 4, speaks in Rom. 10. 18 of the music of the stars being heard "to the ends of the *world*".

But where Strabo reflected the views of educated Greeks and Romans of the time of the

First Advent in saying that there might be two or three other "worlds" on the earth, unknown to them, the inspired writers, looking forward to the time of God's intervention in human affairs, saw that God knows only one world, the world of all mankind. So "*oikoumene*" in Hebrews and Revelation is used by them to mean much more than just the Roman world. Rev. 12. 9 speaks of Satan, who deceiveth the *whole world*, and Rev. 16. 14 of the kings of the earth and of the *whole world* being gathered to the final conflict. Jesus spoke (Matt. 24. 14) of his gospel being preached in *all the world* for a witness; the same world of which Paul spoke when, talking to the philosophers of Athens, he said that God had appointed a day in which He would judge the world in righteousness (Acts 17. 31). This application of the word to the whole earth is even more pointedly made in Luke 21. 26 where "*oikoumene*" is rendered "Things which are coming upon the earth". In Rev. 3. 10 the Lord speaks of the "hour of temptation which shall come upon all the *world*". The writer to the Hebrews refers first to God bringing his Son into the *world* (Heb. 1. 6), and then, coming to the text which is the subject of this note, speaks of the "*world* to come". In all of these instances the sacred writers spoke of a world vaster far than anything the Greeks and Romans of their day could possibly understand their word "*oikoumene*" to mean. They knew only of their own generation and the eight or ten centuries of Greek and Roman history enacted in those lands lying around the Mediterranean Sea. The Apostles knew of a wider sweep of history, going back to the beginning, and of prophecy, going forward into the days of the Kingdom, and they knew of past and future generations of men and women, the entire human race, all condemned in Adam, all to have opportunity of salvation in Christ. So much wider than the wisdom of this world was the vision that inspired those early disciples as they wrote and taught, and so much wider the meaning they could attach to this word "world".

These are the cases in which "*oikoumene*" appears in the New Testament. In all other cases where "world" appears it is translated from "ge", the literal planet Earth, or "kosmos", the established order of things existing amongst men on the earth.

A PEOPLE FOR A PURPOSE

Thoughts on the
Call of the Church

3. Builders at work

Next to design, tools and material are essential in building, plus skill in their use and a faithful following of the architect's instructions. Stones and mortar are only stones and mortar until work upon them prepares and fits them to the design. From the same material one may rear a cottage, a bare essential without beauty of form or appearance, while others may labour upon a palace, noble as well as useful.

Natural philosophers are chiefly agreed that the main purpose of life is to become something, to be made something by the variety of its experiences. However noble these philosophies may be, if they are without God they are without the Master-builder whose pattern and instructions are the true formula for enduring beauty and usefulness. Moses received the admonition "*See that thou make all things according to the pattern showed thee in the mount*".

It is said that when Michael Angelo was looking for a stone from which to sculpture his renowned statue "The Boy David", he found one which had been discarded by some unsuccessful artist. With this neglected, soiled slab he did his best and produced a masterpiece. Two things stand out from this venture. First, the unskilled worker had not been able to produce anything with the material and tools in hand. Second, the masterly touch of genius which laboured lovingly on the cast-off stone and gave to posterity something to prize and admire. Where natural determination fails the Lord saves to the uttermost. Men can ruin the best material but God can take the spoiled castaway and fashion for himself a vessel of grace.

It might be said that each one receives at birth his bundle of tools. As life unfolds so the bundle opens, revealing the assorted talents, the inherited traits of character which are to play a large part in the building of living stones into the eternal Temple of the Spirit. The stone is separated from its native strata, a shapeless, raw, rough piece, the earthy sediments of many generations still clinging to it. All bear about them and within them particles of ancestry. Environment and circumstances provide some of the material. Natural characteristics and talents the tools, and experience the skill. A life-time of slow, careful work lies ahead. This building of gold, silver and precious stones upon a rock foundation is no child's play. However amateur the apprentice, he will be expected to practise, and at least grow proficient at his business if he

does not positively shine. (1 Cor. 3.9-17).

To dig in sand or clay is an easy task but the house of God which is to abide forever must be built into the Rock. How many vaunted tools are broken, how many cherished implements snap when a new Christian meets Christ and realises how poor are all his natural virtues, how unworthy his best endeavours when matched by that excellence of him who was tempted at all points, "*yet without sin*". (Heb. 4.14-16). He "*poured out his soul unto death*" that men might live. St. Paul, taking an inventory of his tools, found it necessary to throw them all away as useless for the great work in hand. Early in the task of building with God he realised that the natural righteousness of man was as filthy rags (Isa. 64.6), that the righteousness of God which comes by faith is a necessary equipment in the preparation of temple stones. (Phil. 3, 3-11). Even experienced builders must be often halted by the comparison of their work with the Chief Corner-stone, knowing themselves to be unprofitable servants, their talents and time, their best endeavours, etching but a feeble imitation of the Great Example of selfless service and amazing love.

How often the most earnest feel the stinging blow of failure, when words and conduct fall short of the inspiring standard. Self-abased they must stagger back from the work, acknowledging its hardness, "*Cast down but not in despair,*" to seek again and again the power of the Holy Spirit which puts a sharper edge to every blade and softer touch to every obtruding angle.

In the family, in the meeting room, in the office, in the busy thoroughfares of life, God's workers, "*in the world but not of it*", find the grindstones of opposition in the uncongenial, the stubborn and the disagreeable, who rub the wrong way. Here are learned the lessons of forbearance, tolerance, patience, understanding and self-control. Uncharitable feelings, sharp criticisms, unjust suspicions, the tart rejoinders, the peevish complaints, the crabbed intolerance, the narrow views, the sectarian bigotry, the priggish superiority, preening itself with knowledge, all these and much more must be brought to that place where the rough corners and natural excesses must be scoured from the human heart and life, as the building stone must be cleared of its clay and the steel tempered which is to trim it to shape and use.

The love of dear ones, the happy fellowship

of kindred minds is the velvet which puts the polish on the well-ground tool or the gleaming surface of a stone but it is the enemy within and without which does the cutting and grinding. It is the rough, rude world, insensitive to feeling, unresponsive to faith, which does the good turn. The sparks and dust fly but while the stone diminishes it grows in beauty. The mind grows more perceptive, the heart larger and kinder with those heavenly virtues freely supplied by the Master-builder to the eager worker.

"Add to your faith" Peter, the man of Rock, knew by hard experience the difficulties of building and what were the best tools to use. He gave the list to his fellow-builders, adding the important rider, "*If ye do these things ye shall never fall, for so an abundant entrance shall be administered unto you into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.*" (2 Pet. 1.3-11).

The natural heart longs for big things to do, to have something to show which cannot be overlooked, to put its faith into action in some big and convincing way. If opportunity is not afforded for a shining, public ministry, a demonstration of dedicated services which cannot be hidden, the tendency is to grow fretful, despondent, doubtful, even listless in the performance of those things which do come to hand. Life tends to be humdrum and uneventful. The questing heart allows disappointment to dim its cheerful lustre, the daily round to sink into a profitless mediocrity and its limitations to form a cage for the spirit instead of the charmed circle where the work of God goes on unhindered and unhidden. His Presence can never be hidden or obstructed in the humblest lot or the quietest life. *The earth has only one Niagara. God gave to the Church only one St. Paul. The mighty spectacular things are few in number. The great ones of the Christian era, or in any high public office, perform their work at a cost few could pay successfully. The meadows of the countryside are beautified by a thousand flowing brooks whose sparkling waters refresh and please the thirsty and needy.*

No Christian can be indifferent to the claims of daily duty. It is here the very means are found to fit and prepare life for its greatest service to humanity, both now and hereafter. Even the chamber of the permanent invalid can become a holy of holies where the light Divine shines through a quiet resignation, through a cheerful unwavering faith, a calm assurance, a wise counsel and a tender consideration, which would make that invalid's departure a genuine loss to society. "The daily round, the common task, will furnish all we need to ask, room to

deny ourselves; a road to bring us daily nearer God." Whatever the work or the lot, mental, manual, exciting, humdrum, or enforced helplessness, with God, that daily lot provides the means of perfecting the living stone for its fittest place in his building.

The hand is the symbol of action and God's Word advises that whatever the hand finds to do, it should be done with all the might. Each day presents a task. Sometimes the hands seem too full. *There is not enough time to do everything.* Yet the consecrated life will do its best with what it has to do, leaving the Master to judge of the effort, to supply the final touches of true beauty. None are to be slack or indolent because the daily lot seems small and simple. True character is revealed in the quality of the work; the character of the stone decides its destiny. Slipshod methods never produce a masterpiece. That is where the touch of genius comes in, that painstaking attention to detail, which will have a thing as good as it can be done, although it may appear outwardly insignificant.

A painter once talked confidently of the great picture he was going to paint when he got the right conditions. He died with a blank canvas, still waiting for the right conditions. Angelo took the neglected stone and worked into it his vision with will and skill, doing his best with the material and the conditions at hand. And the world is richer for his honest labour.

It takes courage and determination to work with God. *It also needs humility. "To hear of high heroic things and yield them reverence due; yet feel life's daily offerings are far more fit for you."* This is the expression of human limitation, the realisation that the best endeavours do not seem to amount to much in the average life. Yet there is another aspect, the call to do that best, to venture with God, to dare, to do and by the Lord's grace to succeed in becoming something worth preserving in a future life, something He can use for his own glory and the blessing of others.

One has described successful living as "having something to take with you and something to leave behind you". What better legacy to bequeath to society than those seeds of faith, fruit of a holy, devoted life which shall spring up into other trees of righteousness when the due time arrives for the pouring out upon all flesh of the Spirit of God. Under that benign influence they will spring to life in the hearts of those in whom they were sown by a steadfast ministry, and the glory of such fruitage will be happy and grateful praise to God. What better thing to take out of life than the Christ-like character complete in

all its graces, polished, beautiful and prepared for eternal ministries. "Faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy" (Jude 24). What does it mean? It cannot now be fully known! What is known is that "The temple stones God now prepares oft cry you hurt me sore. The Sculptor seeks their perfectness and trims them more and more". The disciplined heart will bear his trimming patiently, with cheerful spirit and gratitude, confident that He who has begun a good work will also finish it. One poet pens the reminder that, "*We are not*

here to drift, to dream, to play. We have hard work to do and loads to lift. Shun not the struggle; face it. It is God's gift; be strong".

Whatever the means He chooses, his builders will work with him. All the experience, the circumstances, the talents, the means at their disposal will be used with that careful attention to detail, that inspired employment of the daily round in the perfecting of the spirit until at length in the fulness of his presence all will be satisfied.

To be concluded

THE EFFECT OF EVERY VISION

*A discourse
for the times*

"We see not our signs. There is no more any prophet, neither is there amongst us any that knoweth how long." (Psa. 74. 9).

In those few words, beautiful even in their pessimism, there is summed up all the despair and all the hopelessness of a generation that had lost its youthful enthusiasm. In the early flush of youth they had eagerly embraced all the good promises of the prophets and looked forward with earnest longing to the day when those golden words would be fulfilled in dazzling reality. They had dreamed dreams and seen visions, and in all those dreams and all those visions they had pictured themselves as the favourites of God, called and chosen by him to be his associates in the days upon which He would arise to rule the nations. They ardently desired a rule of righteousness upon earth and the overthrow of evil. They loved the Name of the Lord and they wanted to see that beloved Name cleared of the misunderstandings and false charges that had clustered about it. They had given themselves to God and He had accepted them for his own, to be a covenant people and a light to the nations, and life had become a different thing to them. Of course it was unthinkable that they should ever change their attitude! They had but to wait in the joy of this newfound relationship and when the day of deliverance dawned their dearest hopes would be gratified.

But the years went by and a new and unknown factor emerged. Life was found to contain so much more than was imagined in those early days when the plans and promises of God had been so eagerly embraced. There was disappointment and disillusionment lying in wait to test faith and endurance; the insidious suggestion that more complete knowledge would reveal the instability of the foundation upon

which those earlier golden visions had been built; the realisation that many of the fond expectations had not materialised; and, perhaps worst of all, the onset of old age with its weakening of the natural powers and increasing difficulty of retaining the intellectual understanding of earlier years. What wonder that these things manifested themselves in a growing impatience with the enthusiasm of such prophets as remained in the land and a peevish insistence "there is no prophet; none there are who can tell us how long"?

We can sympathise with those disappointed Israelites of old, for we ourselves face a very similar situation. Things have turned out so different from what was expected and some begin to doubt the certainty of earlier years. There was so much zeal and energy expended in those days, so much time and money given to a work that seemed worth while, so much organising and building, and what has it all come to? Was it so much a work of the Lord as was thought . . . ?

Nay, who are we that we presume to question the wisdom of the Great Shepherd? Shall the thing formed say of him that formed it "Why hast thou made me thus?" Shall the servant say to his Master "Why doest thou this?" It is true that we are told to say, when we have done all that we can, "*we are unprofitable servants,*" but nowhere are we told to stop serving Christ and to say "*this is unprofitable service*". We may not have perceived every aspect of the Divine Plan with unquestioned accuracy, but then a great many Christians throughout the Age have been in that same position. If we have grown weary of deferred hopes it is not because our Lord has grown weary of us. Neither is it necessarily that we are inconstant or changeable; more probable that we are uncertain.

Perhaps it was inevitable. How impossible it would have been in those early days to describe the world as it is now, a world of travel and radio and atomic energy; a world where less than five per cent of the people go to places of worship; a world where science—cold, passionless and inhuman—has been enthroned as God and Lord! How difficult it would have been to outline in detail the many events that must needs occur, the process of development that has had to take place in the affairs of the nations before the Kingdom can come! Surely it was Divine Love as well as Divine Wisdom that kept closed a portion of the veil concealing the future, though revealing enough to inspire the minds and awaken the enthusiasm of those who were to go out as heralds of the Kingdom; that withheld from their minds a mass of detail which could not in any case become a live issue for another two generations.

The prophets have not failed us. The Holy Spirit is still active in the work of God, quickening the minds of his people and showing them visions of things yet to come as the time becomes due for those things to be understood. The drama of world history has stepped up its pace many times over in these last years; the succession of events is more rapid, the signific-

ance of each world crisis of greater moment, the possibilities of each situation more far-reaching. We see with our own eyes that of which our fathers in the faith told us, the breaking-up of a world order preparatory to the establishment of the Kingdom of God's Son. We see the progressive lining up of all world forces under the banners of great powers. We see the land of promise and prophecy slowly becoming caught between the spheres of influence of those Powers. We see the developments in the Land of Promise as Jacob takes to himself his ancient inheritance. We perceive these things and we know what they portend. When the faint hearted children of Israel came to Ezekiel with their complaint "*the days are prolonged, and every vision faileth*" the Lord gave him a word for them. We can take that word to heart, for history has repeated itself. "*Tell them therefore, thus saith the Lord God, THE DAYS ARE AT HAND, AND THE EFFECT OF EVERY VISION.*" Let us give more earnest heed to the sure word of prophecy, for now, in the world's Saturday night, it speaks with clear voice of the things that are yet to be, and as we see those things unfold on the screen of world history, we shall know of a surety that our faith has been well founded and that to us belongs the word "*He that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved*".

THE SOURCE OF LIFE

Life is no part of God's *works*, no created and therefore *finite substance*; neither is it in any case detached from him, or independent of him. As the rivers move along their courses only as they are renewed from perennial springs, welling up where no eye can reach, so is it with life. Genuine philosophy knows of no life in the universe but what is momentarily sustained by connection with its source — with him who "*alone hath life in himself.*" The popular notion which sees an image of it in the reservoir of water, filled in the first place from the spring, but afterwards cut off, and holding an independent existence, is countenanced neither by science nor resolution. How can independent vitality pertain even to the most insignificant of created forms, when it is said so expressly that "*in him all things live and move and have their being*"? Even man has no life of his *own*, though of nothing are people more fully persuaded than that they live by virtue of an inborn vital energy, to maintain which, it needs only that they shall feed and sleep. Not that men deny the general proposition that life is from God, and in the hands of God. Every one is willing to allow that he received his life originally from the Almighty, and that the Almighty

takes it away from him when He pleases. Few, however, are willing to regard themselves as existing only by virtue of his constant influx, which, nevertheless, is the only way in which it can be true that "*in him we live and move and have our being.*" It is wounding to self-love, and to the pride of human nature, to think of ourselves as so wholly and minutely dependent as we are, moment by moment, day and night, the senses all the while insinuating the reverse. Moreover, in the minds of most men there is a strong aversion to recognise physical effects as resulting from spiritual causes. Towards everything, indeed, which involves a spiritual element—which lifts us above the region of the senses—there is a deep-seated dislike, such as mere argument is perhaps incapable of overcoming, and which can only give way, it would seem, under the influence of higher moral feelings. Truly to understand anything of God's government and providence, we must first of all be faithful to his revealed law. We can form no right estimate, either of nature or of life, till we strive, with his Divine blessing, to become in ourselves more truly human.

Leo. H. Grindon (19th cent.)

ARARAT AND ARATTA

Appendix 4 to the
Story of the Deluge

The precise location of the Mount Ararat of Gen. 8.4 has never been definitely established. The mountain in Eastern Turkey now known by that name has been associated with the Flood story only since the 14th Century AD, and is most certainly not the place referred to in Genesis. Several other mountains in various parts of the highlands surrounding Iraq have had the same claim made for them, usually the results of local legends, but in fact there is no clue whatever in the Bible to pin-point the spot, with the solitary exception of the statement in Gen. 11 that the descendants of Noah's sons journeyed from the East to build Babylon. That, so far as it goes, would indicate a spot in the mountains of Western Iran eastward from Babylon. The legends pointing to Mount Djudi in Southern Turkey originated at about the beginning of the Christian era and before that there is only Mount Nisir in the 8th century BC Assyrian tablets and the location of that is in some doubt although certainly somewhere in the mountains east of Iraq proper.

"Ararat" in Gen. 8.4 is not the name of a mountain; it is the name of a district. *"The Ark rested upon the mountains of Ararat."* This word is considered to be the Hebrew equivalent of the Assyrian Urartu, the name of a tribe originating about a thousand years before Christ in the Iranian (Persian) mountains at about the latitude of Baghdad. Growing in numbers and power they slowly migrated northwards until by about the 8th cent BC they had occupied what was later known as Armenia and become powerful enemies of the Assyrians. In consequence the whole of the mountainous district to the north and east of Iraq became known as the land of Urartu (Ararat in Hebrew). The term was superseded in later times by the Greek name Armenia in the north, and by the present Kurdistan in the south. So far as Genesis is concerned, therefore, the Ark could have grounded in any part of this area, a mountainous terrain bordering the Babylonian plain some three hundred miles from north to south.

Moses, of course, editing the ancient records which now comprise the Book of Genesis, knew nothing of this. Urartu as the name of a nation did not exist in his time. The origin of the name "Ararat" in Gen. 8.4 has to be sought in the Sumerian cuneiform writings which are the basis of the Genesis account as we have it, and they go back to about the 26th century before Christ.

The written Hebrew of Moses' time had no vowels so that "Ararat" would be written ARRT, and an ancient name of that nature is what has to be found.

Until quite recent times no such ancient name was known. For more than a hundred years archaeologists have pieced together a tolerably complete and connected account of Sumerian and Babylonian history and place names, and it was thought that all their principal cities were discovered even if not yet excavated. Babylon, Ur, Nippur, Uruk, Kish and many others are well known, and relics from their houses and temples adorn many of the world's museums. But in 1955 a number of epic tablets recording the great deeds of years gone by, discovered at Nippur—the Calneh of Gen. 10.10—many years ago, were deciphered and found to relate to events connected with a hitherto unknown and unsuspected Sumerian city-state, Aratta.

The capital city of Aratta has not yet been discovered. No search for it has yet been made. It remains lie, not in the Babylonian plain where are the other ancient cities familiar to Bible Students, but two hundred miles to the east in the inaccessible Iranian mountains. It must have existed from a remote antiquity and was in the hey-day of its power about five centuries before the birth of Abraham. It then gave way before the military might of the powerful city-state of Uruk ("Erech" of Gen. 10.10) and was heard of no more. Fortunately the tablets offer a fairly detailed description of the location of Aratta and the route by which it was reached from Uruk, with which it apparently had extensive commercial dealings. The full extent of the country cannot be deduced from the tablets, but its capital city and probably main population appears to have been in the mountainous area between the present Iranian towns of Kermanshah, Hamadan and Nuhavend, roughly between the 34 and 35 parallels of latitude and 47 and 48 of longitude, approximately two hundred miles north-east of Babylon.

The likeness of the name to the later "Ararat" prompts the thought that there may be a connection. In the Sumerian language "land" or "mountain, of Aratta" is Kur Aratta. The Hebrew "Har" for mountain is derived from Kur. When the Hebrew Bible was rationalised in the days of Ezra the place name "Aratta" had dropped out of history but the same general area was now included in the 8th century BC name Urartu (Hebrew Ararat) and it could well

be that in this way the present name as it appears in Genesis, "Har Ararat", mountains of Ararat, took the place of Har Aratta.

The acid test of this hypothesis would be the finding of a mountain in the area of ancient Aratta which meets all known data respecting the mountain of the Ark better than does any other claimant. Since the territory in question covers some ten thousand square miles of some of the most terrifying mountain ranges in the world this could be quite a problem. This part of Iran consists of mountains rising to twelve thousand feet interspersed with deep gorges filled with rushing torrents almost impossible to traverse except through a few difficult passes. It was the boast of Aratta that their goddess Inanna had given them a land so mountainous that it was impregnable to their enemies. Said Ensukushsiranna, the lord of Aratta "*the holy Inanna has brought me to Aratta, the land of the holy divine laws; has made me close the face of the highland like a large door*". When the messenger from Uruk was sent to the city, "*he ascends the great mountains; he descends the great mountains; awed by the dread of the great mountains, he wandered about. Five mountains, six mountains, seven mountains he crossed; lifted his eyes, approached Aratta.*" This is the wild country in which the search has to be conducted.

In a totally different field of study there is a clue.

In every ancient city of Iraq there was a *ziggurat*, a temple-tower built in successive stages, each smaller than the one below. At the top stood a temple to one of the many gods, access being gained by stairways built up the sides. These towers were square or rectangular in form, usually built so that one side faced north-east. From various allusions in Sumerian and Babylonian literature it has been deduced that this was in order that the tower should point towards what was called the "mountain of the East". In their legends and religious beliefs this "mountain of the East" was the mountain where the Ark came to rest after the Flood and from which their ancestors had come to populate the land. This mountain, they claimed, was the centre of the world. Its twin peaks pointed to the heavens which revolved on them as on a pivot, and at its foot was the entrance to *Arallu*, the netherworld, the world of the dead. But in the period during which most of the towers were built and most of the literary works mentioning the "mountain of the East" were written, seven to twelve centuries after the Flood, the knowledge of its actual location had been lost—or was deliberately suppressed by the priests—so that

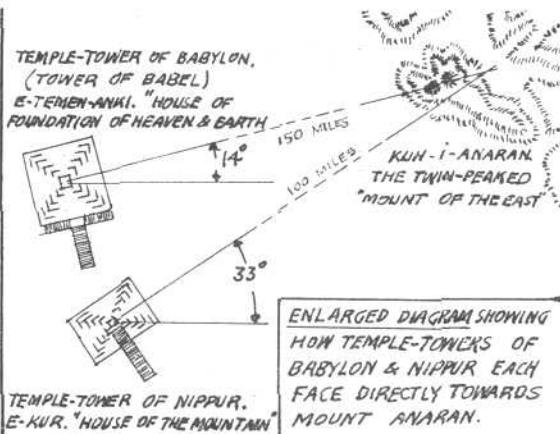
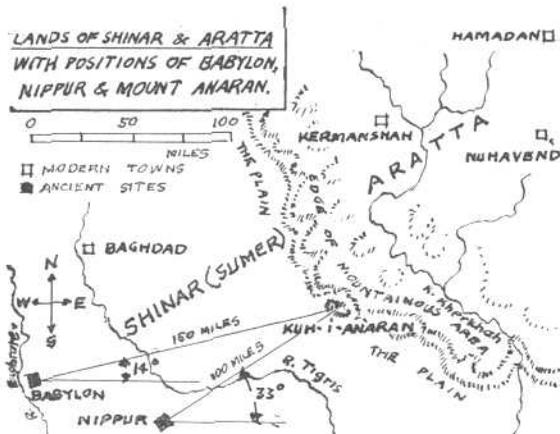
no specific indication of its precise position was recorded, at least in any tablet yet discovered, only that in a general sort of way, it was "in the east".

When Robert Koldewey excavated Babylon in 1900-1910 it was found that the temple-tower of Babylon, (which is the Tower of Babel of Gen. 11), was not orientated in the usual manner, one side facing north-east, but was facing 14 degrees north of east. The excellent plans in Koldewey's work "*The Excavations at Babylon*", show this very clearly. Although the fact has been noted by various writers at different times, no one appears to have hazarded any surmise as to the reason. But remembering that if, as inferred by Gen. 11, the Tower of Babel was the first erection of its kind and the people had settled in the "plain of Shinar", coming from the East, it could be a reasonable hypothesis that the Tower was thus built so that it pointed directly to the sacred mountain. These early settlers would be those who best knew which mountain it was. The priests serving the Temple at the top of the Tower would then conduct their ceremonies directly facing the mountain of the Ark from which they knew their ancestors had come, much as the Jews turn their faces to Jerusalem and the Moslems to Mecca in their prayers.

After which, of course, it remained only to acquire large scale ordnance maps of that part of Iraq and draw a line fourteen degrees north of east from the site of ancient Babylon.

The result is interesting. Such a line travels a hundred and fifty miles across the plain and then passes directly across the twin summits of a mountain whose Iranian name is Kuh-i-Anaran (Mountain of Anaran). Standing on the very edge of the mountains of the Iranian province of Luristan, where they border the Iraq plain, projecting a little farther forward than its fellows, it could be a very likely spot for the Ark, drifting southwards as the Flood waters drained away into the Persian Gulf, to become entangled and run aground. And the situation of Anaran, in Lat. 33 and Long. 47, is where the frontier would have run between the Sumerian plain and the ancient mountain land of Aratta.

In further exploration of this possible indication, the thought occurred that, whereas at the first, Babel (Babylon) with its Tower was the central rallying-place of the people, in somewhat later times a second centre, Nippur (Calneh) emerged with religious significance. Babylon became the holy city of the sons of Shem, the Akkadians, and Nippur became the holy city of the sons of Ham, the Sumerians. All the other city-states in the Iraq plain revered these two



holy places. Is there any likelihood that the builders of the Nippur ziggurat, also made it face the ancient mountain?

It was not so easy to determine this as with Babel. Nippur was first excavated by J. P. Peters in 1888 but his figures for the orientation of the ziggurat are mutually contradictory and vague. A more celebrated archæologist, Hilprecht, continued the work a few years later and the plans in his work (*"Excavations in Assyria and Babylonia"* 1904) show the north-eastern face as pointing 33 degrees north of east. Nippur is about sixty miles from Babylon and a hundred from Anaran. Remarkably, this orientation of 33 degrees from Nippur also crosses Mount Anaran a mile or so to the south of the line from Babylon. Thus both ziggurats, those of the two holy cities of the ancients, point directly to Anaran. It is difficult not to attach some significance to this fact.

The next step is to look at the characteristics of this particular mountain in the light of what the ancients had to say about the "Mount of the East". There have been discovered a number of Sumerian ceremonial hymns which were chanted in the Temple services in praise of the mountain. One discovered by Hilprecht at Nippur runs thus:

*"O great mountain of Bel, of the lofty head,
Whose summit rivals the heavens,
Whose foundations are laid in the nether-world,
Resting in the land like a mighty wild ox,
With horns gleaming like the radiant sun,
As the stars of heaven are filled with lustre"*

Another one, recorded by Ragozin, reads:

*"O mountain of Bel in the east
Whose double head reaches unto the skies
Which is like a mighty wild ox at rest
Whose double horn sparkles as a sunbeam
And as a star".*

The famous "Epic of Gilgamesh" which relates the legendary story of how the Sumerian hero Gilgamesh journeyed through strange lands to find his ancestor Uta-napishtim (the Sumerian Noah) and learn how he survived the Flood, relates how at one stage of his journey he came to the Mount of the East, "whose twin peaks reach to the vault of heaven and whose bastions reach to the nether-world below". From that mountain he had to follow the "road of the sun" to reach the object of his quest.

In these statements there is a remarkable unanimity. They describe the "Mount of the East" as resembling a mighty wild ox at rest, i.e., in a recumbent position, with twin peaks like great horns reaching into the heavens. Now Anaran is in a wild and unpopulated part of the country and it is unlikely that any photographs or pictures of the mountain exist. It is only one of hundreds in the area and has probably never attracted any notice. But an examination of the contours on the map does reveal a startling similarity to the ancient ceremonial chants. Anaran comprises a long mass some three thousand feet high about twelve miles long by five wide crowned at its northern end by two enormous peaks rising side by side to a height of more than five thousand feet. In front of the peaks two giant outcrops fifteen hundred or more feet high project side by side into the valley, for all the world like the recumbent forelegs of a great beast lying down with his horns projecting straight up. The similarity is so marked that it gives good ground for concluding that this is the "Mount of the East" of Sumerian lore, and that the early pioneers who came "from the East" to build the Tower of Babel and later on the first city of Babylon knew perfectly well that their forebears of probably only a few generations earlier came from this mountain to build a new world. At any rate

there would appear to be more evidence that Kuh-i-Anaran is the place where the Ark rested than is the case with any other claimed site.

An interesting sidelight on all this comes from the writings of one of the many mediæval travellers who journeyed through Iraq and recorded their experiences. In or about AD 1170 Rabbi Petachia of Ratisbon, a German Jew, undertook an expedition through southern Russia, Turkey and Iraq to visit his compatriots. It is interesting to note that in his day northern Turkey was known as the land of Togarmah, and southern Turkey and the mountains down to Baghdad as the land of Ararat. Whilst visiting Baghdad and Babylon he was taken to the place in the "land of Ararat" where the Ark was believed to have rested. His account runs (he refers to himself in the third person throughout his narrative) "*Rabbi Petachia said that the mountains of Ararat are five days journey from Babylon. The mountains of Ararat are high. There is one high mountain, behind which are four others, two opposite two. The Ark of Noah was carried between these mountains and could not get out. However, the Ark is not there, for it has decayed. The mountains are full of thorns and other herbs; when the dew falls upon them, manna falls upon them. . . . They look like small grains. They gave the rabbi a few to taste; they melted in his mouth. . . .*" (*Travels of Rabbi Petachia of Ratisbon* 1861).

This is a very fine piece of topographical information and it is not difficult to pin-point the precise mountain to which the worthy Rabbi was conducted. (He is noted for his accuracy of observation.) In all the writings of mediæval travellers (and up to the 18th century) the rate of travel (always by foot or by mule) was thirty miles a day. This can easily be checked in the narratives of travellers such as Marco Polo, William of Rubruk, Clavijo, Benjamin of Tudela, and so on. The travel rate is consistent. This means that Petachia was taken to a place about one hundred and fifty miles from Babylon. The only mountain to meet that requirement, and the nearest mountain to Babylon by road, is Kuh-i-Anaran, the distance by present-day roads and tracks being about 160 miles. The remainder of the description also fits very accurately. Behind Anaran, which stands out into the plain a little in front of the main Iranian mountain mass, there is a valley about eight miles wide by thirty long, connected with the plain at each end by narrow gorges. Behind the valley, arranged in a rough semi-circle, are four prominent mountain peaks rising to much the same height as the two peaks of Anaran. Standing below those two peaks in the gorge, and

looking into the valley, it is apparent from the map that two of the four peaks would appear as standing opposite the other two, just as the Rabbi said. It is almost possible to mark on the map the precise spot where he stood when he made his observation.

The reference to the manna is a supporting touch. Every mediæval and modern traveller in those parts has noted the same phenomenon. Over a large area in north-western Iran and southern Kurdistan certain species of trees exude a sweet sap which coagulates and is gathered and used for food. It does not appear to be quite the same as the Israelites' manna in the desert of Sinai, but most travellers give it that name. Its Persian name is *ghaz* and it is quite an article of commerce. The fact that Rabbi Petachia encountered it on this occasion serves to confirm that he was in fact in this area; this "manna" is not found in the farther north.

It would appear then that in the 12th century of this era there was a local legend of Noah's Ark connected with Anaran with which the Rabbi was regaled. No such legend has survived or at least been recorded. This could be because, unlike Mounts Ararat and Djudi in Turkey, both frequently visited through the centuries by travellers who duly recorded all they were told, Anaran, in a wild and inhospitable country, has never had any visitors, except Petachia. One of the earliest modern explorers, Claudius Rich, sailing down the Tigris in 1815, remarked in his journal that he could see from the vessel, thirty-four miles away at the edge of the Luristan range, this remarkable "*conical mountain looking just like a volcano*" (from his position he would see only one peak, the other being behind it); (Rich, "*Residence in Koordistan*" 1836). Another early one, the "Father of Assyrian archæology", Austin Henry Layard, once passed within twenty miles of Anaran on his way across country from Baghdad to Susa without knowing that he was within sight of the ancient "Mount of the East". And so far as can be discovered, no other explorer has ever been there.

* * *

At some time during the life of Sala, six centuries or so from Noah, the city-state of Aratta flourished, a cultured and civilised Sumerian community. Shem might have been still alive and in any case would not have been more than a century dead. The unknown scribe who undertook to record the stories of bygone times must have had the story of the Flood from someone who had been very near the events—perhaps from Arphaxad the son of Shem, and

recorded the story with its sequel of the Ark grounding upon a mountain in the land of Aratta. That would be in the pictographic script which is the earliest form of writing yet known. Several centuries later the story was translated into the cuneiform script which Abraham knew when in Ur of the Chaldees, and in which form of writing he brought into Canaan with him what we now have as the first eleven chapters of Genesis. These were re-translated into archaic Hebrew during the Israelites' sojourn in Egypt seven or eight centuries later still and even that had to be transcribed into a more modern form of Hebrew in the time of Ezra. By then the name of Aratta had long been forgotten so that it would not be surprising if at that time the later and better known name of Urartu or Ararat took its place, especially as both names were applicable to much the same territory.

At a much earlier date the "Tower of Babel" at Babylon and the corresponding temple-tower at Nippur were built, each facing directly towards the sacred mountain on which the Ark came to rest, mute witnesses to the great event which had heralded the commencement of a new

world and established their fore-fathers in this land. Despite the Divine condemnation of their project as narrated in Gen. 11, there is substantial evidence that men knew and worshipped, however imperfectly, only one God for several centuries after the Flood and their "Mount of the East", with Noah as the man who had talked with God, might well have held the same place in their thoughts as did Mount Sinai and Moses in those of Israel more than a thousand years later. It was only after the passage of centuries and generations that mythology and the creation and worship of many gods crept in, but even so, the old story of the mountain in the east where their common ancestor had been saved from the Flood never died, and was preserved in worship and in legend throughout all future times. It may well be that those ancient records, coming to light by the spade of the archæologists of this twentieth century, can enable us to say with some confidence concerning that lonely Mount Anaran on the frontier between Iran and Iraq, "this is the place where the Ark came to rest and from which Noah and his sons set out to build a new world."

ENCAMPED BY THE WATERS

Much has been written about the Tabernacle or Tent of Meeting in the wilderness, with its ceremonies and sacrifices, so much so that other meeting places between God and men seem to have been overlooked. A study of the early records of God's dealings with men indicate that a well or spring was such a place. When Hagar showed her contempt for Sarah she was forced to leave Abraham's household and go into the desert. The Angel of the Lord found her by a spring of water and told her to return to her mistress. This well or spring became known as Beer-lahai-roi, ("a well to the living one who sees me" Gen. 16.7-14).

Later, when Isaac was weaned, Sarah saw Ishmael mocking Isaac. As a result Hagar was again forced to go into the desert, this time with her son Ishmael. Abraham gave her bread and water, but while she wandered in the desert of Beer-sheba ("the well of the oath") the water ran out and Hagar put her son under a shrub to die, and they both wept. God heard the voice of the lad and the Angel of the Lord spoke to Hagar again. The record states that "God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water and she went and filled the empty water bottle". In the same chapter (Gen. 21.33) we read that

Abraham planted a grove in Beer-sheba and called upon the name of the Lord there, but other renderings prefer "tree" to "grove", which is much more likely.

In Genesis 18 it is stated that the Lord appeared to Abraham by the terebinths of Mamre. There three angels (messengers) appeared, and Abraham begged them to stay while water (from the well) was fetched to wash their feet while they rested "under the tree". Then in Gen. 26.19-25 there is an account of a quarrel over the ownership of some wells, but eventually Isaac's herdsmen dug a third well over which there was no quarrel, and this was named Rehoboth ("Now the Lord has made room for us"). During his lifetime Isaac made his home by Beer-lahai-roi (Gen. 25.11), and once he returned to Beer-Sheba and built an altar there and called upon the name of the Lord, and Isaac's servants were digging a well (Gen. 26.25). Jacob met God at Beer-Sheba and offered sacrifices there and God spoke to him. The Amplified Bible describes Beersheba as "a place hallowed by sacred memories" (Gen. 46.1); many of God's people today have their Beer-shebas.

In time this combination of trees and wells

became oases, where rest and refreshment could be found in the heat of the wilderness or desert. The last verse of Exodus 15 describes such a place, and the scene stirs the imagination. "And they came to Elim where there were twelve wells of water and seventy palm trees; And they encamped there by the waters". We might dwell on the significance of the twelve wells and seventy palm trees, but it is more important to liken this wonderful oasis to the periods of rest and refreshment which are provided by a loving Father for his people as they journey through the wilderness of this life. However, it is important to remember that these oases do not just "happen". During their wanderings the children of Israel came to Beer (meaning "a well"). This is identified as the place where the Lord spoke to Moses saying "Gather the people together and I will give them water" (Num. 21.16-18). Then Israel sang this song, "Spring up O well, let all sing to it", but water did not gush out of the rock. As they sang they dug deep into the earth and tapped the life-giving stream that had been flowing beneath the surface, out of sight for so long.

So in this life we need to combine the songs of faith with digging in the Word of God, where we find still new beauties and still increasing light. Dwelling by the waters is pictured in another way in Jer. 17.7-8 (Amp.) "Most blessed is the man who believes in, trusts in and relies on the Lord, and whose hope and confidence the Lord is. For he shall be like a tree planted by the waters, that spreads out its roots by the river, and shall not see and fear when heat comes but his leaf shall be green; he shall not be anxious and careful in the year of drought, nor shall he cease from yielding fruit." The

words of Jesus, as recorded in John 7.37,38, (Amp.) express the reality behind this picture. "If any man is thirsty let him come to me and drink. He who believes in me, who cleaves to and trusts in and relies on me, out of his innermost being springs and rivers of living water shall flow continuously".

The most spectacular pictures of dwelling by the waters are seen in the visions of Ezekiel and John. In Ezekiel 47 the prophet describes a spring (trickle) of water issuing from beneath the Altar in the New Temple, which becomes a river that could not be passed over. These waters reach the sea of "putrid waters" and heal it and make it fresh so that fish can live in it, "and everything shall live wherever the river goes". On both banks of this river grow all kinds of trees for food; their leaf shall not fade nor shall their fruit fail to meet the demand. Their fruit shall be for food and their leaves for healing.

The new heavens and new earth, pictured by the New Jerusalem, portrays the same scene (Rev. 21). The "Alpha and Omega" promises to give to the thirsty water without price from the fountain (springs) of the water of life. This is depicted by the river flowing out from the throne of God through the Broadway of the city; this too has trees (as in Ezekiel) on both banks yielding twelve varieties of fruit, each month its fresh crop and leaves for the healing of the nations.

So through the ages the tree by a well, the dwelling place of Abraham, the father of the faithful will, according to the Divine plan, become a great river lined with trees on both sides, beside which the whole world will one day be "encamped by the waters".

DISCIPLESHIP

"Whosoever doth not bear his Cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple."

We who follow the Crucified are not here to make a pleasant thing of life; we are called to suffering for the sake of a suffering, sinful world. The Lord forgive us our shameful evasions and hesitations. His brow was crowned with thorns; do we seek rose-buds for our crowning? His hands were pierced with nails; are our hands ringed with jewels? His feet were bare and bound; do our feet walk delicately? What do we know of travail? of tears that scald before they fall? of heart-break? of being scorned? God forgive us our love of ease. God forgive us that so often we turn our faces from a life that

is even remotely like his. Forgive us that we all but worship comfort, the delight of the presence of loved ones, possessions, treasure on earth. Far, far from our prayers too often is any thought of prayer for a love which will lead us to give one whom we love to follow our Lord to Gethsemane, to Calvary—perhaps because we have never been there ourselves.

Lord, we kneel beside thee now, with hands folded between thy hands as a child's are folded in its mother's. We would follow the words of thy prayer, dimly understanding their meaning, but wanting to understand. . . . "That the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them." (selected).

TEN VISIONS OF CHRIST TRIUMPHANT

3. Visions 4 & 5 — "With Christ in the Heavens"

The vision of the 8th chapter of Revelation goes back into the doctrinal field. It begins to look at the effect of Jesus' death in the world here and now. It combines two related themes; Divine acceptance of those who take their stand with Christ and dedicate their lives to him in whole-hearted consecration of all their energies and gifts and talents, and Divine judgment upon those who reject and oppose the goodness of God because their hearts are evil and they "will not have this man to reign over us" (Luke 19. 14). Both acceptance and judgment have to be viewed against the wider canvas of God's redemptive plan for all mankind; these relate only to the outworking of that plan so far as this present Age is concerned. There is another, the Messianic, to follow when the position of all who have not become Christ's in the present will be reviewed so that the judgments of this Age are not irrevocable. Revelation 8 is largely a chapter of judgment, judgment upon those of successive generations throughout the Age who have knowingly and consciously opposed Christ. It is not the final judgment because their rejection of Christ is not final. It is a picture of the present Age as respects the attitude men take towards Christ and his Church and the consequences which that attitude brings upon them.

"Another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer, and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne" (Rev. 8.1).

There is only one altar in the symbolic visions of Revelation, standing before the Heavenly Throne in the sight of God, and that altar corresponds to the golden incense altar in the Holy of the Tabernacle and Temple, standing before the veil which shrouded the Most Holy wherein dwelt the Majesty of the Most High. The other altar of the Levitical ritual, the Brasen Altar of sacrifice in the outer court, would be manifestly improper in these visions, for the sacrifice Jesus made when He suffered death on the Cross was over and done with and He is now officiating in the presence of the Father on behalf of his Church. So the angel standing at the altar is Christ in his post-resurrection status, bringing to the Father the offerings of his Church. This does picture, more eloquently than can Leviticus, an essential part of the Levitical ritual. Following the sacrifice of the sin-offering on the Brasen Altar in the Court, it was the duty

of the High Priest to take a censer of burning coals, with incense, into the Holy with him when he carried the blood of the sin-offering to sprinkle on the Mercy-Seat. He could not enter the Most Holy with that blood until he had first offered incense on the Golden Altar in the Holy. With that cloud of "sweet smelling savour" preceding him into the presence of God, he could pass within the Veil and present the blood of the sin-offering in confidence that it would be accepted.

This is a picture of Jesus the Church's High Priest in the doctrinal aspect, officiating in the presentation of the sin-offering which is the means of removing sin from the world. Here again Heb. 2 comes in. *"In all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people"* (Heb. 2.17). That is what the angel is doing here at the altar. The Ransom has been given; the man Christ Jesus has given his life on the Cross and the way is legally clear for all men to return from the grave and stand trial for life. But that of itself does not give them reconciliation to God. There is a long story yet to tell before that blessed outcome can be proclaimed. And the first step in the programme is the selection of those who, like their Master, are prepared to pour out their own lives unto death in a daily dying, as did He.

The prayers of saints, ascending up as incense before God out of the angel's hand, picture the whole offering of all who during this Age come to God in consecration and give their lives to be buried with Christ by baptism into his death. There is nothing indefinite about this. The members of the Body yield their earthly lives and all their endeavours on behalf of the world's reconciliation to God just as truly as did Jesus. Their offering is accepted by God and ultimately is used by him, in a manner we cannot hope to understand, as a means to the salvation of the world. In some way there is a power generated by those lives of devotion and self-sacrifice, which can have a profound influence on the minds and hearts of men and play some very essential part in the conversion of the hearts of stone to the hearts of flesh (Ezek. 36.26). Jesus, having already offered up the fruits of his own three-and-a-half years of human life to be used in the interests of mankind's reconciliation, now offers up the prospective fruits of all the

consecrated lives of all his followers for the same purpose. And the Father accepts the offering. Henceforth it is true that "if we suffer with him, we shall also reign with him". Having thus laid down the basis for the ultimate reconciliation of "whosoever will", the angel turns, filling the censer now with fiery coals alone, no more with incense, and casts it into the earth, and the consequence of that action is the progressive sounding of the seven trumpets, each with its tale of judgment upon an unbelieving world.

This casting of the censer into the earth is for judgment. "I am come to send fire on the earth" said Jesus "and what will I, if it be already kindled?" (Luke 12.49). He knew, none better, that many who should have recognised his Messiahship would reject him, and He knew also that nothing now could save judgment coming upon that godless generation—as it did when the Romans destroyed their city and nationhood less than forty years later. This same symbol was presented to the prophet Ezekiel at another time of judgment upon Israel — the Babylonian captivity. He was to go in between the cherubim and take coals of fire therefrom, and scatter them towards the doomed city (Ezek. ch. 10). Jerusalem was destroyed then, and it was destroyed again in the days of Jesus.

That, after all, is what Jesus foretold. "I am not come to bring peace, but a sword". He knew that the message he brought to earth would be rejected by many, and since the hearing of the message brings responsibility, the rejection of the message can bring naught else but judgment. The judgment came first and heavily upon the people who first rejected Christ, the Jewish nation. Hail and fire, mingled with blood, came to the earth, and the Jewish world was destroyed.

So the trumpets sounded, one after another, each one heralding another phase of the judgment as the Age progressed, until at last the seventh angel sounded, and the judgments ended, for the kingdoms of this world had given place to the kingdom of Christ, who will reign throughout that Messianic era when all men shall learn of his righteousness and make their final decision for eternal life. But although it is true that God hath appointed that future day in which He will judge the world in righteousness (Acts 17.31) the fact cannot be ignored that there is a responsibility upon men now to do what in their hearts they know to be right. Every rejection of the wise counsel of God brings corresponding penalty, every persecution of those who do serve God involves retribution. The world today has departed from right principles to a greater extent than ever before in its history, the time of the Flood perhaps excepted;

and the world's trouble is greater in consequence than has ever before been known. "A time of trouble" said the angel to Daniel "such as was not since there was a nation" (Dan. 12.1). But after judgment comes blessing, an opportunity to learn the lessons pointed by the judgment, and after this, the greatest judgment of all, comes the greatest blessing for mankind. It is then that the fruits of the "prayers of saints" offered to God with the incense of Christ's own sacrificial life will become the means of leading men in right ways and bringing forth further fruits in turn in their lives to the everlasting glory of God.

A completely different setting is afforded by the presentation of the fifth vision. "*I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the Mount Sion, and with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father's name written in their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven . . . and I heard harpers . . . and they sang a new song before the throne . . . and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand which were redeemed from the earth.*" (ch. 14.1-3) Mount Sion (Greek form of Hebrew Zion) in Jerusalem was the seat of royalty. The king's palace was on Mount Zion and so poetically it became a symbol of Jerusalem the royal city. "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). Hence the Lamb standing on Mount Zion with his redeemed Church around him, and the sound of music and sacred song, speaks of a King and his followers who have overcome the enemy, gained the victory, and are resting in peace and quietude and unchallenged security. This is a state which is enjoyed to a degree by the Church whilst still in the flesh; they are "seated with Christ in the heavenlies" (Eph. 2.6) and so are able to rise above the troubles and anxieties of this world. It is also the state which will be true of the Church at the end of the Age when the Lord gathers to himself his own but before He comes to reveal himself to the world. In a sense therefore this picture of Christ and his Church gathered together on Mount Zion is a link between those earlier visions which depict our Lord's work for his Church from his resurrection and onward through this present Age and the later five visions which depict the varied phases of his revelation to the world in the Messianic Age, when his Church will be with him.

Chapter 14 goes on to speak of things that definitely have their place at various times during the Christian Age, from the proclamation of the everlasting gospel at its beginning to the

treading of the winepress at its end. In great measure it parallels the fifth chapter and the breaking of the seals, but whereas the events of chapter 5 are those of the social order, these in chapter 14 are those of the ecclesiastical order. Naturally enough, therefore, the vision of chapter 14 has to do chiefly with those who at least have named the name of Christ, and it is out of such that the members of the "hundred and forty-four thousand" are drawn. Hence the insistence of verse 4 that these on the Mount Zion are *"they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth"*. In the Epistle to the Hebrews a pointer to this vision is given in chapter 3 vs. 6. *"Christ as a son over his own house; whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end"*. This company on Mount Zion is a house over which Christ is the head; the fact that they stand on Mount Zion is a symbol of their being overcomers, and the whole picture is a foreview of what will come at the end when the Church of Christ has completed its earthly course and has been translated to the heavens and united for all eternity to the Head.

But this 14th chapter has a present application which is very real. The Lamb standing on Mount Zion, surrounded by the Church, immediately prior to the message of the everlasting gospel and the doom of Babylon, pictures the commissioning of all consecrated disciples, of whatever period of the Age, to undertake their life's work. To some, especially in the early centuries, it was to go out proclaiming the everlasting gospel. To others, in later times, it was to witness against the falsity of great Babylon and warn the faithful against any kind of alliance with, or sympathy for, the apostate systems of men. Still later it was to proclaim the imminent presence of the Son of Man, returning in spiritual glory to gather his saints to himself, and finally it was to witness to the inevitability of Divine judgment upon a guilty world. These early verses of chapter 14, picturing a radiant and joyful company standing on Mount Zion, the royal mountain of Jerusalem, are paralleled by the declaration of Heb. 12.22 *"Ye are come unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn which are written in heaven"*. This is a present achievement and not a future state. We have now come to Mount Zion and we now stand upon it, secure in the knowledge that our Lord will never fail us, and therefore if we maintain our faith we are surely

saved. As the same writer shows so plainly in chapter 4.9 *"there remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works."* If we have fully measured up to all our privileges we will have come into the secret place of the Most High and received that God-given peace which in very truth puts us upon the Mount Zion. We can sing the song which none but the redeemed can sing; We have come into a world apart from this present world, a condition of existence in which old things are passed away and all things are become new.

This Mount Zion, then, is the state of perfect peace and confidence into which all of the consecrated should pass when they accept the leadership of Jesus in their hearts and lives. No matter what may be our position in the everyday world, no matter how hard the circumstances or how trying our environment, no matter how near the world, the flesh, and the devil, and how far away those Divine ideals toward which we seek to approach, we can all the time be on Mount Zion singing the new song and rejoicing in the constant spiritual presence of our Lord with each. Even although all this a matter of the heart and mind it is no less real. It is this standing on Mount Zion in company with each other and the Lamb that is steadily taking us more and more out of accord with the things of this world and bringing us more and more into harmony with the things of the spirit. *"We all, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image"*.

Of these five glimpses of Jesus and his work at his First Advent and during this Age on behalf of his Church, surely none is more appealing and soul-inspiring than this one which tells us what is to be the glorious outcome of it all. *"In their mouths was found no guile: for they are without fault"*. That is the intent and purpose of this Christian Age, to develop and perfect a company devoted to God and his purposes, and of whom it will be declared, when that development is completed, that *"they are without fault"*.

Glorious, not only for themselves, but for all the world, for if God can so work upon the hearts of these weak and imperfect creatures to render them without fault before his glorious majesty in the courts of heaven, He can surely do the same with all the sons of men *"whomsoever will"*, in the coming Millennial Day upon earth. If Jesus can so work on the hearts of these few during the Christian Age, surely He can do the same for others in the next Age. The work of the Good Shepherd with the Church

now is an earnest of what He will do with the world later on. The High Priest standing now in the midst of the seven lampstands ministering to his beloved, will come forth with them in the blazing glory of meridian sunlight to extend the blessings of his loving care and shepherd rule to all the nations.

Something of that is what is forthshown in the remaining five visions, all of which picture in vivid symbol the varied factors contained in that sequence of events which together make up what is implied by the fulfilment of his promise "I will come again", the Second Advent.

To be continued.

PARABLE OF A FERRY-BOAT

Leaning on the parapet, he watched the steam ferry-boat making its leisurely way across the river. A queer, ungainly looking craft it was, sitting squat and flat on the water, its two tall funnels standing up straight, one at each end of the motley load of vans, lorries and cars. For more than fifty years now it has plied to and fro between its two landing stages, never venturing up or down stream more than has been necessary to avoid other river traffic. As often as not it makes part of the journey floating sideways in the grip of the tide, which flows strongly at this point. Its paddle wheels make a great deal of noise and throw up a lot of spray, but the boat never gets up any considerable speed, for it is heavy and cumbersome and the distance it has to travel is so short.

A short, sharp blast echoed imperiously over the water. A small motor vessel, making its way down river, was warning the slow-moving ferry of its approach. The heavily laden craft hesitated, slowed down, its paddles whirling furiously first in one direction and then in the other as it manœuvred and turned in the endeavour to leave a clear passage for the faster boat. The other vessel deviated slightly from its course and passed athwart the stern of the ferry; the sound of its engines came sharply upon the ear as it speeded up and soon it was but a speck in the distance, heading for the open sea. Now the ferry-boat was at the far landing stage, its paddles slowly revolving to hold it stationary there against the urge of the swiftly flowing tide.

And he thought to himself how many Christian organisations and institutions become like that ferry-boat. They pass continually backward and forward across the river of Truth at the point where they began their corporate work, unceasingly repeating the same round of activity and always maintaining the same outlook, their paddles constantly threshing up the same water and fighting always against the flowing tide which would carry them to shores undreamed of and show them vistas of which they had not conceived. And when perchance there happens along a band of Christians not content to man a ferryboat, but would travel down the ever widening and ever deepening river of Truth un-

til it merges into the ocean of the fulness of Divine revelation, there is much ado to keep the institution with all its lading well clear of the venturesome rovers, lest there be a collision, and untoward consequences to vested interests.

There are so many to-day who want their religion and their Christian activity made safe for them. It is so easy to join the crew of the ferry-boat, to be very busy with the work of taking travellers across the river and back again, day after day. But it is the pioneer, travelling the course of the river, who feels the upward lift of the heaving billows, senses the keen air and fresh wind, and comes out into the open sea, upon the horizon of which he sees, dimly yet but ever growing clearer, the palaces and temples, the cliffs and mountains, of that glory land which is the world that shall be; the crew of the ferry-boat never see aught but the grimy buildings and smoky factories of the earthly city within which their whole lives are being spent.

Let us be pioneers, like those Pilgrim Fathers who set out to colonise America. "*The Lord hath yet more Truth to break forth from his Holy Word*" was the parting charge to them of their Pastor, John Robinson, and in the power of that admonition they went forth to lay the foundations of a new world. "*The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream, and he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully.*" Only so may our Christian witness be effective; no witness that is not based upon the best and deepest understanding of the Divine Plan that it is possible for us to attain can be expected to meet the needs and the problems of this generation; the catchwords and allusions that were intelligible to men and women generations ago mean nothing to their children to-day, and so it comes about that it is not only Truth that is progressive, but witness is progressive also. Let us see to it that our own vision of the coming Kingdom is that which is seen, not from the deck of a city ferry-boat, flat down on the muddy river waters, but from the bows of sea-going vessels, high up on the ocean billows, where sea and sky alike tell of the majesty and power of God in creation and revelation.

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

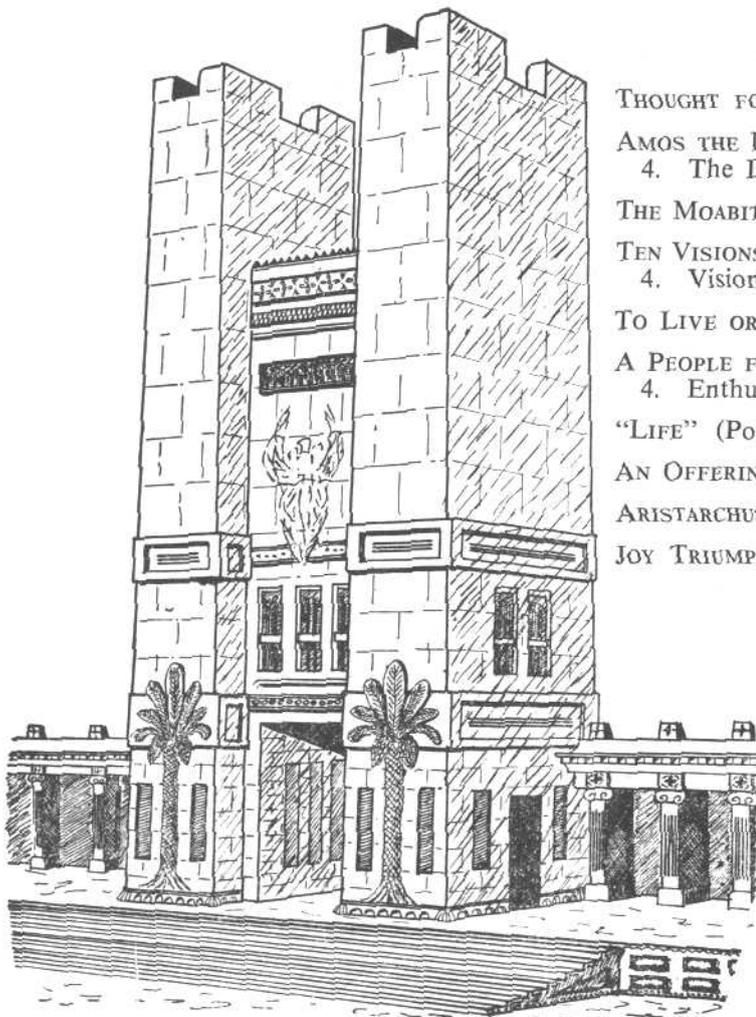
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of charge to all who are
genuinely interested, on
request renewable annually
and is supported by the
voluntary gifts of its readers*



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

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Thought for the Month

We have for some time been familiar with the sensational claims made by the Press for the capabilities and powers of modern calculating machines, robots and automatic computers. These fruits of human inventive genius, it is said, possess memories by means of which they can store information and release it when required; they can perform intricate mathematical calculations in a fraction of the time possible to mere man possessing only a human brain. They can, in fact, writes the reporter enthusiastically, practically think, responding to external stimuli in the same fashion as does a human brain. Of course this is all nonsense; the most intricate of such devices is a pure machine, operating mechanically or electrically in accordance with the laws of mechanics and electro-technology. One blown fuse and the computer is dead until someone comes along and puts in a new fuse. But the whole thing is symptomatic of man's desire to do something that God has already done, but without God's help—and the result is a miserable caricature of the real thing. Much better to be honest and admit that man can build wonderful machines of almost fantastic attributes, but he cannot create life and intelligence.

Then an Australian scientist comes along with the statement that it will soon be possible for medical men to operate on the brains and vocal chords of monkeys and the like so that they may be given the intelligence and the powers of language of man. He looks forward to a day when "the menial tasks of life will be undertaken by intelligent talking monkeys", thus setting men free for more leisured pursuits. That such a prospect would imply a slavery every bit as hideous as that which formerly afflicted the coloured races does not, apparently, trouble him in the least. Truly, the arrogance and selfishness of modern educated man appears to know no bounds.

All the same, here is a splendid opportunity for the modern "science fiction" novelist. Suppose the thinking machines and talking monkeys got together and produced a race of hybrid creatures which decided humans were a nuisance anyway and were best out of the way! An armour-clad monkey thinking and acting a thousand times faster than man might prove a formidable proposition. One could only pray that a fuse might blow at the critical moment. It all leads one to wonder if there is not some factor in human nature which induces deterioration of intellect, feeble-mindedness, in the educated man who deliberately leaves God out of his life. The actions to-day, not only of scientists, but of statesmen, might well justify some such conclusion.

"God hath made man upright" said King Solomon "but they have sought out many inventions". (Eccl. 7. 29). The Hebrew word, strangely enough, denotes mechanical devices, and comes from a root meaning to think or compute in a mathematical sense, with a secondary meaning "to devise evil". Perhaps the wise king was more farseeing than we give him credit for. At any rate his words are very apt to our own times.

Coming Convention

Yeovil, Fri.-Tues. 17-21 August at "Patmos", 3 Hillgrove Avenue, Yeovil, Som. Details from Mrs. P. Stracy at above address.

Gone from us



Sis. D. Heap (*Warrington*)

Sis. C. Petrie (*Glasgow*)



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

AMOS THE HERDSMAN

4. The Devouring Lion

Amos 3.1-15

Chapter 3 commences a new section in the prophecy of Amos. The next four chapters, 3 to 6, comprise a four-fold expression of the national failings and sins of Israel which were leading inevitably to the breakdown of their nationhood and their extinction at the hands of the Assyrians and Babylonians, which eventually came to pass just as Amos had foretold. Each of these chapters appears to look at one of the four broad sectors into which the structure of the nation could be divided. Thus chapter 3 looks at, and condemns, the nation's military power and its trust in warlike abilities. Chapter 4 looks at the commercial and social structure of the community, chapter 5 its religious organisation and its priesthood, whilst chapter 6 directs stern condemnation against the royalty and nobility, the kings and princes of Israel-Judah. The shortcomings of each are declared and the consequences that will inevitably follow. As a measure of the solemnity and emphasis with which Amos felt he had to invest these declarations he changed his former introduction "Thus saith the Lord" to each of his judgment-messages of chaps. 1 & 2 to "Hear this word which the Lord has spoken against you" and he reiterates "Hear this word" three times as he proceeds with his denunciation.

These chapters are directed against both kingdoms, that of Israel and that of Judah. This is plain from ch. 3.1 "Hear this word that the Lord has spoken against you, O children of Israel, against the whole family which I brought up from the land of Egypt". Although the two-tribe kingdom of Judah had remained loyal to the Davidic kingly dynasty and more or less so to the Temple worship of God, whilst the ten-tribe kingdom had frankly and avowedly gone over to self-styled kings and a pagan worship and priesthood, there was in the Divine sight very little to choose between them. They were both, each in its own way, disloyal to God, and the same condemnation was applicable to both. "You only have I known of all the families of the earth" He says (ch. 3.2) "therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities". This was the chosen nation, all twelve tribes, ordained at Sinai to be a set-apart people having a special commission with corresponding special obligations. They defaulted on the obligations and showed themselves unworthy of the special commission. They had undertaken to be set apart and above the surrounding nations, but proved in the end to

be no better morally than those nations, wherefore God allowed them to experience the same vicissitudes of fortune as normally befell those other nations. And in no sphere was this more true than in that of national defence. Their military prowess, in which they prided themselves and trusted, proved to be no more effective than that of the peoples around them. Sometimes they won and sometimes they lost; at the end, when confronted by a vastly superior military power, they lost completely and the whole nation went into hopeless captivity and their land was left desolate. "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" (ch. 3.3) demands the Lord. The two, of course, are Israel's God and Israel. How can they walk together when every act of Israel is in direct defiance of the express commands or pleadings of God? For God does not only command, in those things in which He has a right to command; He also pleads, in respect of those things which lie within the realm of man's own free will. In both these respects there was disharmony. It had been said of old time that Enoch "walked with God"; Noah "walked with God"; now Israel no longer walked with God.

So the Lord turns his attention to Israel's lamentable position, at this moment from the point of view of their military power and effectiveness of their defence, relying on their material weapons but without God. The background to his words is the increasing threat of invasion by the Assyrians, to which Israel was quite heedless. "Will a lion roar in the forest, when he hath no prey?" He demands. "Will a young lion cry out of his den, if he hath taken nothing?" (ch. 3.4). The lion is Assyria; if the lion roars, it is because he is in the act of springing upon his prey, in this case helpless Israel. If he cries out of his den, it is because he has taken his prey into it, just as the Assyrians would very shortly now be taking the people of Israel captive to a strange land.

Can a bird be caught in a snare if no snare is set for him, or does a trap spring up unless it has taken something, he went on (ch. 3.5). In all this God was stressing the reality of the Assyrian threat but Israel would not listen. "Shall a trumpet be blown in the city, and the people not run together. Shall there be evil in a city and shall not the Lord do somewhat?" (ch. 3.6). This is a military metaphor. The trumpet is blown in the streets of the city to signify the approach of

the invading enemy; the people run together in a frantic effort to defend themselves. But here the endeavour is fruitless; the invaders are too strong for them and before long the city is captured and the hapless populace subjected to all the horrors of warfare. This is the "evil in a city" of this verse. The expression is a little ambiguous. The A.V. text puts it that the Lord has done it, i.e., caused the evil, but in the marginal note, that the Lord will do something about it. Moffatt has it that "the Eternal is at work" and the N.E.B. "will not the Lord act?". It is possible to take the Hebrew text either way, but when looked at in the light of the following verse it is more likely that the sense is that the Lord will take action. Ch. 3.7 says "*Surely the Lord God will do nothing without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets*". The Assyrians are on the march and nothing now can save Israel apart from the power of God. The Lord has done something to allow them thus to subjugate Israel and the Lord will do something else later on when the lesson has been learned—He will deliver Israel. That is to come about in a then future day and the only ones who know anything of those future plans of the Almighty are his servants the prophets. Amos was one of those prophets. He knew what the outcome was to be. But he could not proclaim that outcome just yet. He was commissioned now to declare the message of judgment. At the end of his prophecy he was to be permitted to reveal something of the purposes of God at the End Time when repentant and purified Israel is fully reconciled and restored to God and ready to enter upon their destiny of being a light to the nations.

There is much more in that seventh verse. It stands as an expression of a principle. There is never a time in history when no voice is raised to declare the significance of the times and the working of God. God never leaves himself without a witness. No matter how irreligious the world may have become, no matter to what low ebb faith in God may have shrunk, no matter how much it may seem that God has deserted mankind, there are always those—"watchers", to use our Lord's term—who are so in tune with the Almighty that they understand in appreciable degree what He is doing and will do. There is never a generation which does not have a witness given to the outworking of the Plan of God. And when, as in our day, the state of the world is one of confusion and disintegration, "men's hearts failing them for fear and for looking to the things which are coming upon the earth", the voice of the prophet is heard more intensively and a louder witness given to "those

things which must shortly come to pass". Whenever God makes another move or introduces another factor in the outworking of his redemptive plan for mankind, He tells his prophets, and they in turn tell the people, that they might have the knowledge, "whether they hear or whether they forbear".

At this point Amos stops speaking in metaphors and gives his hearers a vivid literal description of the warfare which is soon to afflict their land. History shows that there were three incursions of the Assyrians against the ten-tribe kingdom, the third culminating in the fall of Samaria and the depopulation of the land. All this is forthshown in the remainder of this chapter. Amos turns himself and looks to the south, calling upon the Philistines and the Egyptians to behold the judgment God is going to permit befall Israel. "*Publish in the palaces at Ashdod, and in the palaces in the land of Egypt, and say, 'Assemble yourselves upon the mountains of Samaria, and behold the tumults and the oppressions in their midst'. For they know not to do right, saith the Lord, who store up violence and robbery in their palaces.*" (ch. 3.9-10). The surrounding nations are bidden to take their stand and view the sad state of rebellious Israel.

Each stage of the three-fold judgment, the three incursions of the Assyrians, is solemnly introduced by a "thus saith the Lord". These were the Lord's words, not those of Amos. These were the judgments of the Most High, and only repentance, immediate and complete, could lift them. But Israel did not repent.

"*Thus saith the Lord God: an adversary shall surround the land, and he shall reduce thy strength, and take spoil from thy palaces*" (ch. 3.11). Ten years after Amos uttered the words, when Menahem was king of Israel, Tiglath-Pileser of Assyria came with his army and demanded tribute in token of submission and allegiance. Menahem had no option but to give way; he handed over a thousand talents of silver—nearly a million pounds or two million dollars at to-day's values—which he extracted from his unwilling subjects. "*Menahem extracted the money of Israel, even of all the mighty men of wealth . . . so the king of Assyria turned back, and stayed not in the land*" (2 Kings 15.19-20). Truly, as Amos had prophesied, the adversary reduced his strength and took spoil from his palaces.

Five years later came the second judgment, more warlike and more severe. "*Thus saith the Lord: As the shepherd taketh out of the mouth of the lion two legs, or a piece of an ear, so shall the children of Israel be taken that loll on the corners of divans in Samaria or on the damask*

cushions of a couch" (ch. 3.12). 2 Kings 15.29 and I Chron. 5.26 tell how, in the reign of Pekah of Israel, Tiglath-Pileser ("Pul" in some texts is an alternative name for the same Assyrian king) came again and this time took half of the nation, chiefly those inhabiting the lands east of Jordan and in Galilee, captive into Assyria. So Pekah lost half of his kingdom at one blow, rescuing only "pieces" from the "mouth of the lion". And whereas it was only money that was taken on the first occasion, this time it was the fate of many of the wealthy and the noble to be snatched away from their luxurious homes and life-styles and forced to join the dreary march across the desert to Assyria, never to see their homeland again.

But still the remainder did not repent, and so the final blow fell. Thirteen more years passed, and then Shalmaneser V of Assyria invaded Israel, laid siege to the city of Samaria, and after three years captured and destroyed it, taking all that were left of the ten tribes to Assyria to join the earlier captivity. "*Hear ye, and testify in the house of Jacob, saith the Lord, the God of Hosts.*" An especially solemn pronouncement, this, for it betokened the end of the nation. "*In*

the day that I visit the transgressions of Israel upon him I will also visit the altars of Bethel . . . and I will smite the winter house with the summer house, and the marble palaces shall perish, and the great houses have an end, saith the Lord" (ch. 3.13-15). Bethel was the idolatrous religious centre of the land; that would be destroyed, and so would be the marble palaces of the kings—Ahab was the first to build himself a palace of marble—and the houses of the rich and influential. All was to be swept away and all their occupants transported to serfdom in Assyria.

So the military power of Israel is shown in this chapter to be as ineffective against the armed might of Assyria as would be an unarmed shepherd against a raging lion. Let the trumpet be blown in the city, it has no effect. The enemy will come and he will have his way. Now Amos turns away from the army of Israel, the generals and strategists and all whose profession is armed force, and looks at the merchants and the commercial magnates, the "idle rich" and the socialites. In chapter 4 he has a message for them.

To be continued

THE MOABITE STONE

Mesha, king of Moab, was the undistinguished king of an undistinguished people. The nation of the Moabites was never a very powerful or influential one; it had its beginning in the days of Abraham, at the time of the destruction of Sodom, a beginning that was by no means auspicious (Gen. 19. 30-38), and it came to an ignominious end by being absorbed into the surrounding peoples during the times of change that attended the coming of the Persians and the Greeks shortly before the First Advent. But Mesha king of Moab has one claim to enduring fame; he caused to be inscribed a stone tablet which, buried for nearly three thousand years, has appeared in these our days to give witness to the accuracy of Holy Scripture.

Mesha rebelled against the overlordship of Israel. Omri, king of Israel, had reduced Moab to subjection. Ahab his son received tribute until the day that Mesha turned against him. Ahab allowed the case to go by default for the time being, but in the days of his son Jehoram, the Israelites advanced against Moab to re-impose their rule. They entered the land, driving the Moabites before them, until in his extremity Mesha resorted to the terrible act of sacrificing his first-born son in the fire to Chemosh the god

of Moab, in the hope that in face of this offering Chemosh would relent and deliver his people. The Israelites were so horrified at the scene that they raised the siege and returned to their own land, at least for the time being. Doubtless the Moabites exulted in the thought that Chemosh, at the eleventh hour, intervened to save them.

The whole story is told in 2 Kings 3. 4-27. "*And Mesha king of Moab was a sheepmaster, and rendered unto the king of Israel an hundred thousand lambs, and an hundred thousand rams, with the wool. But it came to pass, when Ahab was dead, that the king of Moab rebelled against the king of Israel; and king Jehoram went out of Samaria the same time, and numbered Israel. And he went and sent to Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, saying, the king of Moab hath rebelled against me; wilt thou go with me against Moab to battle? And he said 'I will go . . . so the king of Israel went, and the king of Judah, and the king of Edom . . . And when all the Moabites heard that the kings were come up to fight against them they gathered all that were able to put on armour, and upward, and stood on the border . . . And when they came to the camp of Israel, the Israelites rose up and smote the Moabites, so that they fled before them; but they*

went forward smiting the Moabites, even in their country. . . . And when the king of Moab saw that the battle was too sore for him, he took with him seven hundred men that drew swords, to break through even unto the king of Edom; but they could not. Then he took his eldest son, that should have reigned in his stead, and offered him for a burnt offering upon the wall. And there was great indignation against Israel, and they departed from him, and returned to their own land."

Up to the latter half of last century the Bible stood alone in this account of the conflicts between Moab and Israel, and the Old Testament historian not unnaturally enlarged upon the times when Israel was victorious, and said little about the periods of Moabite supremacy. But Mesha himself also committed to writing the story of his exploits in those same days. It came about in the year 1868 the Rev. F. A. Klein, of the Church Missionary Society, was taken by a friendly Arab sheik to a spot near the ancient village of Deiban, where the River Arnon rushes down a steep gorge into the Dead Sea, to see a massive black basalt slab, some four feet in length by two feet wide and thick, inscribed with a mysterious writing, that had come to light.

That slab is now known as the Moabite Stone, and a replica of it stands in the British Museum. (The original is in the Louvre at Paris). The local Arabs, learning of the interest their "find" had aroused, superstitiously broke it into pieces before it could be moved, but impressions of the inscription had, happily, been taken; the pieces were for the most part recovered and the monument restored.

It is sometimes said that the Moabite Stone confirms the Bible story of Jehoram's war against Moab, but that is not true. The inscription refers to an earlier period, and recounts the events of a time when Moab rebelled against Israel and was victorious, capturing many Israelite towns and taking many Israelite captives. But it is a striking confirmation of Old Testament history just the same. The first verse of the first chapter of 2 Kings says, simply and briefly "Then Moab rebelled against Israel after the death of Ahab". Nothing is said as to the success or otherwise of the rebellion and the chapter goes on to tell of the reign of Ahaziah, Ahab's successor. It is not until we come to the reign of Jehoram in the third chapter, earlier quoted, that we find Moab still independent, and Jehoram advancing against them in order to subdue them. Obviously then, although Scripture says not one word about it, the Moabite rebellion had been successful. And this is what the Moabite Stone declares, giving the fuller details

of that revolt that the Old Testament historians had omitted. The inscription commences "I am Mesha, son (worshipper) of Chemosh, king of Moab, the Deibonite. My father reigned over Moab thirty years and I reigned after my father. I made this high place for Chemosh because he had saved me from my enemies. Omri was king of Israel, and he oppressed Moab many days, for Chemosh was angry with his land. And his son (Ahab) succeeded him, and he too said 'I will oppress Moab'. He said so in my days, and I went out against him and his house, and Israel perished utterly. . . . And Chemosh said to me 'Go, seize Nebo from Israel'; and I went by night, and fought against it from dawn until noon, and I took it and slew all. . . . and I took from thence the vessels of Jehovah, and placed them before Chemosh. . . ."

There is more in the same strain. The Book of Kings, eloquent in what it does not say, merely tells us that Moab rebelled after the death of Ahab. Mesha tells us of the success of that rebellion and how Israel—as he thought—perished utterly under his onslaught. The Moabite defeat of Israel in the days of Ahaziah the son of Ahab must have been a crushing one. Then in the reign of Jehoram the successor of Ahaziah came the reversal of fortune which is recorded in 2 Kings 3, when Israel drove the Moabites back into their own land with heavy loss. Taken together, the two accounts, the one in the Scriptures and the other on stone, yield us a complete picture of those stirring events.

2 Chronicles has another sidelight on the story. It is the well-known account of how good king Jehoshaphat of Judah and his people set out to meet the invading Moabites without weapons but trusting in God for defence and singing the high praises of God as they went. "Ye shall not need to fight in this battle" was the word of the Lord to them "for the battle is not yours, but God's". And God delivered with a great deliverance.

Now that, also, was just after the death of Ahab and it must have been the same invasion which is recorded on the Moabite Stone. This time it is Mesha of Moab who is silent. He exults about his victory over the king of Israel; he says nothing at all about the king of Judah. That is Mesha's unwitting testimony to the truth of 2 Chron. 20. That part of the Moabite army which encountered good king Jehoshaphat's men, trusting in their God, was routed and dispersed. The part which fought Ahaziah the wicked king was victorious, and that victory was engraved upon Mesha's stone monument to be a witness against the ten-tribe kingdom for ever.

TEN VISIONS OF CHRIST TRIUMPHANT

4. Visions 6 & 7. The Beginning of the Advent

Five visions are past; five more are to come. The events of the First Advent are now left behind; vision six takes us well along the way towards the Second Advent and after that we have four glorious pen-pictures of the stirring happenings of that Advent and the inception of the Millennial Kingdom. But first of all it is necessary to view vision six.

John saw another mighty angel come down from heaven (Ch. 10.1-3). The splendour and glory accompanying this visitant from above was something greater by far than that revealed in any of the former visions. John had seen our Lord once as a man-child, twice as a sacrificial Lamb, twice as an officiating priest. All these appearances had to do with his First coming to earth, his resurrection, and ministry on behalf of his Church. But now there is evidence of action; the time has come to set in motion those forces which are to gain power and momentum until at last they overturn and destroy all that there is of evil in the earth and establish a world of everlasting righteousness. No wonder that John, looking upon this new scene, described the visitant as a "mighty" angel.

The newcomer was "clothed with a cloud"—that is, he appeared as if surrounded by the clouds of heaven and almost as if walking upon clouds which were swiftly bearing him earthwards. His head was encircled by the rainbow, his face radiant as the sun, and his feet—properly "legs"—shimmered like pillars of fire. There is much in this description that is reminiscent of the vision of Deity seen by Ezekiel and described in chapter 1 of his prophecy. He too saw a transcendently glorious Being enthroned in the clouds, surrounded by the rainbow, and radiant in a fiery glory. There is one difference. Ezekiel perceived that he was face to face with the Lord God of Israel, and the voice which spoke to him was the voice of God. John knew that the appearance which was before his eyes was a representation of Christ, the Son; his mind went instantly to the vision of the Heavenly Assizes in Dan. 7 where "One like the Son of Man" comes before the Ancient of Days to receive his kingdom. Just as that Son of Man descended from Heaven to earth to assert his power and claim his domain, so now John saw this visitant from Heaven "*set his right foot upon the sea, and his left foot upon the earth*" (ch. 10.2). In symbolic gesture, He comes to assert his authority over a world which is in rebellion against

him, but not yet to institute the Millennial reign which will quieten that rebellion. First of all there is to be an enlightenment, the dawning rays of the "Sun of righteousness" who Malachi (ch.4.2) said would arise with healing in his wings—his beams. Jesus himself likened his Advent to the *astrape*, the radiance of sunrise (Matt. 24.27). So now, John saw the angel with a countenance "as the sun" and he looked intently to see what the vision should portend.

The angel "*had in his hand a little book open*" from which he proclaimed a message. Later on John was told to take the book and eat it; it would be sweet as honey in his mouth but afterwards he would experience bitterness. In this he did but repeat the experience of Ezekiel who also was given a book, in which was written "lamentation, and mourning, and woe" (Ezek. 2.10). Ezekiel, too, was commanded to eat the book "*and it was in my mouth as honey for sweetness*", but he soon sensed the bitterness of the message he was to preach from the book. Here the similarity ends, for Ezekiel's mission was to an unfaithful and apostate nation who had been taken into captivity to Babylon for their sins, and the message was one of condemnation. John's vision had to do with the coming of new light and new knowledge into the world, the rising of a sun which is never going to set, and the bitterness represented the fiery trials and hard experiences of those who championed this new light against the entrenched forces of darkness. For this vision of Revelation chapter 10 continues into chapter 11, where there is depicted the symbol of two witness-martyrs who are raised up to bear faithful testimony during the persecution period of the mystic twelve hundred and sixty days, and are finally silenced for a short space only to receive and be vindicated by the coming to earth of the Messianic kingdom, when the kingdoms of the world become the kingdom of Christ (Rev. 11.3-15). That seems to indicate the interpretation of this vision of the rainbow angel and the little book. This is Christ, three-quarters of the way through the Christian Age, bringing the first harbinger of the light and truth of his Second Advent which itself is still in the future, and the time indicated is that of the Reformation.

The Reformation was the first effective challenge to the power of Antichrist. The battle was not won then—it is not completely won yet—but that great event in the history of the Age does

mark the point when the risen Christ intervened from Heaven to halt the downward decline of true Christian faith in the world and begin to bring before the minds of men the true gospel of the Kingdom. The light which then began to shine upon the Word of God has never been extinguished; not only so, but it has increased and grown brighter as the centuries passed until now in these closing days of the Age understanding of the Divine Plan and the purposes of God is clearer and more complete than at any previous time. But this is only to the Church, the true-hearted followers of Jesus. The rest of the world goes on its way, unknowing, until the cataclysm comes, as Jesus himself said (Matt. 24. 37-39). This is shown here in Revelation. The resplendent angel, standing upon sea and land with the open book in his hand, reads from it in a stentorian voice like the roar of a lion (ch. 10. 2-3). Nevertheless only John, the symbol of the faithful, the Church, heard what he said. Then "*seven thunders uttered their voices*"—the proclamation of the angel echoed and re-echoed from the skies sevenfold, and John made ready to write down what had been said. But a voice from heaven commanded him to seal up the things that had been said, and not to write them. In other words, the proclamation and the revelation of the Divine purposes which it brought was not for all; it was only for those who are pictured by John.

During the long centuries of the Reformation period, when as yet the end of the Age was a measurable distance away, the power of Antichrist was exerted to suppress the truth and the true faith. The faithful were in the main submerged and oppressed, and the Faith, although becoming better and better understood by the Reformers and their followers, was still a closed book to the greater part of Christendom. The message of the seven thunders was continually and consistently being given in secret and under cover, but it remained largely unwritten and unknown. Only as time went on did it slowly force its way to the surface. Only at the end of the Age does the voice of the seven thunders become audible to the many, when the power of the Antichrist is in process of being broken. Paul referred to this in 2 Thess. 2.8 when he said of the Antichrist that the Lord would consume that great system "*with the spirit of his mouth, and destroy (it) with the manifestation of his presence,*" a clear reference to one of the consequences of his Second Advent.

So this mighty angel, our Lord at the time of the Reformation, gave this message to his Church. But he also had another and a wider proclamation. "*The angel . . . lifted up his*

hand to heaven, and swore by him that liveth for ever and ever . . . that the time should no longer be delayed but in the days of the voice of the seventh angel . . . the hidden purpose of God will be fulfilled" (ch. 10.6-7). When, later on in chapter 11, the seventh angel sounds his trumpet, it is to announce the transfer of world sovereignty from the powers of this Age to the benevolent and just rulership of Christ. The Second Advent will have become fully accomplished "*and he shall reign for ever and ever*" (ch. 11.15).

The setting of this vision, then, is from the time of the Reformation onward to the end of the Age. In a sense the descent of this mighty angel and his proclamation was a kind of preparation for "*the gospel of the kingdom*" which was to be so marked a feature of Christian witness in the final few centuries of the Age. The message was sweet, sweet as honey, but its consequences in opposition, oppression, persecution, and all the horrors inflicted by Antichrist upon the faithful in Christ Jesus made it bitter when eaten. Nevertheless the witnesses were faithful in their testimony and at the end they were raised to heaven and to life immortal, "*and their enemies beheld them*" (ch. 11.12). As Jesus had already said, "*then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father*" (Matt. 13.43).

There now come into view the four visions which between them picture various aspects of the Second Advent itself. Vision seven enshrines very familiar Scripture symbolism—the Son of Man crowned as a king, coming to take possession of his kingdom but first of all to gather to himself those who are truly his. The harvest of the earth is the description given, taking the theme from the parable of the wheat and tares in Matt. 15. The 14th chapter of Revelation contains the glorious picture. "*I looked, and behold a white (bright, brilliant) cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of Man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle*" (ch. 14.14). A cry from heaven comes to this kingly figure, calling upon him to thrust in his sickle and reap the harvest of the earth, for the time of harvest has come. So the harvest is reaped.

It is very important to observe here that in this vision the King does not come immediately to take his kingdom and reign over the nations. That aspect does figure in the later visions but not here. He comes for a specific purpose, to reap a harvest. Following this reaping there is another factor in the sequence of events leading to the full end of the Age, the gathering of the "vine of the earth" and the treading of the wine-

press, Armageddon (ch. 14.17-20). Only after that does the kingly function, the reign of Christ and his Church over the earth, commence. At this point in chapter 14 the Lord returns to gather his Church, to resurrect to immortal life all who during the Age, having "made their calling and election sure" have been laid aside in death to await the resurrection call. And beside those who are thus raised from the dead to be with the Lord, there are those still living at the time He comes. These, says the Apostle Paul, will not sleep (in death) but will be "changed", in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump. *"For the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed"* (1 Cor. 15. 51-52). Again in writing to the Thessalonians he says, *"we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not precede them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them to meet the Lord . . ."* (1 Thess. 4.15-17). This is the same as is pictured by the harvest of wheat in the parable of Matt. 13.24-30, 36-43). The seed, sown by our Lord through his servants and agents throughout the Age from Pentecost to the end, has borne fruitage in those faithful souls of all generations laid aside to wait the coming of the Chief Reaper to initiate and supervise the harvest. The harvest, he said in this parable, is the end of the Age. Now in Revelation 14 we have this very thing pictured in vision. The kingly reaper, sickle in hand, comes to reap. Those who are thus reaped are joined with him to be revealed with him a little later on to a wondering world. But at this moment the world knows nothing of this. The harvest is a process that is unknown to and unobserved by mankind in general. The resurrection of the sleeping ones is not to a renewed terrestrial existence upon this earth. They closed their eyes in death, perhaps, some of them, many centuries ago; they open them again to a celestial world outside the range of human sense but one in which their Lord is waiting to greet them. The others, who are, to use Paul's words, "alive and remain", will pass into death in the normal fashion and find themselves, again in Paul's words, "in the twinkling of an eye" in that same celestial world and amidst that exalted celestial company. *"We know not what we shall be, but we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is"* (1 John 3.2).

Later on in Revelation (chapter 19) there is a picture of a somewhat later stage in the events

of the Advent. The Church, the Bride of Christ, has now been gathered together and translated to that celestial home which the Lord himself has prepared. He said so to his disciples *"I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also"* (John 19.2-3). This union with Christ in the heavens, immediately prior to the manifestation of the Church with him to the world at the establishment of the Messianic kingdom, is described in Revelation chapter 19 as the "marriage supper of the Lamb". Just what is the reality behind this vivid metaphor is difficult to surmise; it relates to conditions and activities in the celestial realm of which we, having only terrestrial experience and knowledge, can have little if any conception. The language of Rev. 19 appears to indicate a kind of triumphal reception into Heaven and introduction to the citizens of the celestial realms. It must surely indicate a being familiarised with the privileges and duties of life in that realm and those connected with the ordained work of the Church among mankind upon earth during the Messianic era, the Millennium. For be it remembered that the glorified Church is destined, in association with her Lord and Head, to minister Millennial blessings to men and lead them through the successive stages of repentance, conversion, and acceptance of Christ, to reconciliation with God and entry into the eternal state, as many as will or can be thus persuaded. So this "marriage supper" must be accomplished before the climacteric of the Advent when the Lord Christ, accompanied by the Church, is revealed to the entire human race as earth's ruler and man's shepherd. The prophet Isaiah, saw that in vision. *"He shall feed his flock like a shepherd . . . the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together"* (Isa. 40.5, 11). The earlier events of the Advent are hidden from the eyes of men but when at last all things are ready, the resurrection and translation of the Church has become an accomplished fact, the kingdoms of the earth have given place to the Kingdom of our Lord, then all men shall know, and see, and accept the fact, that Christ is Lord, and will cry, as Isaiah, again, said they will cry, *"Lo, this is our God: we have waited for him, and he will save us. This is the Lord: we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation"*. (Isa. 25.9).

So the harvest, the gathering of the Church, occupies the earlier part of the Advent period and is followed in Heaven by the "marriage supper", the union of the Church with her Lord, and upon earth by the onset of Armageddon, the final scenes of the breakdown of human society.

Both these events are succeeded by the commencement of Divine rule in the earth, when *Christ and his Church are manifested in a manner not yet comprehended by men, but one which will amply fulfil the prediction of Jesus "they shall see the Son of Man coming in the*

clouds of heaven with power and great glory" (Matt. 24.30). It is the province of the remaining three visions to depict the essential characteristics of the various aspects of that final event.

To be continued.

TO LIVE OR TO DIE

*An exhortation
to trust*

In moments of high courage, when fired by a noble purpose, fearless men have been known to say "It is not necessary that I should live, but if I do, life can have but one object for me". It is no light thing to say, nor is it an easy attitude to have reached. Most men on sober reflection would agree that the world would still go on without them, but few sit down to face that *uninviting situation*. Most men are of a cowardly spirit on the question of "passing out" from the known to the unknown. They face the last issue with something of the resignation of fatalism, because they must. Even Christian people, long buoyed up by expectations of winging their flight to "a better land" at death, fight shy of the moment of departure. The doctor is expected to do his utmost to put off that farewell moment as long as possible, and many thanks are extended to him if he is successful in winning a *respite for the "embarkee"*. Those unhappy folk who "pass out" by their own hand are generally considered to be "of unsound mind", not able to weigh properly the blessings of life against the dark uncertainties that lie ahead. Such unhappy souls are counted exceptions, beaten down by contrary forces till they find no desire in life. Not only would the majority of men not "pass out" in that way; but could they really have their choice, they would not "pass out" at all.

There is nothing censurable in this attitude. Man was made to live originally, and had he not sinned, he would not have had to die. The entrance of sin did not destroy the desire to live, and except where adversity or unremitting pain rob existence of all its joys, the desire still persists. It is the enforcement of the penal decree of God against sin which makes death, thus far, inevitable. The "needs be" comes from the Divine side of the question, not from man's. The interruption of those subtle cosmic forces which come into our mundane sphere from outer spaces—vitalising life-promoting forces—cause man to wither and decay and die, long before he has had enough (as a rule) of this mundane world. It is accordance with nature to desire to live, and it is true that man only dies

because he must.

It is not fair nor reasonable to judge this question from the standpoint of these war-fevered days. These are days of mass-madness and hypnotic dementia. With the fearful things looming ominously near, thousands — perhaps millions—might say it were better to be dead than alive, but could the reign of peace return, the *balance of their judgment would quickly be restored*. The attitude of man in every land could be summed up in one short phrase—"Man wants to live as long as he can, and will face up to death, only when he must".

This general attitude of the mass makes the attitude of the exception only the more remarkable, and when the "exception", still blessed with health and strength, still unworn by adversity or pain, looks out dispassionately on life and death, and says "It is not necessary for me to live, but if I do, life can have but one object for me", it may be taken as a veritable certainty that such an one is consecrated to the noblest things he knows. The "object" is greater than the man, and greater than his life—so great that life is something to be spent in its behalf; so great that if life may not be spent in its behalf, life has no worth in itself at all. Some men reach this Alpine height, and conquer self and circumstance, but these rare souls are few indeed. There are but few objects within this mundane sphere which are worthy of such consecration and devotion, and where such consecration has been seen the object has been universal, as a rule. Men will set themselves apart in this supreme sense more readily when it is for "all" than when it is for a few—for a scientific, or humanitarian, or universal end.

When the Church of God was young her experience was blessed by the utterance of one who reached Himalayan heights of self renunciation and utter consecration. If ever human lips said truly "It is not necessary for me to live, but if I do, life can have but one object before me" it was said by this man's lips. "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me" said this fully surrendered soul. "For me to live is Christ, to die is gain" he

said on other occasion to his perturbed and wondering brethren. These words were not uttered in the thoughtless flush of youth but in the years when judgment was mature. He himself was getting well on in years, yet not so old that he was senile and worn-out. There was yet much vital force and driving force left in his fervent soul. He had not reached "retiring" age. He was not ready for his "easy chair," yet with all this unspent reserve of capacity to "do", he was ready to subjugate his whole interest in life for his Master's sake—and "live" if his Master wished for him to live; or "die" if that were his Master's will.

It is not possible here to trace the full outline of his circumstances save only to say that it was a "crisis" time in his life. He was in chains, under arrest, and waiting verdict from Cæsar's Court. Brethren in Philippi were perturbed about this situation, and wondered why it should have come about. They could not understand why Providence should have permitted the Gospel's most zealous ambassador to be put in chains; but that ambassador was under no uncertainty himself. He had no need to be uncertain. He had committed himself into Jesus' hands, to serve him just as long as Jesus desired, and to lay his ambassadorship down and go to "sleep" just when his Master pleased. There were no "second causes" in his life. No other hand than Jesus' could mark out his path. It did not lie with Imperial Cæsar to interfere with his life's destiny. His life's objectives were not contingent upon the whim or mood of any man. The decisions which affected his life were made in heaven; were made by his own Lord, and none could say him nay. He was his Master's chattel, his Master's slave, his Master's voice, and his Master could do his Will in every sense, alike "in" him, and "for" him, and "by" him. He knew his Master had lived and died, and by the Father's power had mounted up on the hither side of death to glory, honour and immortality. His Master received "all power in heaven and earth" and was merely marking time, "from henceforth expecting" till the whole world should be made his footstool. Death could have no further dominion over that exalted One, and if to-day, to-morrow, or any day, his Master should decide his journey done, his service at an end, there was nothing else to the question—he would lay himself upon the headman's block as

readily as on his nightly couch. There is something delightful in this utter abandon to the Master's Will. To have no choice of this or that apart from him is rest and peace. To care not if we live, or if we die, if thus his Will be done is victory indeed. To yield one's self to his embrace with infant-like dead-weight in mother's arms, is ever his delight.

We need to take stock of these things today. God has not made any promise to preserve in unconditional physical safety any child of grace. The story of the faithful Church has been one of death and suffering, from the beginning of its career. Stephen was crushed with stones; James was slain by Herod; the catacombs of Rome were filled with heroic dead; the Waldenses, the Albigenses and Huguenots were ruthlessly cut down. Germany was deluged for a hundred years with blood. The saints were given into one persecutor's hand for "a time, times, and the dividing of a time"; Jesus said ". . . I send unto you prophets and wise men and scribes . . . some of them ye shall kill and crucify . . ." God promises no immunity from violence to the followers of the Lamb, but He does promise grace enough to help them bear their lot. But though no complete immunity has been proclaimed, no man nor other agency can lay God's children low till his due time has come. "They sought to take him, but no man laid hands on him, because his hour was not yet come" (John 7. 30; 8. 20). But later on the Blessed One said "The hour is come that the Son of Man should be glorified" (John 12. 23). "Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father; save me from this hour; but for this cause came I to this hour."

In these troubled days the child of God who sits loose to earthly things, and begins each day with resignation to finish his course that day with gladness should the Lord permit, can find rest and peace of heart. The child who knows he cannot end his days till God's due time has God himself at the helm of his life, and with God at the helm his life cannot be wrecked by any storm until God pilots him into port. But if any saint of God thinks that the world or any part of it cannot go on without his oversight, and that it is essential for him to live on its behalf, that saint has much to learn. He has not yet realised that the only object of the Christian's life is "Christ", and should he live, or die, he is the Lord's.

The inclination we all have to settle down and make things comfortable for ourselves has directed very much of Christian effort into a wrong channel. The importance of things seen and temporal has overshadowed the unseen and eternal.

All things are possible to him who *believes*; they are less difficult to him who *hopes*, they are more easy to him who *loves*, and still more easy to him who perseveres in the practice of these three virtues.

A PEOPLE FOR A PURPOSE

Thoughts on the
Call of the Church

4. Enthusiasm

Enthusiasm means a passionate zeal for a person or work; an intense ardour, a keen interest, a deep fervour. It is driving power; the force which moves and keeps moving any person devoted to a selected project. The word is derived from the Latin *enthusiasmus*, to be inspired, and from the Greek *entheos*, to be possessed by a god. Literally, it is *En-theos*—God in us. Here is something to note, for it is the secret of successful living. When Paul asked a special grant for the Ephesian church, this was the boon he craved on their behalf, *“that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God”*. He asked also the indwelling of Christ, the strengthening with might by his Spirit in the inner man. (Eph. 3. 14-19).

This filling with God, with Christ, with the strengthening power of the Spirit, comes according to the measure of self-emptying. The self-emptying will be according to the desire to receive the driving force which not only transforms life but fills it with purpose to completion. The purpose for which God separates and works with his living stones is that they shall shine with the light of his holiness, that they shall show his perfections, so declaring his works. They are to be, both now and hereafter, a visible evidence of his love and glory.

The temple of Solomon was filled with the glory of God. It was a temple made with hands, a demonstration of the greater Temple yet future. The spirit of God departed from it when the nation sought other gods and it passed away. The greater Temple will never pass away. It will form a permanent habitation of the Spirit because the love and loyalty of every member of the Temple will have been proven beyond doubt in the working years. God will be its light forever. *“For the Lord hath chosen Zion (the true church) He hath desired it for his habitation. This is my rest forever, here will I dwell; for I have desired it”* (Psalm 132. 13-14).

God will be its light forever, each stone glowing with individual distinction with the glory received from him, everyone a temple of the Temple, as every shining leaf is a part of a living tree. A life dedicated to the sacred purpose of God is more than a cleansed and separated life. It must go on to its final destiny, *“Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ let us go on unto perfection”* (Heb. 6.1).

It has already been seen that faith, tools, skill, persistent labour and determined effort, with the

conditions at hand, form the material and equipment from which a possible future glory may be carved. Now comes the force, the driving power of a Divine energy, an unabating vigour, a passionate zeal for the bringing to perfection of the pattern shown by God in his Son (Heb. 12.3). The same force which fills the life will also empty it; *“the love of God has been diffused in our hearts through that Holy Spirit which has been given us”* (Rom. 5.5. *Diaglott*). The power of this Spirit has been likened to a wind, energising, quickening, driving all before it. The dead wood, the stagnant vapours, the frail fabric, the worn-out rags of all that previously composed life, must flee, be scattered, before the fresh unsullied vigour. To the heart whose gates are wide open to meet it, willing that all things should be made new, it rushes in with flood-force, sweeping out the silted up channels of thought and feeling, clearing the vision, deepening the capacity to receive and use its living waters (John 7. 38-9). Again, that Spirit burns and glows as a living fire, an illuminating flame, presenting to the mind a vision of the invisible, supplying the might that can cast aside hindrances, which can be gloriously ruthless in treading upon natural desires, making them ends by which the eternal vision may be realised. The prophets of old knew this burning force within them, urging them on to speak with courage and clarity the things seen and received by its medium. Jesus receiving of its fulness, was utterly consumed with zeal until He had accomplished man's instruction and redemption.

So Paul says *“Quench not the spirit”*. Do nothing to dim or dampen or obstruct this full, free-flowing force by which God transforms human life, making living stones into a glowing torch of light and life in a dark and dying world. Unless the stones glow now with the radiance of his love they will not glow hereafter. The stones of the old temple were hewn in underground quarries and there shaped and dressed. When the time came for assembling and fitting them together, they were moved into place without sound of hammer or any other tool (1. Kings 6. 7). The mason's work had been accomplished. No later touch was added or needed. They were wrought in secret and so beautifully did they fit together, each in its appointed place, that the thinnest blade could not be thrust between them.

The living stones are also wrought in the secret places of the earth. Whatever they will be here-

after they must be now for no alterations will be made on the heavenly site. There will be no cutting, chiselling or polishing there. The environment alone will be changed when the earthly tabernacle is dissolved and the living stone slips silently into place.

How important and necessary it is that the fulness of God shall fill, that Christ must dwell, that the powerful energy of the Spirit shall preside over this life-work without let or hindrance! How careful and prayerful must be the life of one who is not disobedient to the heavenly vision! Jesus found it all joy to be about his Father's business, even his meat and drink to do what the Father required of him. The life which cannot be full time employed in Christian work can be fully engaged in the Father's business, doing his will in daily life, serving him in the daily round, being conformed to his likeness by daily experience, exhibiting his Spirit in daily contacts. A mind so attuned to the heavenly places will absorb the Spirit's holy influence as the earth drinks in the sun and rain sending them out again in the flower and fruit of life. This filling with the fulness of God through constant association by prayer, study, meditation, fellowship and lofty thought, is the fulfilling of the Father's purpose. By such means He is shown forth to the world through his people, even by the imperfect flesh revealing a little of his perfections. All the graces of Divine love, engraven upon the pliant heart, expressing something of the heavenly origin, in word, in tone, in look, in deed, glorify God and add to the enduring beauty of his workmanship. How keen, how patient, how intent, should they be who have put their hand to this noble task, who have, by solemn dedication of the will put their hand into his hand that they might be transformed, that He may be shown in such a fashion that others may be won to him.

No work goes on its way unhindered. Life produces many a snag and the human element experiences many a slump. Bunyan's pilgrim was acquainted with the Slough of Despond. Enthusiasm is sometimes bogged down in some personal quagmire. A spiritual weariness arises, a dissatisfaction with what appears to be a lean period of ineffectual effort. Remembering former pleasures of vigorous faith and action, the impeded worker is apt to sigh like poor afflicted Job, "Oh that I were as in months past". The evidence of a lively Christian experience seems lost. Peace of mind, abounding joy, zealous activity, a desire for prayer and study have died down. There is little taste for spiritual things. Life becomes tiresome and the conduct of

fellow-beings is viewed with a jaundiced eye.

Causes of such a decline are many. A lack of self-discipline, a temporary walking after the flesh, a lack of spiritual exercise, may be responsible for the lowering of tone, the languid mind and the dwindling energies. It may be some form of idolatry, the affections being pre-occupied with the things of earth. The self-righteousness which exalts a heart in pride instead of bending it at the throne of God is another reason why work is halted when it looks most promising. A wistful sigh for happier days is not a cure. When the fire burns low and life loses its driving power, then is the time to seek an interview with the Master-builder. To him, the ailing labourer must state his case without reserve, in humility and hope. The contrite are always revived and replenished, for a gracious God is more willing to give the energy of his power than his co-workers are eager to receive its stimulating force.

Then there are those who also feel with Job in their afflictions, "My purposes are broken off" (Job. 17.11). The bright promise of useful ministry is suddenly smitten, the life laid aside. All appears useless and lost. Hopes are dashed. There seems no answer to the strange frustration. When Michael Angelo found the stone for 'The Boy David' statue, it was lying abandoned and spoiled by unskilful cutting. Patiently, the great artist fashioned the stone so that the defects of its early accident are not visible. Mistaken zeal can put all its energies to the work of a system, give its allegiance and devotion to men or a movement, when God requires the power of living and loving to be spent upon the Gospel as above and beyond party—to Christ as above and beyond all men however talented their ministry. Teaching, preaching and the organised activity of societies are means employed to one great end, the spiritual perfection of the dedicated mind and will. Even Jesus rejected the commendation of the young man who sought eternal life—"Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one—that is, God" (Matt. 19.17).

Throughout his life and ministry it was God He revealed to men, God He honoured and glorified in his work, and the presence of God He sought as the crown of his joy (John 17.4-5). So God-likeness and the fulness of joy in his presence are the ultimate endeavour and end of all labour and experience. "For while one saith, I am of Paul, another of Apollos, are ye not carnal? Ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building . . . All ye are Christ's and Christ is God's" (1 Cor. 3.21-23).

The natural heart, prone to love and admire

most what can be seen and heard, needs often the reminder that—

"The letter fails, the system falls and every symbol wanes,

The spirit over-brooding all, eternal love remains."
(Whittier)

The impetuous, eager enthusiasm which would bind itself to creeds, causes and leaders, must sometimes be separated from an activity which would unwittingly separate it from its true goal of repose in God, that his holiness may be etched upon the living stone of a loyal devotion. Though the outward activity may cease, the inner work of the Spirit never ceases until that likeness is wrought which nothing and none can deface or destroy. True Christian enthusiasm is neither parochial in its outlook nor partisan in its adherence to the purpose of God, seeing all issues from the "breadth and length, the depth and height" of his eternal purpose. They who glow with its life-giving force will make progress. They will go on from 'strength to strength'. In any natural employment the worker tires, going from strength to weakness and weariness, but the workers with God, receiving of the energy of him who never wearies, are enabled to go on to the end of life with a freshness of faith and a perennial vigour which adds 'glory to glory' to the Spirit's work.

The frosts of many winters may crown the head which, in youthful ardour, first bowed before God in consecration. There may be slower action. The hot hasty zeal, the elated daring of earlier days has given place to mature thought, to wise consideration, to the calm courage of

deliberate action. But the grasp of truth is keener, the determination set fast, the faith strong, the trust unshakeable. The desire remains, ardent as ever, to diffuse the knowledge and love of God, to win souls to him through the Saviour's love and sacrifice for man. There will be a beauty about the whole person, a glow from within, shining without, which touches word, look and action with "the wisdom which cometh from above", with the compassionate gentleness of him who called the weary to his side, and the healing sanity which freed men from sin and gave to them a right mind. It will be the halo of a holy life, unheeded by its wearer but carried away from the long intercourse with the Temple-builder. His Spirit will be shown through the people of his purpose that the perfections of his love may be known among men.

On every stone of note the mason leaves a mark. On royal property it is the mark of royal ownership. In his vision, John saw the angel with the seal of the living God. He saw the fabric of society held together until that royal mark had been set upon every living stone (Rev. 7.2-4). Paul also, looking upon that royal edifice, wrote to Timothy, "*the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, the Lord knoweth them that are his*" (2 Tim. 2.19).

"Who would faint while such a prospect urges on to faithfulness

Look not at the things beside thee, those behind thee have no worth

Let the glorious hope before thee, fill thy heart with rapturous mirth."

The End.

"LIFE"

Oh, shed no bitter tears upon my dust,
When the Dark Angel comes, as come he must,
For I shall be with him in Whom I trust.

Nor shall my work for him be ever done,
For, far beyond the setting of the sun
Awaits a task that hath not yet begun.

Nor can be, till this tenement decay,
Turning again unto its primal clay,
And to a fitting house I wend my way.

With what a glory shall the morning glow,
When I have left this fading scene below,
And with swift feet to my own mansion go.

Much of my labour here was done in pain,
So great the effort, and so scant the gain,
Yet, by Thy grace, some fragment may remain;

Some feet, now marching in the path of right,
Some eyes, now open to the Heavenly Light,
Some wings, once folded, that are now in flight

Yet, Lord, Thou knowest I am weak and old.
Still keep my heart from ever growing cold,
Or being, in Thy service over-bold

This, at the last doth grieve my spirit sore,
This, now above all else I now deplore,
I have not loved my fellow-pilgrims more!

(T.H.D.)

AN OFFERING FOR SIN A doctrinal essay

"When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed." (Isa. 53.10).

Strange, mysterious words; a tale of sacrifice and death on the one hand, and of new life upon the other. Seed that is to arise out of an altar-offering given for sin! Small wonder that the full significance of this scripture can be appreciated only by a clear understanding of the Divine Plan. And yet we must pause, and linger over the haunting beauty of these words, and picture in our minds all that the offerings for sin meant to the pious Israelite, if we are to draw from this theme the guidance for daily life which it can afford.

The Day of Atonement offerings symbolise the process by which our Lord recovers the world from sin and the consequences of sin; in a word, the work of reconciliation. The Ransom is the giving of the *anti-lutron*, the corresponding price. That forms the essential basis upon which the work of reconciliation can go forward and without which reconciliation cannot be made. For the Church, that work is effected during the Gospel Age, the present time, and for mankind generally it will be effected during the Millennial Age, the day of the yet future Kingdom of God upon earth. In this connection it should be borne in mind that whereas in this Age our Lord Jesus Christ himself reconciles his disciples to God, in the future Age these same disciples are to be associated with him in the work of world reconciliation and will themselves be the missionaries of that Age, or, as Paul designates them, "the ministry of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5. 18).

Since the Day of Atonement ritual pictures the process of the removal of sin from the world, it follows that the works of the First Advent, the Gospel Age, and the Millennial Age must all find place in the ceremonies, covering the whole period until the time that sin has been utterly removed, never to return. The "offerings for sin" occupy the central position in these ceremonies.

The fundamental idea underlying the offering of slain sacrifices is that of giving life to God to be used again for the renewal of life in the world. This idea is met with in every type of pagan religion where sacrifice is made, a survival from the days when mythology and polytheism developed out of mankind's originally clear knowledge of the true God. The sacrifices instituted by Moses were no exception to this

rule; he declared, under Divine direction, that "*the blood is the life thereof*" (Deut. 12. 13; Lev. 17. 11, 14) and the sprinkling of the blood of the offering in the Most Holy quite definitely symbolised the offering of life to God, that new life might come to the people. Primitive races sacrificed their chiefs and kings when they grew old in the belief that their powers and vitality would be passed on to their successors in the leadership of the tribe. The Canaanites burnt their first-born children to Moloch that the life thus given up might reappear again in enhanced vitality of the people and the land. Even the Israelites were occasionally guilty of this latter abomination and had to be prohibited its practice, as in Jeremiah "*and they have built the high places of Tophet, which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and daughters in the fire, which I commanded them not, neither came it into my heart*" (Jer. 7.31).

The Apostle says "*Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin*" (Heb. 9.22). Sin cannot be overcome and its consequences nullified, the man reconciled to God, without the offering of life, which in itself involves death, the shedding of blood. God's call to Abraham to offer up his son Isaac on Mount Moriah, and the substitution at the last minute of a ram caught in the thicket is an example of this principle. The writer to the Hebrews says that Abraham accounted God able to raise Isaac from the dead (Heb. 11.9), as though he could use that sacrificed life again in giving new life to the world, for Abraham knew that it must be and could only be through Isaac that the world could be blessed (Gen. 17.19). The virtue of the sacrifice lay not in the act of slaying the victim, but in that the life thus released from earthly restraints and interests, and given into Divine keeping, is used by God, and this is precisely the principle underlying our Lord's human life from Jordan to Calvary, and of every life that in this Age is utterly consecrated to Divine service to the exclusion of human interests.

The Day of Atonement ceremonies illustrate this principle. The place of offering was the "mercy-seat" in the Most Holy of the Tabernacle. The bullock, without blemish, was slain and consumed by fire on the Brasen Altar in the Court, and its blood taken by the High Priest beyond the Veil into the Most Holy, there to be sprinkled upon the Ark of the Covenant. This ritual was the solemn offering of life to God,

and since the bullock had been slain as representing, and in lieu of, the High Priest, the act was equivalent to the High Priest having formally offered his own life to God. But there is much more in this ritual than the mere act of dying. For some time longer the choice parts of the slain bullock were burning upon the Brazen Altar in the Court within full sight of the attendant priests, and the remainder of the carcass was dragged forth and burned outside the Camp of Israel (Lev. 16.27) in the sight of all people. For a perceptible period of time, therefore, this Sin-offering was being offered in a fashion known and perceived of all men until all was reduced to ashes. Not until that point was reached was the "offering for sin" completed.

This slow consuming of life wholly devoted to God foreshadowed the earthly life of Jesus, during the three and a half years between Jordan and Calvary. It was at Jordan that He said "*Lo I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me), to do thy will, O God*" (Heb. 10.7). At Calvary He uttered the words "*It is finished*" and "*bowed his head and gave up the spirit*" (John 19.20). It was the Sin-offering that was finished at that moment; the last remains of the antitypical bullock were there and then reduced to ashes in the sight of the Roman centurion and the bystanders. At that same moment the Ransom was given, the work of an instant, Jesus Christ dying on the cross "*the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God*" (1 Pet. 3.18).

The necessity for this "Sin-offering" lies in the fact that the ransoming of men from the power of the grave and restoring them to conscious life does not of itself transform them into sinless beings who can be expected never again to transgress the laws of God. Every man, coming back "in his own order" (1 Cor. 15.23) will be free from the Adamic death sentence but will have still the effects of his former life with which to contend, and in the case of many human beings it will be a long, toilsome journey away from the thralldom and power of sin to the full liberty of the sons of God (Rom. 8.21). The Ransom will restore all such to conscious life, as it is written "*For to this end Jesus both died, and rose, and revived, that He might be Lord both of the dead and living*" (Rom. 14.9) but a continuing work is needed with them before they can be presented faultless before the Heavenly Father. And this is where the *life* of Jesus of Nazareth, as distinct from his *death*, plays its part. The writer to the Hebrews says that "*In all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God to make reconciliation (i.e., a sin-offering) for the*

sins of the people" (Heb. 2.17). The teachings of Jesus; the works of Jesus; the wondrous influence of Jesus; that marvellous power which radiated from his devoted life and drew men to follow him; all this, involving so much of sacrifice and consecration on his part, even unto death, has, in a manner totally incomprehensible to our finite minds, engendered a potent dynamic force which has been operating throughout this Age for the spiritual life and sustenance of his own disciples, the Church, and will operate during the next Age in a similar fashion toward the world.

"*The bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world*" (John 6. 51). These are no idle words; they are the expression of a great truth. When the sick woman touched Jesus, He knew that vitality had gone out from him (Luke 8.46). How it comes about we know not; what unknown influences are at work we can only guess; what we do know is that in a very real sense the consecrated life of Jesus upon earth, spent wholly and completely in the service of his Father, was becoming transformed into a reservoir of creative, life-giving energy "for the life of the world". And in all subsequent days both in this Age and the next the fruits of Jesus' life on earth have been and will be the means of imparting new strength, new incentive, new life, to men and women recovered from death by virtue of the Ransom, and brought back to full reconciliation with God by virtue of the Sin-Offering.

This then is the Scriptural truth pictured in olden times by the bullock on the Day of Atonement. But the story does not end there.

When Jesus was upon earth, He invited men to follow in his steps and to associate themselves with him to such degree that it could be truthfully said they were taking up their crosses and following him to crucifixion. "*Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me*" (Mark 8.34). The sayings of Jesus and the teachings of the Apostles regarding this self-denial and whole-hearted devotion to Jesus at the cost of ordinary earthly interests and advantages are so numerous in the New Testament and so well known that there is no need to recount them in detail. Suffice it to say that instructed Christians do know perfectly well that such a call to consecration of life and abilities to the Divine service is invited and encouraged in the teachings of Christ. Now this call to consecration is something quite apart from the general message of God's plan for mankind in the coming Kingdom, also preached by Jesus. Briefly put, God proposes the conversion of mankind in general during the next Age, the

Millennial Age, but invites those who will respond to his leading to give themselves in complete dedication of life to him in this Age, the Gospel Age, that they might be his representatives and ambassadors in the world now, and his ministers and missionaries to mankind then.

Now the noteworthy thing about this invitation to dedication of life, or "consecration," borrowing the word from the Levitical ceremonies, is that the subsequent life, conduct, and mission of the consecrated disciple is of precisely the same character as was the earthly life of our Lord. "As he is, so are we in this world" (1 John 4. 17). In every manner—except in the execution of the supreme purpose for which Jesus came into the world, the giving of a "Ransom for all" (1 Tim. 2. 6)—we as his disciples are associated closely with Jesus. His mission was to preach the Gospel of the Kingdom; so is ours. His work was to do good to all men; so is ours. His aim and purpose was to banish sin and reconcile men to God, leaving them perfect and flawless in God's sight; that aim is ours. We are called to follow in his steps and to be identified in every respect with all that He does. To such an extent is this true that the promise to all such "overcomers" is that upon the completion of their earthly experiences and training they will be raised to reign with Christ, to sit with him on his throne, and to reign over the earth in association with him, for the conversion and blessing of mankind, as a queen might reign jointly with a king (Rev. 3.21).

It follows therefore that the earthly lives of all the members of Christ's Church are offered to God in precisely the same way that the life of Jesus between Jordan and Calvary was offered to God, and that this offering is maintained until it is ended by death. It cannot be claimed that the *effectiveness* of that offering, even of the entire Church of all ages, can be placed on a level with that of our Lord. Nevertheless God looks upon the motives of the heart, and reflects, as did Jesus in speaking of the widow who cast her two mites into the Temple treasury, "they have done what they could". And because those heart motives have been sincere and those consecrated lives have been spent to the very end in Divine service and the discharge of the Divine mission, God is able to make use of those offered lives in his future work. *Because* the offering of the corporate Church of this Age has been acceptable to God, He can use that corporate Church, in its resurrected spiritual state, as a storehouse of spiritual power which will play its part in the regeneration of the world.

It is this that is shown in the second Levitical ceremony on the Day of Atonement. After the

bullock had been offered and the sprinkling of its blood upon the mercy-seat had won Divine acceptance, a goat was brought forward to the priests. This goat was treated in exactly similar fashion to the bullock. There was no difference whatever, the only essential being that the bullock must first have been offered and accepted. Once the blood of the bullock had been sprinkled upon the mercy-seat, that of the goat could and did follow it and was acceptable to God for his purpose.

In past times, believing that these ceremonies merely pictured the *death* of Christ upon the cross, expositors were forced to the conclusion that this ritual with the goat pictured the same thing as did that with the bullock but from a different aspect. This was an explanation offered to fit the situation. Reasoning back from the New Testament teaching now understood concerning the difference between the call of the Church and the hope of the world, a knowledge which earlier expositors did not possess, it seems clear that, just as the offering of the bullock pictured the consecrated offering of Jesus' life between Jordan and Calvary, so the offering of the goat which followed pictured the identical offering of the consecrated life of the corporate Church during this Gospel Age.

The typical ceremony is very fitting here. The goat is a vastly inferior animal to the bullock and in the ceremony its value as an offering would bear no comparison with the bullock, which was the offering *par excellence*. (This is shown by the sentiment expressed in Psa. 51.19, where the Psalmist, seeking for a simile to express the superiority of man's Millennial Age devotion over that of any other time in world history declares ecstatically "Then shall they offer *bullocks* upon thine altar"). Then the goat is said to be a sin-offering for "the people," i.e., all Israel, as distinct from the bullock, which was for Aaron and his house, the priesthood (Lev. 16.11). In this manner is shown the fact, borne out by New Testament teaching, that the force and influence of Jesus' earthly life and teaching has been effective primarily for the Church, the "Royal Priesthood" and that the world in general, those who know not God, have been largely uninfluenced by it. The time is yet to come, however, when the world will come under the influence and power of that life of devotion, but it will be through the medium of the glorified Church and be illustrated to the world by the lives' devotion of the members of that Church. Men will "by your good works which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation" (1 Pet. 2.12). It may be a correct view of the matter, then, to say that just as the

life of Jesus has provided a power which has influenced, guided and vitalised the "Royal Priesthood" of this Age to follow its calling and walk in his footsteps even unto death, so the inspiration and example of the course of the corporate Church in this Age, added to the inspiration and example of Christ's life, provides a spiritual power or dynamic which will be a potent force for the reconciliation of all men in the next Age.

In this great offering for sin, therefore, this process by means of which life, with all its possibilities, is offered to God to be used in the world's reconciliation, both Jesus and his church have their respective parts to play. In neither instance does any consideration of the Ransom, the deliverance of mankind from death and the power of the grave, enter into the matter. That is an entirely different aspect of God's plan of salvation, one in which our Lord is the only One, the all-sufficient One, concerned. But after the Ransom has been given, and the way is open for reconciliation, then appears the sphere in which the Sin-offering can operate. The fruits of

the earthly life of Jesus, and the fruits of the earthly lives of his consecrated followers, freely bestowed upon the world to guide them to reconciliation with God, will be evident in that day when all the sin that is in all the world will be as it were loaded up and removed far away from the habitation of men so that it can never return.

That aspect of the subject lies beyond the scope of this study. The consuming of sin-offerings upon the altar ends with the close of the Gospel Age, and after that time there is no more any sprinkling of blood upon the antitypical "mercy-seat". The "bullock for a sin-offering" and the "goat for a sin-offering" will have been offered and consumed; there remains to be accomplished the literal removal of sin from the hearts and lives of men, by the writing of Divine law in their hearts and their intelligent conversion from sin and reconciliation to God, and this is the purpose and the object of the Kingdom of God upon earth.

PARCHED GROUND TO BECOME A POOL (Isaiah. 35)

The Soviet Union has an ambitious plan to change the climate and increase the productivity of Central Asia by diverting certain Siberian rivers, which at present flow northward into the Arctic ocean, southward through a new giant canal 1500 miles long so that they flow into the Aral sea and other new seas to be formed. This could be the greatest irrigation scheme ever carried out on the earth. The plan is envisaged to be completed before the end of the century.

Naturally there is criticism from the west. It is suggested by experts that the result will be the melting of the Arctic ice with dire consequences to western Europe, which will, it is said, be "wrapped in continuous fog" and turned into a desert. Additionally the temperature of the oceans would, it is suggested, rise by 25 degrees centigrade; which would certainly make the water rather too hot for swimming! But there is usually undue alarm expressed when a new proposal of this kind is mooted, especially if it emanates from Russia. It is well established on the authority of experienced climatologists that there was no Arctic ice between the 4th and 10th centuries of this Christian era; during that time the Danes discovered and colonised Green-

land, so named because of its fertility, and there was no ice there then. And none of the dire results now predicted appear to have smitten the world at that time. In fact that period is known as the "secondary climatic optimum", in that world weather was warmer and more genial than at any time since about 3000 BC, the time of the Flood.

The interest in all this to the Bible student is that this is just the kind of thing that will be characteristic of the coming Millennial Age when men will happily collaborate together in such enterprises to increase the fertility and productiveness of the earth, and so fulfil the ancient prophecy which says that "*the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose . . . in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert*". "*And the parched ground shall become a pool*" (Isa. 35.1, 7). There should be no cause for complaint if it should eventually be found that the Soviet Union has been fulfilling prophecy a little in advance. The experience gained should be very useful to men faced with similar problems in other parts of the globe in the coming Age.

God is not sparing in his riches, He gives not a trickle but a torrent. As his power is great, so is his grace. (2 Cor. 9-8).

Would you have fellowship with the Father? You will be sure to find him within the precincts of his holy house.

ARISTARCHUS

He is mentioned only five times in the New Testament, casually, as though he was of no particular importance. Yet reading between the lines, and noting how close he seemed to be to the Apostle Paul, it may well be concluded that Aristarchus was a stalwart character who played a relatively significant role in the busy missionary activities of the great Apostle.

He is first mentioned in the story of the riot at Ephesus (Acts 19) when, in company with a fellow-worker, Gaius, he was hurried into the amphitheatre by the irate citizens, angered at the threat posed to their goddess Diana by the faith preached by these men. It is said there that they were Paul's "companions in travel"; from a reference in Acts 20.4 it emerges that Aristarchus hailed from Thessalonica in Greece. It is likely therefore that the two men first met when Paul came to Thessalonica during the course of his second missionary journey (following the dream of the man calling him to "come over into Macedonia and help us": Acts 16.9; 17.1), some five or six years previously. Paul's party at that time included Timothy, Silas, and Luke. It is very possible that before leaving Greece for Ephesus Aristarchus had given up his occupation in Thessalonica and thrown in his lot with the Apostle.

Does this mean that as a completely new convert he was prepared thus to share the itinerant and arduous life of those who travelled with Paul preaching the gospel of the kingdom? It could have been so, but would Paul on the other hand have been likely to accept an untried man, still new in the faith, for so important a duty? In a similar situation he chose and accepted Timothy at Lystra (Acts 16.1) only after the local Christian communities had given him a glowing report as to the young man's qualities, and he had known the faith long enough to have become reasonably mature. It might well have been that something of the same was the case with Aristarchus. It is true that the church at Thessalonica was founded by Paul on the occasion of his first visit, but the tone of the narrative, "*some of them (the Jews) believed . . . a great multitude of the Greeks . . . of the chief women not a few*" seems to indicate a readiness to believe and organise into a community separate from the synagogue which could imply that many of them already knew of and had accepted much of the Christian gospel prior to Paul's visit, perhaps without separating from the synagogue,

and it only needed the coming of the Apostle and the clearer light he could shed on the elements of the faith to induce the formation of the Thessalonian church. It might well have been that one or more citizens of Thessalonica — perhaps Aristarchus himself — had been at Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost and heard the Apostles preach, and taken the news back with them. It is not beyond the bounds of possibility that Aristarchus was already partially instructed in the faith, already a partial believer in Christ, when Paul met him, and that the Apostle, recognising some sterling qualities in this man, invited him a couple of years later to join him. So when the third missionary journey was in progress this stalwart Greek found himself working with Timothy, Silas and Luke.

The next mention of Aristarchus is about a year later. After the riot at Ephesus, Paul had gone back to Greece, revisiting the churches he had founded during his second missionary journey, and after six months or so set out for what was destined to be his last visit to Jerusalem, from where he was sent to Rome. Quite a party accompanied him on this occasion, and Aristarchus was one of the party (Acts 20.4). Most of them left Paul at various points on the ensuing journey, in the interests of various commissions and duties, but when at last Paul arrived at Jerusalem Aristarchus was still with him, together with Luke and Trophimus at least. He had now been a companion in travel to Paul for something like five years.

There followed Paul's two years imprisonment at Caesarea under Felix and then his voyage to Rome. Aristarchus was still with him. Luke relates in Acts 27.2 that when the ship set sail from Caesarea "*Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, was with us*". Luke's own sterling loyalty to Paul, and his unfailing refusal to leave his friend no matter what vicissitudes or misfortunes may befall, is well known. It is not so easily realised that Aristarchus also displayed much the same characteristics, and was with Paul almost as long as was Luke.

With Luke, he shared Paul's two years imprisonment at Rome. This we know from Paul's letter to the Colossians (ch. 4.10) in which he says "*Aristarchus my fellow prisoner saluteth you, and Marcus*" (Mark). The latter, it is known, made his own way to Rome and spent some time there with the Apostle during those two years. The reference to "fellow-prisoner"

probably only means that Aristarchus had voluntarily elected to stay with the Apostle while he was detained in Rome. A round dozen or more, from Greece and Asia, came and went at various times during that two years, but Aristarchus and Luke were there all the time. Another greeting from both these stalwarts appears in the epistle to Philemon (Philem. 24) at about the same time and that is the last that is definitely stated of Aristarchus. Still with the Apostle, still waiting to know what the Roman authorities were going to do, still preaching the gospel in Rome.

When, at the end of the two years, Paul was acquitted and free to go where he liked, what happened to Aristarchus? Of those who visited Rome during this period the subsequent movements of all can be accounted for except those of Aristarchus. All others, except Luke, left Rome for various Greek and Asian churches. Luke accompanied Paul wherever he went during the ensuing five or six years of which nothing is recorded and was with him when we are able to pick up the thread again. The logical inference is that Aristarchus stayed with him also. If in fact Paul did occupy that silent six years with a missionary tour through Spain, Gaul and Britain, which is the most likely hypothesis, then these two were his companions in that tour. When Paul comes again into sight he is journeying through Dalmatia and Illyricum and Greece, thence across Macedonia to Berea, voyaging to Crete and back to Nicopolis on the west coast for the winter. (1 Tim. 1.3; Titus 3. 12) then through Berea, Thessalonica and

Philippi to Troas, where he was arrested for the second time. From there he was taken to Rome, but now only Luke was with him. The implication is that Aristarchus was left in one of the Greek communities—probably his old home at Thessalonica — at Paul's request, to serve the interests of the faith, and that is as far as logical inference can trace him.

He was a constant companion of and fellow-worker with the Apostle Paul for something like thirteen years, sharing with him the toils and trials of the way, steadfast in his chosen mission of declaring the good tidings of Christ. Luke was the only one who could claim a longer period of companionship with Paul; he joined Paul several years before the other man came on the scene and remained with Paul until the Apostle's death. There must have been a special friendship between these two; they were both Greeks, they both owed their enlightenment to Paul, they both travelled with him more consistently than any others, more so even than Mark or Timothy, both of whom had other pastoral charges to administer at different times in their careers. His biography, had it been written, would surely have been of absorbing interest to all who realise what a debt is owed to these stalwarts of the middle First Century who, with Paul their acknowledged leader, blazed the trail of Christianity for us to follow. As it is, all we can do is raise our hands in salute to that hardy soul whom we only know in Luke's words as "Aristarchus, a Macedonian, of Thessalonica".

HOLINESS AND SERVICE

"If a man cleanse himself he shall be a vessel unto honour sanctified, meet for the Master's use, prepared unto every good work". You cannot have the law of service more clearly or beautifully laid down. A vessel of honour, one which the King will delight to honour by use, must be a vessel cleansed from all defilement of the flesh and the spirit. Only then can it be a sanctified vessel, possessed and indwelt by God's Holy Spirit. So it becomes meet for the Master's use. Holiness is essential to service. The will of God must first live in us, if it is to be done by us.

In Scripture whatever bore the name of holy had a use and a purpose. The holy angels, the holy prophets and apostles, the holy Scriptures, all bore the title as having been sanctified for the service of God . . . we can only serve as we are holy. Holiness is essential to effective service. The more of holiness, the greater the fitness for service; the more there is of true holiness, the more there is of God, and the more true and deep is the entrance He has had into the soul so the more complete is the hold He has on the

soul to use it in his service.

Note the connection between "sanctified" and "meet for the Master's use". True holiness is being possessed by God, true service being used by God. True service is being yielded up for the Master to use. Then the Holy Spirit is the agent and we are the instruments of his will. Such service is holiness.

How many weary workers have spent their strength more in the outer court of work and service, than in the inner life of fellowship and faith. They have never understood that only as the Master gets possession of them, as the Holy Spirit has them at his disposal, can He use them, can they have true power. The way to have God's power in us is for ourselves to be in his power. God may appear to keep the door closed against your working for him in the way you would wish. Still, let it be a matter settled between God and the soul that your longing for holiness is that you may be filled for him to use.

(Andrew Murray 19th Cent.)

JOY TRIUMPHANT

"And they worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; and were continually in the Temple, praising and blessing God. Amen." (Luke 24. 52-53).

That was the foundation of the Christian Church!

A handful of men and women, quite ordinary men and women, subject to the same failings and weaknesses as are we ourselves, initiated and commenced the building up of the most wonderful society the world has ever known—the Christian society. They discovered a power which enabled them to brave the most intense opposition and endure the most incredible hardships without ever losing the happiness and joy for which they became proverbial among their enemies. They underwent experiences that ought by ordinary standards to have made them the most miserable of people and yet by the testimony of their opponents as well as of themselves they were of all men the most happy. True to the words of their departed Leader, their sorrow had been turned into joy and their joy no man could take from them. Where did they get it from?

It started on that memorable day when a few of them watched their dearly loved Lord ascend before their very eyes into the heavens. The time past had been one of sorrow and grief, doubt and perplexity. They had believed that this Jesus whom they had followed and in whom they had put their trust were indeed he that should deliver Israel. They had been so certain they had found him of whom Moses and the prophets did write. Then came a time when they were not so sure, when like John the Baptist, long since laid to rest in his grave, they wanted to ask "Art thou he that should come, or look we for another?" Then there had been that crushing blow, the arrest and death of their Master. That had put an end to everything. All their lives' hopes and all their expectations for the future had been pinned on this gracious figure that had come into their lives, and now those hopes and expectations had all been dashed and shattered, and life no longer held any meaning or offered any purpose. God had forgotten to be gracious and turned his face away from those who served him; so it had seemed; but then had come that wonderful happening on the third day that, despite its mystery and the measure of perplexity to which it had given rise, had rekindled their hope and faith and planted their feet once more upon the path which had led

them to this position of joy which now they occupied. It was Jesus, their Jesus, back again from the dead, present with them as of old, and yet not in just the same old way. There was a difference, a difference none of them could define or explain, but nothing of that mattered in the light of this glorious realisation that had come to them. Jesus was theirs; He had indeed come as the prophets had promised; nothing could ever happen to alter that one inescapable fact. The days of waiting, of hoping, of expecting, of longing, were all in the past. *Jesus had come!* The powers of evil might rage and manifest their fury as indeed they were doing but that did not matter. *Jesus had come*, and the days of evil were numbered. True, Jesus had gone away again, into the skies, and the magic of his voice and his touch no longer thrilled their earthly senses, but of what consequence was that? *Jesus had come*, and life henceforward held a joy and a confidence that coloured everything in the world with brighter hue than ever before had been known.

They returned to Jerusalem with great joy because they knew that even although Jesus had left this world to return to his Father, his presence was still with them and would always be with them. In the power of that knowledge, and in the inspiration of that abiding presence, this handful of men and women went out in joy and gladness and conquered the world. In less than six generations a thousand years of Roman paganism, backed by all the might and power of a world-wide empire, was crashing to its ruin before them.

We do well to heed the characteristics of this primitive Christian community. There is something here that we need in our own Christian lives and our own Christian fellowship, something that we must have if we are successfully to challenge the new paganism of our day which has so much in common with that of ancient Rome. It must be with more than passing interest that we turn again to the story of those few earnest disciples making their way back to Jerusalem from the slopes of the Mount of Olives. And as we go once again over the well-known story we are impressed by the fact that the faith by which we live began, on that memorable day, in five things:—blessing, worship, joy, praise and thanksgiving. Those five manifestations of the human spirit in its stand before God are vital. First of all there is blessing; not only the blessing of God coming upon his people

just as the blessing of Jesus came upon the few disciples standing before him on Olivet, but the consecrated, devoted attitude receptive to blessing. On our part we need to be in the condition of heart that has faith in the coming of the blessing, stands ready to receive the blessing, and rightly appreciates and esteems the conferred blessing. The Lord our God will bless us; of that there is no doubt, on the authority of his Holy Word; but we must needs be open and amenable to receive the blessing, apply it to ourselves and make manifest its fruits in our lives.

Secondly comes worship. They worshipped him after receiving his blessing and before returning to Jerusalem. Worship is a vitally important thing in the life of the Christian. We do not esteem it as we should. God is not pleased with thousands of slain sacrifices and ten thousands of rivers of oil. He asks for our own heart's devotion and that we render to him in outwardly ceremonial fashion when we come to worship him. It is not necessarily that we must go into some great and ornate building to render our worship, nor join with some mighty congregation and well-drilled choir. *"Our fathers worshipped in this mountain,"* said the woman at the well, *"and ye say that in Jerusalem is where men ought to worship"*. *"Believe me,"* said Jesus earnestly, *"the hour cometh when the true worshippers shall worship neither in this mountain nor yet at Jerusalem . . . for they that worship God must worship him in spirit and in truth; for God seeketh such to worship him"*. Nevertheless, there is much to give strength and encouragement in difficult times in the habit of meeting together for orderly and fervent worship. We are bidden not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together, and in that assembling we do well to worship him that made the sea and the dry land, in whose hands is the soul of every living thing and the breath of all mankind. Surely it must give pleasure to the heart of the Everlasting Father when his children assemble before him to yield him their worship. The Early Church were in no doubt about the matter; they gathered together often for worship and adoration and their lives were enriched thereby.

Thirdly, we travel the Christian way with joy. As the little group made its way back into the city it did so "with great joy". If that ascent into heaven which they had witnessed a few minutes previously had been construed by them as involving a parting there would hardly have been this atmosphere of outward, ebullient joy, so obvious as to be recorded by the historian many years later. The conclusion is irresistible that they did not picture Jesus as having left

them at all; He was still with them, only invisible, and He was going to be with them for the rest of their lives as they went about the fulfillment of his commission to preach the glorious gospel in all the world for a witness unto all nations, and make disciples, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever He had commanded them. No wonder they were joyful.

Joy leads to praise. It can hardly do otherwise. The joyful frame of mind can find its logical outlet only in one way; the giving of praise to God Who has given the cause of joy. So it comes about that the fourth element in this early enthusiasm was praise. They had gratefully received the blessing, they had worshipped, they had returned to Jerusalem with joy. Almost immediately they were found in the Temple, praising God. What more natural place could there be for them? Instinctively they went into the House of God to render praise to him for their great blessing. And they were there continually; this was not just an isolated act of worship, a formal acknowledgment to God of the privilege and power He had bestowed upon them. This was a condition of mind which could only be satisfied by an actual residence in the courts of God, an instinctive realisation that the outward environment should correspond so far as was possible with the inward thought of the mind. They were continually in the Temple because that was the right place for them, and they were continually praising and blessing God because they could do naught else.

That expression "blessing God" can only mean thanksgiving. The grace of gratitude must surely have some place in this account. Just as the child of joy is praise, so the child of praise is thanksgiving. After all the experiences, the heartaches, the disappointments and disillusionments of the past the disciples had now been ushered into a condition of conviction and certainty, and although they had been told that life would henceforth be hard for them—pitifully hard—yet they lifted up their voices with one accord and gave thanks to God.

Blessing; worship; joy; praise; thanksgiving. These five are the keynotes of Christianity, the hallmark of the Christian society, the evidences of Christian fellowship. *"The Kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but joy, righteousness and peace in the Holy Spirit."* The extent to which we as a fellowship of Christian believers neglect or lose these things is the extent to which we lose our usefulness to God and our standing before God. If Paul, having all knowledge, but without love, could be nothing more than sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal, how much more are we hollow and empty in the Lord's sight if,

despite all our knowledge and all our protestations of loyalty to him, we have not succeeded in preserving these things in our own communal life? If it was by the power of such things that the early Christians challenged the evil forces of their day, and triumphed, how can we expect to challenge and triumph in our turn without them?

The newly-won converts who gathered around the Apostles after Pentecost quickly found themselves absorbed into the same spirit. The influence of Olivet remained after Pentecost and coloured the whole life and outlook of the infant Church. "*And they, continuing daily with one accord in the Temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people.*" (Acts 2. 46-47). Here is worship, joy, praise and thanksgiving again, just as on the former occasion. The wonder and the magic of this new fellowship into which they had come was born out of these things—and with the loss of worship, joy, praise and thanksgiving, the wonder and magic goes out of the Christian calling. We must preserve these things and increase these things within us and in our midst if we are to abide a people fully exercising the wonderful privileges that are ours.

This then was the impelling power behind the marvellous achievements of the early Church; this the faith that enabled them to take joyfully the spoiling of their goods. It was their certainty, not that Christ *will* come, but that He *had* come, and that they were now engaged in a work of witness and in the building of a Church that could not have been commenced until He *had* come and could not be continued except by the power of his abiding presence. Their faith was rooted not so much in the promises of the future as in the events of the past. They believed in the coming of the Kingdom and in the Second Advent of their Lord; but the theme which was so often upon their lips and which formed the mainspring of their lives was that which is best defined in the words of Paul "*Remember ye the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said . . .*" They had seen the Lord; He had been with them and set them this commission to fulfil; true, He now was invisible, but they knew that He was with them. "*Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the Age*" He had said, and they believed him. It was because they believed him that his power, the power of the Holy Spirit, was in them and manifested itself through them. So the early Church grew and multiplied, and men began to take notice of this new force that had come into the world. A small provincial movement became a world-wide community;

what had seemed to be but a minor sect of Judaism developed into a universal Church.

That first primal impulse never left the Apostles throughout life. Peter, thirty-five years later, told his brethren "*we have not followed cunningly devised fables when we made known unto you the power and presence of our Lord Jesus, but were eye witnesses of his majesty*" (2 Pet. 1. 16). Peter saw no reason, at the end of his life, to retract the things he had said or disavow the vision he had seen in earlier days. True, he had progressed in knowledge as well as faith and doubtless there were many relics of his old Judaistic doctrinal beliefs that he had discarded as the years passed by and revealed the truths of the Gospel in clearer light. But he never lost sight of the one central fact that dominated his life; *Jesus had come*; and all that Peter was and hoped to be hinged upon that one inescapable fact.

Paul, at the end of *his* life, avowed to his son-in-the-faith Timothy "*I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded*" (2 Tim. 1. 12). There was no doubt about the matter in Paul's case either. He too, knew that Jesus had come, and appeared to him on the Damascus road, had commissioned him to take the Gospel to the Gentiles and laid upon him great sufferings for his Name's sake. Paul never wavered; the vision he received at the beginning remained with him and illuminated his course throughout life. The abiding spiritual presence of Jesus was a very real thing to Paul. "Whether we wake or sleep" he said "we live together with him".

The saintly John, last of all the Apostles, was not one whit behind his fellow-labourer in the constancy of his faith in this central fact. "*Abide in him*" he exhorted his spiritual children "*that when he shall appear, ye may have confidence and not be ashamed before him at his coming*" (1 John 2. 20). There is a subtle shade of meaning here surely. "When He shall appear (*epiphaneo*—be manifested as it were openly) ye shall not be ashamed before him at his coming" (*parousia*—presence). Does this mean that if we abide in him we may have the joy of being aware of his presence even before his open manifestation? That is the thought of many and it harmonises well with those other Scriptures that tell of his coming for his own silently and unobserved, before the world at large are aware of his Advent. But at any rate there is no doubt in John's mind that in the meantime, while as yet they are to wait for his coming, they may and must "abide in him". That demands a recognition of his spiritual presence with them "*even unto the end of the Age*" which is quite a differ-

ent thing from his invisible presence at the end of the Age.

This joy persisted as the first believers spread abroad and converted others "afar off" to the faith. Paul and Barnabas, leaving Antioch of Pisidia and going into Iconium to minister there "caused great joy unto the brethren" (Acts 15. 3). When the messengers from the conference of Jerusalem (Acts 15) returned to Antioch of Syria with the considered judgment of the Apostles and elders on the questions that had arisen for discussion, the Antioch brethren "rejoiced for the exhortation" (Acts 15.13). This Antioch Church, where the disciples first gained the name "Christians" was evidently the most virile and progressive of the churches of that day. It was so, because it had the spirit of joy; joy in the Lord, joy in the Truth, joy among the brethren; and one of the outgrowths of that joy was the sponsoring of missionaries to go out into Asia and spread the glad tidings. Missionary zeal has its birth and origin in joy. A sad and miserable community can never summon the zeal to go out and make converts to the Gospel of Christ; and if it did its Church life would probably repel the converts. It is the happiness and the spontaneity of the Christian good news that attracts men and women from a world that in Paul's day, as in ours, has little of either. That ought to be a pointer to us in our own endeavours to witness for the Master.

It was Nehemiah the zealous patriot who coined the immortal phrase "*the joy of the Lord is your strength*" (Neh. 8.10). He was calling his people then, as a certain famous statesman of our own day called our fellow-countrymen not so long since, to "blood and toil, tears and sweat", but added something that no statesman of this world, however far-sighted and vigorous, can give, "the joy of the Lord—your strength". We need to take that to ourselves

It is important correctly to understand the doctrine of co-operation. A disposition to co-operate is not more opposed to the sinful indolence which falls behind, than to the hasty and unrighteous zeal which runs before it. It is in the excess of zeal, which has a good appearance but in reality has unbelief and self at the bottom, that we run before God. Co-operation, by being calm and peaceable, does not cease to be efficacious. Souls in this purified but tranquil state are souls of power, watchful and triumphant against self; resisting temptation; fighting even to blood against sin.

also. The discouragements and disappointments and disillusionments of this our day, in this our Christian walk, are so great and forceful that we need a power in our lives able to withstand their assaults. That power is our possession of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of faith and of hope, and too, the Spirit of joy. Our joy in the Lord lightens the severity of our trials and illumines the darkness of the clouds. In that joy lies our strength, the ability to "*endure, as seeing him who is invisible*". In Nehemiah's time it was that spirit of joy, that joy in the Lord, which enabled his people to go forward to the building of a Temple and the creation of a nation. God grant that we realise, as did Nehemiah, that our strength is in our joy in the Lord. God grant that we take to ourselves the lesson of Olivet and create with our fellows an atmosphere of worship, of joy, of praise, of thanksgiving. Only thus shall we be able to go forward in full assurance of faith, a happy band of pilgrims, realising in joyful fellowship together the lightness of the afflictions which, rightly accepted, shall one day win so great a prize.

"I thank thee that I am not as other men are."

What a miserable confession to make. In looking upon his fellows he saw nothing to emulate, no characteristics or virtues which he could desire for himself, but only the sordid evidences of evil. The reign of sin and death was a very real thing to this Pharisee; and with an exquisite nicety he carefully dissociated himself from it all and explained to the Almighty that, living perforce in an evil world and amidst sinful men, he was nevertheless not of them nor with them, and that he at least was one to whom had come the superior inward knowledge which, separating for ever from the plebeian multitude, rendered him a fit companion for the One Who dwelt in the inner sanctuary.

If we are indeed building upon that Rock which is Christ, there can be no disappointment, no disillusionment, no discouragement, for we shall be in very truth continually beholding, as in a mirror, the glory of the Lord, and are being changed into the same image, not because our idols do not have feet of clay, but because of that very fact. Not because there is nothing in our life that saddens and wears us, but because by means of these very things we are inspired to lay hold the more tenaciously to that which entereth as an anchor, within the Veil.

W. J. Lickman



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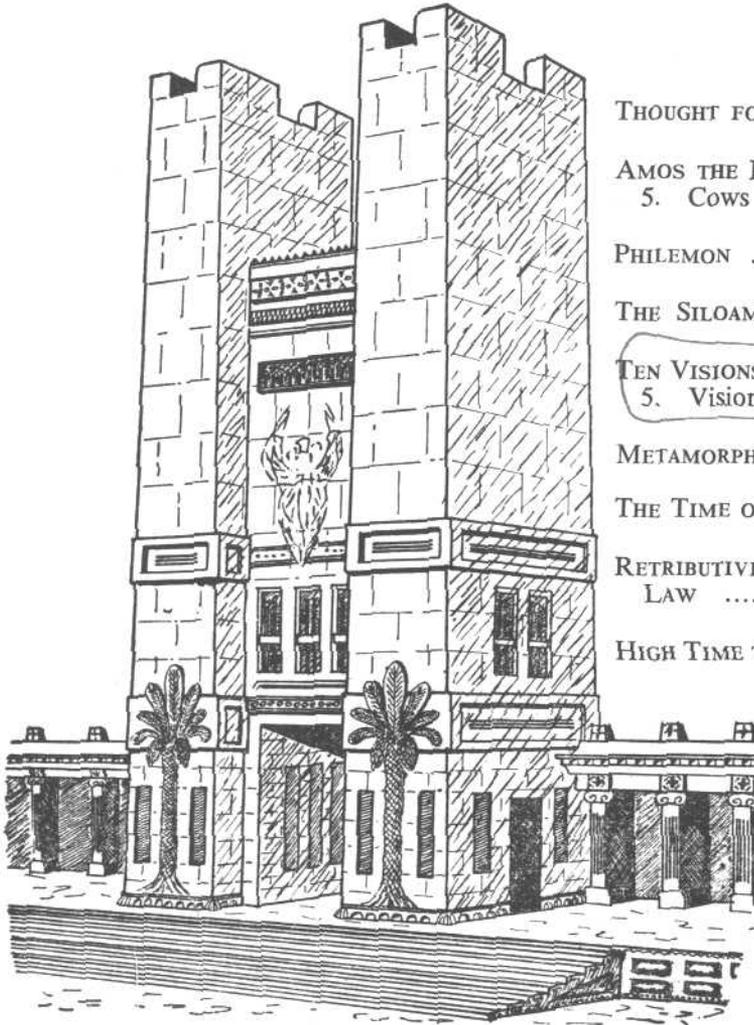
Thou, therefore, endure
hardness as a good
soldier of Jesus Christ

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

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Thought for the Month

"He gave . . . apostles . . . prophets . . . evangelists . . . pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ . . ." (Eph. 4. 11).

Every now and again someone comes along with an eulogy on the merits of eschewing all human aids to faith and belief, and relying entirely upon personal reading and interpretation of the Bible. Once we were immature children, spoon-fed with the theological notions and definitions of faith of older men or long-since-dead members of a past generation who only partially understood the Christian faith. Now we have our eyes opened and we can interpret the Scriptures to ourselves without any human help, and we are all the better for it. That is the presumption, and the elderly believers who ought to know better, and the naive youngsters who cannot be expected to know much better, would alike be greatly disturbed to be told that their attitude is spiritual egotism of a high order. But so it is. The Christian who thinks that he can complete his growth in grace and knowledge without any assistance from the instruments the Lord has placed in the Church for that purpose is repudiating the whole arrangement whereby Christ ordained that his Church should grow. The right of private judgment, of deciding for oneself the extent to which things we see and hear and read do correctly represent the word of the Lord to us, is one that we do well to maintain and guard jealously. That is our privilege and prerogative. But to claim that our own ability to sense the Divine mysteries is so pronounced that we need no assistance from the ministers God has appointed for that purpose is one that has no endorsement in either the writings of the Apostles or the teachings of Jesus.

It is a truism, endorsed by St. Paul, that no man liveth unto himself. That holds good in our

spiritual lives particularly. The whole body can only be "fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth". The labours and writings of men long since gone to their rest, the ministry of men now living and moving amongst us, the devotional thought and intellectual insight of zealous disciples known or unknown to us, in a myriad ways contribute to our own growth in the things of the Spirit. The man who refuses to avail himself or partake of these things and deliberately confines himself to the circle of his own interpretation of the Authorised Version is, whether he realises it or not, rejecting the accumulated experience of all God's saints through the Age provided by the Good Shepherd for his benefit.

It may sound very fine and large to say "I study the Bible for myself; I don't accept the opinions of any man", but it is really rather petty and very silly. It does not betoken maturity of Christian character but rather the reverse. One element of true humility lies in the willingness to learn from others and the man who ignores all that has been discovered in the past in knowledge and understanding of the Divine Plan and endeavours to start again from scratch, so to speak, would be a very remarkable individual if he could catch up on all that two thousand years experience in the short space of his own lifetime.

Gone from us



- Sis. E. A. Campbell (Newport)
- Sis. L. Lingley (Sittingbourne)
- Sis. E. Maggs (late Kettering)
- Bro. F. B. Smith (late London)
- Sis. G. Watkins-Ball (London)



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

British ministers of Jewellery

AMOS THE HERDSMAN

5. Cows of Bashan

Amos 4.1-13

Scornfully the young prophet swept the assembled crowd in the Bethel sanctuary with his burning eyes. Sleek, well-fed, lavishly clothed, they moved forward with their offerings to the idol as the ceremonial proceeded. He looked upon the women folk, their rich garments adorned with ornate jewellery from the markets of Tyre, and as he did so the Holy Spirit came upon him; in those self-centred and self-satisfied apostate daughters of Israel he found the inspiration and the message he needed. So his, by now, well-known voice rang out over the heads of the worshippers.

"Hear this word, ye cows of Bashan, ye women of high Samaria"—the insulting allusion conveyed all the contempt that he felt for them—"who oppress the poor and crush the needy, and say to your husbands, Bring, and let us drink" (ch.4.1). This rendering is a little different from the A.V. All translators have had difficulty with vs. 1-5 and 12-13 of this chapter and it is generally agreed that the text is faulty. What appears to be the best and most lucid composite rendering of various translators has therefore been adopted here.

The prophet is still talking to the nation in general but he addresses his message to them through the wealthy "upper class" women—the "cows of Bashan" as he contemptuously describes them. The particular national aspect he is looking at here is the social and commercial. The wealthy women were a symbol of the society which because of material prosperity and a high standard of living was utterly devoted to self interest and totally heedless of the plight of the poor—for where there is an inordinately wealthy element in the community there is always the correspondingly poor one. This is the prophet's accusation. Amos accused them of oppressing the poor and needy, and spending their time carousing with their husbands—and equally so with their friends in the same position. But retribution was to come; from the heights of ease and affluence they were to be thrust down to the depths of degradation.

"The Lord God hath sworn by his holiness, that, lo, the time is coming when men shall carry you away on their shields and your children in fish baskets. You will be carried straight out through the breaches in the walls, every woman exposed naked to view, and you will be forcibly taken to the high sanctuary of Rimmon, saith the Lord." (ch. 4.2-3).

These two verses have given a great deal of trouble to translators by reason of the evident corruption of the text at some early time. The principal difficulty is the word here translated "sanctuary of Rimmon"; a number of different interpretations have been offered, of which the A.V. "ye shall cast them into the palace" is the least satisfactory. The most likely to be in keeping with the tenor of Amos' words is that here given. Rimmon was a Syrian deity in whose honour an annual spring-time feast was held which combined mourning for the slain god with joy at his resurrection, ensuring the coming of spring and the renewing of vegetable and animal life. (See Zech. 12.11 which alludes to this feast.) The feast involved degrading licentious rites and ceremonials and it has been suggested that this is Amos' meaning here. The opulent and care-free rich women of Israel were to be taken by the enemy soldiery, through the breaches made in the city walls by the invaders, to the sanctuary of Rimmon for this purpose. Thus they were to be swept in a moment from the lap of luxury to the misery of utter and hopeless ruin. Here again is seen the shadow of the Assyrian invasions which were to come as penalty upon Israel and which was to bring all Israel's prosperity to an end.

From contempt Amos now passes to sarcasm. He looks again at the people passing in front of him with their offerings for the idol. "Ye come to Bethel, and transgress" he taunts them biting. "At Gilgal ye multiply transgression. Ye bring your sacrifices every morning, and your tithes every three years. Ye offer thank-offerings with loaves and proclaim and publish your free-will offerings. Ye love to do what is proper, ye sons of Israel, saith the Lord God" (ch. 4.4-5). In all of this they were doing the right things, but they were offering to the wrong god. "Thou shalt have no other gods before me" was the commandment given at Sinai. "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one God" cried Elijah. Joshua and Samuel had exhorted the people to remain true to God and the people had responded enthusiastically. But all that was now in the past and the sacred sites of Bethel and Gilgal, once hallowed by being centres at which God was worshipped in spirit and in truth, were now defiled by the presence of idol sanctuaries, devoted to gods which tolerated and approved the unjust and immoral practices of an apostate people. Your religious observances are correct enough,

accused Amos, but they are offered to gods which are the creation of men's hands, gods which themselves are the reflection of men's sins and indulgencies, gods which look upon evil and injustice and condone it. As Jeremiah was to say two centuries later "a wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land. The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means, and my people love to have it so: and what will ye do in the end thereof?" (Jer. 5.30-31). Amos went on to tell the heedless people of Israel just what God would do; but first he reminded them of the judgments they had already endured without being led thereby to reformation.

"I have given you cleanness of teeth in your cities, and want of bread . . . yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord" (ch. 4.6).

This means famine. "Cleanness of teeth" indicates there was nothing to eat. This was one element of the penalty consequent upon apostasy from the Mosaic Covenant. Whilst loyalty to God was maintained, crops and flocks would be abundant and food assured. Disloyalty involved the reverse; this happened time after time in Israel's history. When the lesson was learned, the formula was always the same. "Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and he heard them, and delivered them out of their distresses." But this time they had not cried unto the Lord.

"And also I have withholden the rain from you, when there were yet three months to the harvest; and I caused it to rain upon one city, and caused it not to rain upon another city . . . so two or three cities wandered unto one city, to drink water: but they were not satisfied. Yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord" (ch.4.7-8).

Harvest is from April to June. The absence of rain during February and March is calamitous in its effect on the crops. The first infliction was famine; the second one is thirst. There was no water. A striking instance of this was during the time of the prophet Elijah, when the drought endured for three years, and was only ended by the wholesale conversion of the nation at the instance of the prophet. That drought came in consequence of idolatry and was ended when Baal-worship was renounced and the entire nation returned to God. But that was in the past and now Israel had relapsed again into idolatry, and this time had not returned to God.

"I have smitten you with blasting and mildew: when your gardens and your vineyards and your figtrees and your olive trees increased, the locust devoured them. Yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord" (ch.4.9).

This is the logical consequence of the two

previous judgments, famine and drought; what crops remained shrivelled and died. When by reason of returning favourable climatic conditions and much hard work there were signs of new produce from the trees and vines, the locusts came and ate them all up. Something of the same is related by a contemporary prophet, Joel, who fulfilled his mission in the southern kingdom of Judah at a time not very far removed from that at which Amos prophesied in the north. His first chapter seems to allude to an unprecedented plague of locusts, four different species in four successive waves, and when they had passed over there was nothing left. A plague such as this bore most heavily on the poor of the land, and the workers, who depended upon their crops and flocks and herds for sustenance and a living. The wealthy ones — and these are those to whom Amos is directing his denunciation at this moment—were able, when home-produced supplies failed, to obtain their needs from the rich and prosperous merchant nation of Tyre on the sea-coast, a nation with which the kings and leading citizens of Israel maintained close and friendly connections; so they were able to override the worst effects of the plague and they did not repent and turn to the Lord.

"I have sent among you the Egyptian pestilence; your young men have I slain with the sword and have decimated your horses. I have sent the stench of your camps into your nostrils. Yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord" (ch.4. 10).

Egypt was the proverbial source of pestilence and sickness. The hot dry south wind, blowing into Canaan from Sinai and Egypt, was responsible for bringing much of the epidemics which from time to time ravaged Israel. The incident of the destruction of Sennacherib's army outside Jerusalem in the days of Hezekiah is one instance. In the long catalogue of disasters which would come upon Israel if they forsook the covenant, detailed in Deut. 28, the Egyptian pestilence figured very prominently "the Lord shall make the pestilence cleave unto thee, until he hath consumed thee from off the land . . . The Lord shall smite thee with the botch of Egypt, and with the emerods and with the scab, and with the itch, whereof thou canst not be healed" (Deut. 28.21-27). All these inflictions came upon the pleasure-loving apostates of Israel, but despite all this they did not turn to the Lord.

"I sent you an earthquake, as I overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and ye were as a firebrand plucked out of the burning: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord" (ch.4.11).

Some scholars have surmised that this was the earthquake mentioned in chap. 1 by which Amos

dates his mission. This is improbable, since his mission commenced two years before that earthquake (ch.1.1) and he is not likely to have spent such a period delivering his message. More probably, since minor earthquakes are fairly common in that land, there had been a preliminary one some years earlier, perhaps forming the culminating infliction of this whole series of five judgments recalled by Amos in his denunciation of the people. In such case the following expression might indicate that even after these five severe judgments the Lord had preserved the national sovereignty of Israel and saved them still from the Assyrian menace, "as a firebrand plucked out of the burning", A last opportunity to repent before the final calamity had to fall. If so, it can well be concluded that during the immediate past, prior to the emergence of Amos as a prophet, Israel had experienced these five calamities in succession—famine, drought, barrenness, pestilence, earthquake. These happenings should have caused them to think, and recall the prosperity and freedom from such things they had enjoyed in earlier times when they served the Lord in sincerity and truth. But they did not, and continued on their heedless course, until God had no option but to take drastic action. That action is expressed forcefully in the two concluding verses of the chapter. There is a remarkable allusion buried in these verses which may well be the most definite reference in the Old Testament to Christ the Son in his pre-human state, although this is concealed in the A.V. by an inadequate translation. If this meaning of the expression concerned is established it makes Amos noteworthy as being the first in the Scriptures to touch upon that mystic yet vital doctrine, the relation between the Father and the Son.

"Therefore, O Israel, thus will I do unto you. And because this is what I will do to you, O Israel, prepare to call upon thy God. For, behold, I am he that strengthens the thunder, and creates the wind, and reveals his inner mind" (Heb. seach, Gk. logos) "to man, and forms the morning and the darkness, and marches over the heights of the earth — the Lord, the God of Hosts, is his name" (ch. 4.12-13).

The "thus" in this verse refers back to verses 2 & 3, where one aspect of the Assyrian menace is pictured. Because the five nation-wide judgments were ignored and there was no repentance and no turning from their evil ways, the Lord would invoke his final and irrevocable penalty; the Assyrians would invade their land and take them all away into captivity. For something like two centuries, ever since the division of Judah and Israel after the death of Solomon, Israel had followed this apostate course and the Lord had

sent prophets and given repeated opportunities for reform and return; only for a short period following Elijah's triumph over the priests of Baal was there anything like a national return to God and that did not last very long. Now God would act and the action would be final. Twenty-five years later the Ten Tribes went into captivity and were dispersed among the nations — and never came back. Not until the days of the Messianic kingdom yet to be established will Judah and Israel be re-united to become in very truth the people of the Lord (see Ezek. 37.16-28) and then only because they will, at last, have learned the lesson and will never again "defile themselves any more with their idols, nor with any of their detestable things, nor with any of their transgressions" (Ezek. 37.23).

The expression in the A.V., "*prepare to meet thy God*" although beloved of many fervent street-corner evangelists, is less accurate than "*prepare to call upon thy God*". The point here is that Divine forbearance has come to its end; there will be no more reprieve. The full penalty of the violated covenant will be inflicted and the people expelled from the Promised Land into which their fathers came with rejoicing and enthusiasm but of which their descendants have shown themselves utterly unworthy. From now on it is Israel which will have to call upon God for He will no longer call to them or overlook their transgressions. Until they do that there is no escape and no restoration.

But the most interesting element in this final verse of the chapter is this reference to the "inner mind" of God. Set centrally amidst a recapitulation of Divine attributes, the God of the mountains and the wind, of day and night, who reigns supreme upon high, above the earth, is this word which in the A.V. runs "*and declareth unto man what is his thought*". That does not convey much. The Douay version has it "*and reveals his inner mind to man*" whilst the Septuagint renders "*and proclaims to man his Christ*" — more properly, since this is the O.T., "his anointed": (*christou*). These somewhat divergent expressions have obviously sprung from one original source but no Hebrew manuscripts of so early a date now exist so that a certain amount of deduction is necessary. The people of Israel in pre-Christian times held to the idea of the mind of God, his Word, (Gr *logos*) personalised and becoming the manifestation of God to man (as John, "the Word (*logos*) was made flesh, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father" (John 1.14). In pre-Christian times the *Logos* was the anointed one of the Father, as in Prov. 8.10-11 "the Lord acquired me in the beginning of his way, before

his works of old. I was anointed from the ages before the earth was". This could account for the "inner mind" of God being equated with "his anointed" in the Septuagint.

The Hebrew word in this text is *seach*, its only occurrence in the O.T. Gesenius defines its meaning as to meditate, from a root signifying to produce or bring forth, from which is derived the idea of speaking or talking with oneself, especially as relating to Divine things. From this it is easy to see how the text pictures the Divine mind manifested in the personality of the Word of God, the *Logos*, who appeared on earth as the Man Christ Jesus, and upon his reunion with the

Father after his resurrection was hailed supreme over all things in heaven and earth. It might well be therefore that in this Spirit-guided utterance of this relatively obscure 8th century B.C. Hebrew prophet we have the first veiled allusion to one of the most important doctrines of the faith—the personality of our Lord Jesus Christ and his relationship to the Father.

But Amos would know little of this. His short pæan of praise to the might and majesty of God ended, he turns his attention, in chapter 5, to another section of the nation due for reproof, the idolatrous priests.

To be continued.

PHILEMON

True nobility is more often shown in the little things of daily life than in the great things. When a man lives in the full view of public opinion he is keyed up to create a favourable impression but it is the nature and temperament shown when the lime-light is withdrawn, when there is no inducement to wear a mask, which reveals the true man and what he really is.

This is shown in an incident in the life of the Apostle Paul. This does not mean that Paul was not at all times genuine or that he at any time dissembled or pretended that he was one thing at one time when the public eye was upon him and another thing at another time in private. The incident brought before us in the letter to Philemon, however, shows us the true nobility of this man of God in a clearer light than is possible when we are considering the great public work Paul accomplished during his eventful life. We can gather from the record of Paul's life a very good idea of his keen spiritual vision, his intellect and reasoning powers, his great skill in argument, his passion for truth, his love for his countrymen and for the churches he founded, his continual care for them, his ardent loyalty to the Master he served and his heroism, courage and fortitude under bitter trials and disappointments. We can gauge pretty accurately the strength of all these qualities but nowhere is the heart of the man so well revealed as in the short private letter he wrote to Philemon.

It is here that Paul throws off as far as possible his Apostolic dignity and his fatherly authority over his converts and descends to a familiarity of equal intercourse. He lingers with obvious delight on the word "brother" which breathes the very spirit of freedom and equality. In this letter we see in Paul not the towering Apostle but the friendly partner; he speaks simply as a

Christian gentleman and uses true courtesy, delicacy and tact. After reading it we confess that we know the writer better and it would have been a vast pity if this letter had not been included in the Canon of Scripture.

In the course of his missionary journeys Paul had spent a considerable period at Ephesus. It is probable that the Church he founded there was numerous and distinguished and the fame of the Apostle as it spread affected neighbouring towns and doubtless attracted men like Philemon and Epaphras who were natives of Colossæ. Perhaps these men founded the Church in their own town; it is certain that Philemon's house at Colossæ was the recognised centre of Christian activity in that place.

Philemon was evidently a man of mark, probably quite wealthy, for it is said he was able to refresh the hearts of the saints, which seems to suggest gifts both temporal and spiritual. Moreover he was in a position to entertain brethren. Philemon must have been held in high repute by the Apostle for the latter treats him almost as an equal, a fellow labourer and partner, as a brother and not as a son, like Timothy, for instance. Philemon's wife appears to have been Apphia and his son Archippus; both Christians, Archippus holding office, probably a Deacon in the Church. The details supplied, though meagre, give us the impression of some wealth and dignity in the family nobly used for the relief of necessity and the binding closer of the bonds of Christian love and unity.

Another member of the household was Onesimus, a slave, but he turned out badly. He stole his master's goods and, fearing detection, fled to Rome, doubtless thinking that among the thousands of that crowded city he would escape notice.

Our God is ever watchful and in this runaway slave He saw a potential child of grace. *"Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called, but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world."* It is among the poor despised and outcast ones that the Gospel of Jesus Christ has wrought miracles all down the age. It has changed lives like those we read of in the Corinthian Church, some of whom were thieves, covetous and worse; but the message of salvation transformed them into noble and pure men and women with hearts aflame with a new and burning desire to do the will of God and tell forth the wonders of his grace.

Paul was at this time undergoing his first imprisonment at Rome. It was irksome enough to be chained continually to a Roman soldier, though some generous concessions were made him and he was able to live in his own hired house and receive there any who came enquiring into the faith he preached. So earnestly did he follow up this advantage that a number of converts to Christianity were made and Paul's name began to be known in Rome. Men and women who came under his influence were not backward in proclaiming their new faith and in course of time the Truth reached Onesimus the runaway slave. Christianity regenerated the true humanity which had been degraded in him. The actual circumstances which led to his introduction to Paul are not told us but it is certain that Paul, noting his sincerity and earnestness, received him as a brother in Christ and a close fellowship sprang up between them. Onesimus was happy in the privilege of doing many a little service for the Apostle.

It would not be long before Onesimus made a full confession of his past life and how he had robbed and run away from his master, and we can picture the Apostle's surprise when he learnt that the master's name was Philemon, one of the principal supporters of the Colossian Church and a most worthy friend of his own. It was with mingled feelings and some perplexity of mind that Paul meditated on the problem now presented to him. What course of conduct should he advise Onesimus to pursue? Onesimus was now a free man; ought he to inform the authorities and let the man suffer for his crime? That, he knew, would be sending his convert to certain death. Would it not be better to say nothing about the matter? Onesimus had become very dear to him and had been of great service to him in his imprisonment. It would be hard indeed to lose him and yet Philemon had his rights which ought to be respected. Slavery was a recognised custom and clearly Onesimus was the

property of Philemon and ought to be restored to him. He would write to Philemon and make Onesimus the bearer of the letter. But the letter did not prove an easy one to write; he wanted to conciliate Philemon and yet not humiliate Onesimus—to commend the evil doer and yet not excuse his offence. Such was the delicate problem set his mind.

To give Onesimus courage to face the master he had injured, Paul arranged that there should be a third person present. Tychicus, a companion and fellow labourer of Paul and probably one of his own converts, was on his way home and the idea came to Paul that Tychicus might act as a mediator and ease the situation by his presence (Col. 4. 7-9). Tychicus could present the letter while Onesimus, adopting his old position as a slave, would remain unseen but within call.

The letter is a model of tact and Christian courtesy. Paul first endeavoured to create a favourable atmosphere of good-will by referring to the fact that they all belonged as members to one family. There was himself and Timothy, Philemon, Apphia, Archippus, and other members of the Church meeting in Philemon's house, all called in one holy calling, all privileged to name God as their Father and the Lord Jesus as their elder Brother. What a bond of union—! Surely Philemon's heart would rejoice as he recalled the boundless grace of God accorded to his family! Then the writer touched a chord of tenderness in Philemon's heart by making reference to himself as a prisoner and an old man; Paul would be between fifty and sixty and after a life of unexampled labour and suffering he might well call himself aged in relation to his need of ministry from his son Onesimus. Paul commended Philemon in verses 4-7 and cordially acknowledged his love and loyalty and thus carefully prepared the way for the main object of his letter. He intended to make it very difficult for Philemon to refuse the request he was about to make; Philemon would surely be anxious to live up to the good opinion Paul had of him. In verses 8 and 9 he approached the matter a little closer and told Philemon that there was a duty he should do. He did not yet tell him what it was but he urged his own position as an Apostle and suggested that he could demand this thing but he preferred to leave it to Philemon's love and good-will and to his feelings towards himself as a dear bosom friend. His appeal was to love rather than authority, "I plead with you for this child of mine to whom in my prison I have become a father". Then he announced the name, Onesimus. In verse 11 he frankly acknowledged that Onesimus had been found a worthless character. The name Onesimus means useful or profitable

and Paul played upon the word and seemed to say, "He belied his name in days past, he will more than deserve it now". Though once unprofitable Paul could vouch that he was a *changed man*. "He is so dear to me that in sending him back to you with this letter it is like tearing out my very heart. If I kept him by me he would be ministering to my needs in your stead just as I know you would be serving me if you were here, but I would not do that without your consent so that your goodness to me might come of your own free will and without any appearance of restraint." Notice how carefully Paul chose his words, he said Onesimus "departed" not "fled" from his master. The word "fled" might have awakened resentful feelings and he wanted to avoid that. "He parted from you for a while that you might get him back for good", a very graceful way of putting it! He hinted at the Providential aspect of the matter and suggested that the parting was unconsciously overruled by a higher hand. God in his wisdom had parted him from Philemon for a season that he might receive him for ever. Verses 16 to 18 are very tender; Paul reiterated that Onesimus was now a brother dear to himself; how much more must he be dear to Philemon: If Philemon considered Paul as a partner in the Gospel let him receive Onesimus as his own representative. In verse 21 Paul speaks of his confidence that *Philemon would do as he suggested, then adds that he was hoping to see him soon face to face.*

It is not difficult to follow the workings of Philemon's mind as he read the letter. We are not told of the result but we cannot doubt that Paul's appeal, couched in such happy language, had its effect. Philemon would surely feel that he could never face the Apostle again if he refused to do what he desired; what Christian joy would

fill his heart as he learnt that the grace of God had touched Onesimus and effected such a marvellous change in him. How long would it be before Philemon would eagerly enquire where *Onesimus was and learning that he was without, insist on having him in so that he might assure him of his complete forgiveness?*

Why is this letter included in the New Testament? No important doctrine is enunciated as in Romans; it admits of no controversial or directly theological use; there is no dissertation on Christian virtues, no warning against apostasy or false teaching as in Galatians; it is purely a personal letter, even though a model of the highest character. The question will be answered if we can see in this simple letter an analogy to the story of redemption.

Onesimus the thief and slave had run away from his master. Man was the creation of God and as such was his property but by his conduct he has erred against his Master and provoked him sorely. He has become not a servant of righteousness but the slave of sin and has run away from God, his legal and proper owner. Not only has he run away but he has robbed him of his due and gone into a far country. But an all-loving Providence has led his steps to Jesus, Who suffered great privations for his sake. There at the feet of Jesus, whom God counts as his partner, the repentant slave pours out his soul and confesses his sin. Acting on the advice given him he returns to God, his rightful owner, and is received, not as a slave, but even as Christ himself, and all the debt he has incurred is put to the account of Jesus.

*"Naught of merit or of price
Remains to justice due
Jesus died and paid it all
Yes—all that did I owe."*

PERSISTENCE OF LIFE

At about the beginning of the century there was a sudden deluge of torrential rain on a certain desert region of South America which had received no rain for nearly 400 years. There had been complete and continuous drought for almost four centuries. Within a few days of the downpour millions of seeds which had been lying dormant in the ground during all that time started growing and flourished as if it were no more than the onset of a new season. One wonders if most of the earth's deserts are not simi-

larly packed with the seeds of the Millennial earth, ready to burst forth so soon as the processes of that Age begin to bring the life-giving water to them. "Everything shall live where the river cometh" said Ezekiel when he described the water of life fertilising the wilderness. Just as the dry bones of Israel are pictured in his vision as coming to life in that day, so may we expect Nature herself to spring forth into abundance when the kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord.

Christians often refer to Israel as the "Holy Land". How many realise that the prophet Zechariah first gave it that name; see Zech. 2. 12.

The saintly Dr. George Matheson once said, "Devotion must be a child of reflection; it may rise on wings, but they must be wings of thought".

THE SILOAM INSCRIPTION

The Voice of
Archaeology

Deep down in the limestone strata that underlies Jerusalem an inexhaustible supply of fresh water forces its way through cracks and crevices, following the general slope of the rock layers toward the south-east, until at length it comes to the surface at what is now known as the Virgin's Fountain. From the dawn of history that water has flowed. It was the main source of supply for the Jebusite city of Jerusalem ruled by Melchisedek, the Priest-King of Abraham's day. It once served the Crusaders' need when Jerusalem was besieged by the Saracens. To-day it waters the market gardens of Jerusalem. And it has made Biblical history.

The Virgin's Fountain lies half way up the rocky slope of Ophel, the south-eastern projection of the mountainous mass upon which Jerusalem is built, and outside the ancient walls. In the dim days before Abraham entered Canaan the industrious Jebusites had cut a tunnel into the mountain to conduct the waters to the foot of a vertical shaft which they had made leading up to the city on the heights above. They called it Gihon, and by its means they were able in times of siege to obtain water without venturing outside the walls. It was their undoing eventually, for when David beset the city Joab and his stalwarts made their way along the tunnel, climbed up that shaft and took the Jebusites by surprise, so capturing the city for David (see 1 Chron. 11. 6 and 2 Sam. 5. 8—the "gutter" of the latter text is this shaft).

But it was at a later date that the fountain demanded a king's anxious thoughts. In the days of Hezekiah, Sennacherib of Assyria invaded Judah with his armies. Once again Jerusalem was threatened with siege. The first thing to do was to ensure the water supply. The measures Hezekiah took to accomplish this end were considered so noteworthy as to justify incorporation in the histories of the times. Says the chronicler (2 Chron. 32) "*There was gathered much people together, who stopped all the fountains, and the brook that ran through the midst of the land, saying 'Why should the kings of Assyria come, and find much water'.* . . . Hezekiah also stopped the upper watercourse of Gihon (the shaft into the city) and brought it straight down" ("underground" is the literal meaning) "*to the west side of the city of David*". The Book of Kings supplements this by saying (2 Kings 20. 20) when recounting the deeds of Hezekiah ". . . the rest of the acts of Hezekiah, and how he made a pool,

and a conduit (aqueduct) and brought water into the city, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah." And in the Apocrypha, Ecclus. 48. 17 informs us that "*Hezekiah fortified his city, and brought in water to the midst thereof; he digged the hard rock with iron, and made wells for waters.*"

King Hezekiah's tunnelling operations, interesting as they must have been to the people of his own day, had little or no interest for more recent generations, and the story was speedily relegated to the background by students. In later times, however, speculation began as to whether this tunnel had any real existence. The critics dubbed it legend; others were not so sure; but there was no external evidence. Dr. Thomson, the Palestine missionary and author of the well-known work "*The Land and the Book*" says of the water channels and fountains of Jerusalem, when describing his own investigation, "*Hezekiah and his 'much people' stopped them up so effectually that they could never be found again, even by the Jews themselves.*" The historians of the Old Testament had left no geographical indication of the locality of the tunnel—at least, it was accepted that no such indication existed until someone, reading the familiar words of Isa. 8. 6 "*forasmuch as this people refuse the waters of Shiloah that go softly, and rejoice in Rezin and Remaliah's son . . .*" realised that here was a clue. "*The waters of Shiloah that go softly!*"

The Pool of Shiloah (Siloam is the New Testament Greek form of the word) was well known and had been well known for generations. It was, and is, the most constant reservoir in the city. Artificially built, more like a tank than a natural pool, some fifty feet by twenty, and about twenty feet deep, it has served the needs of generations of Jews and Arabs without question. It was common knowledge that the water reached the pool from the mouth of an arched orifice in the rock, but no Arab had ever dared to venture far inside. So far as can be ascertained, the first to make the attempt was Dr. Robinson, early in the nineteenth century. Stepping into the water of Siloam, he waded into the archway and found himself in a narrow tunnel, two feet wide but ten to fifteen feet high, the stream that supplied the Pool flowing along its floor. He followed the winding course of the passage for about one third of a mile, knowing that from the direction he took that he was some hundred feet or more beneath the streets of Jerusalem above. At length

he splashed his way into daylight again and found himself at the Virgin's Fountain, outside the City and on the steep slope of the Valley of Jehoshaphat.

Later on it was ascertained that the first hundred feet or so of the tunnel at the Virgin's Fountain end is in fact the ancient Jebusite aqueduct, and the vertical shaft leading up into the city was discovered, and signs that the old tunnel had been blocked at that point in order to divert the waters to the Pool of Siloam. The correspondency here with the account of Hezekiah's action in 2 Chron. 32 seemed almost complete.

Then in 1880 some Arab schoolboys were playing around the Pool of Siloam and one of them fell into the water. Scrambling out, he ventured, boylike, into the tunnel and, clambering along its wall, noticed, what no one had ever noticed before, some rough Hebrew characters chiselled in the rock. He told his teacher, Dr. Schick, who investigated for himself. He found a complete inscription in archaic Hebrew characters. The following year Dr. A. H. Sayce, the celebrated archæologist, visited the spot and copied the inscription. When examined it proved to be an account relating to the building of the tunnel, written in Biblical Hebrew of the 8th to 6th centuries B.C. Since Hezekiah's reign falls within this period there remained no reasonable doubt that the tunnel was in fact the one described in the Old Testament as built by Hezekiah at the time of the Assyrian invasion.

Various translations of the inscription differ in minor details. Here is a fair representation.

"Behold the tunnel. Now this is the history of the tunnel. While the miners were still lifting up the pick, each towards his neighbour, and while there were yet three cubits to excavate, there was heard the voice of a man calling to his neighbour, for there was an excess in the rock on the right hand, and on the left. And after that on the day of excavating the miners had struck pick against pick, one against another, the waters flowed from the spring to the pool, a

distance of twelve hundred cubits. And a hundred cubits was the height of the rock above the tunnel."

Those miners must have worked hard! Spurred on by the imminent threat of invasion, they excavated and removed, by hand, over two thousand tons of rock to make that tunnel. Every bit of that material must have been passed in baskets along a line of men to the open air. And when the work was done someone from among them, a man perhaps for ever unknown, left this writing, chiselled in the everlasting rock, to give its witness in due time to the accuracy of the Bible story.

These explorations yielded another detail of interest in relation to the New Testament. The account of Christ healing the impotent man at the Pool of Bethesda is well known. The Pool was famous because at intervals, said the Evangelist, an angel came down and troubled the waters; whoever first stepped in after the troubling was cured of his complaint. Such a phenomenon as is thus described is seen daily at the Virgin's Fountain and the Pool of Siloam. Somewhere far underground beneath Jerusalem, where the water which supplies these fountains collects, there must be a great reservoir shaped by Nature into the form of a siphon; periodically, generally two or three times a day, the water comes gushing into the Virgin's Fountain, and from hence through the tunnel into the Pool of Siloam, as though a hidden store had been suddenly let loose. This freak of Nature has never been discovered, but the signs are conclusive that the water builds up slowly until it overtops some bend in the outlet and then the whole accumulation siphons away. The situation of the Pool of Bethesda is not established with certainty; even though it prove to have been in some other part of the city the probabilities are that it received its supply from the same ultimate source as Hezekiah's pools, and the "troubling of the waters" occur there, just as to-day it still occurs while the villagers of Siloam satisfy their needs at the place made famous by Judah's pious king.

NOTE ON HISTORY

"History is a branch of knowledge which is enjoyed by both scholars and ignorant persons and which is relished by both the stupid and intelligent. Everything remarkable becomes known through history. Every marvel gains its appreciation through it. Notable and sublime characters and qualities are derived from it. The political education of kings and others is based on it. History collects for you the first and the

last, of persons and things, insufficiency and abundance, nomadic life and city life, things of the present and the past. Many judgments regarding the moral and legal character of things are based upon history. The knowledge of it is considered an asset in any gathering and station."

Al Masudi, 10th century Arab historian, known as "the Herodotus of the Arabs".

TEN VISIONS OF CHRIST TRIUMPHANT

5. Visions 8 & 9. The Lamb goes forth to war

"After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, and the earth was lightened with his glory. And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen" (Rev. 18.1-2).

One of the most significant events in the chequered history of Israel was the collapse of the Babylonian world power when Cyrus the Persian captured Babylon, and restored the people of Israel to their own land. In a very real sense the fall of the ancient city of Babylon marked the end of a world order. The Babylonians were the last surviving remnants of the people who populated the "plain of Shinar" after the Flood, built the notorious Tower of Babel, and instituted a system of world dominance allied with false religion which profoundly affected and moulded human thought and development for twenty-five centuries. Writing, mathematics, the sciences, law, together with religious doctrine and ceremonial, all has its source in Babylon. As a centre of population it goes back nearly five thousand years; as a political power dominant over the then known world more than four thousand. Our units of time and distance, our weights and measures—until the considerably inferior metric system was adopted—all are derived from Babylon. The ceremonials, the trappings, the buildings, even to some extent the doctrines of institutional Christianity in the world to-day include much that is derived from Babylon. And the dominant characteristic of Babylon was that it supported a politico-religious system based upon the worship of false gods which themselves were but reflections of the imaginations and standards and vices of men. Abraham was called to separate himself from the land of which Babylon was the chief city and to come into a land which God would show him and which therefore became in due time the land peculiarly sacred to God. The two cities, Jerusalem and Babylon, became respectively the cities of the ways of God and the ways of man. To the God-fearing Jew who looked upon Jerusalem as the city of righteousness, Babylon was the city of evil.

It is for this reason that the eventual fall of Babylon and the end of that order of things is alluded to so often in the Scriptures to picture the end of the very imperfect and largely godless rule of man upon earth at the time when the Lord Christ takes up his power and commences his Messianic reign. In the symbolism of

Revelation, the fall of symbolic Babylon occurs at the time of the Second Advent. Just as Cyrus the Persian with his armies put an end to the empire of Babylon and assumed the regal power, so does the Lord Christ with his Church from heaven put an end to the present world order and initiate a new one, "wherein dwelleth righteousness" as Peter puts it (2 Pet. 3.13). This is the theme of this 18th chapter.

The angel coming down from heaven in power and great glory of verse 1 is our Lord Jesus Christ in one of the many aspects of his Second Advent. This is not merely an angelic messenger commissioned to come to earth with a message. The description is too exalted for that. There is a definite correspondence between Rev. 18.1 and the vision of the Almighty described by Ezekiel in Ezek. 43.2-4 and Ezek. chaps. 1-5: The same expression is used of the coming of the Most High in Ezekiel's vision "*the earth shined with his glory*" and the theme was the same, the Lord coming to execute judgment upon an evil order of things that approached its deserved end. But just as the vision was vouchsafed only to Ezekiel and it was his responsibility to make its implications known to Israel, so now the glory of the revealed Lord at this moment is perceptible only to the people of the Lord, the Church in the flesh at the time of the event, and the Church is to make the message known. The remainder of chap. 18 makes it plain that the destruction of Babylon, although expressed in the past tense, is a future, albeit imminent, event—what is known in prophetic parlance as "proleptic", i.e., a future event described as though it has already taken place.

This aspect of the Advent is that in which the returned Lord, already moving in the affairs of the world to bring about the introduction of his kingdom, as yet unperceived by mankind in general, is revealing to his own followers the nature of the judgment which is about to befall the world order. In the first place (ch. 18.2) He declares that Babylon has become the haunt of demons and unclean spirits. It is tempting to associate this statement with the tremendous increase in dealings with the occult and supernatural which is so marked a feature of contemporary society, and it may yet be demonstrated that in sober fact the hidden spiritual powers of evil are attaining a sphere of influence in the affairs of the world to-day similar to that obtaining in the days before the Flood. It was that

malevolent interference in the affairs of earth by those demonic powers of evil which more than anything else "filled the earth with violence" (Gen. 6) and brought about the end of that world. Maybe history will repeat itself.

Verse 3 pictures all nations as intoxicated by their allegiance to the ruling principles of Babylon, the ruling powers united in purpose and action, and the commercial interests drawing their wealth and position from their connection with the system. The picture is that of the entire world making common cause in supporting a world order which enshrines much that is immoral and unjust, but men cling to it partly because it serves their self-interest and partly because they know no other. But to those who are Christ's, whose lives are dedicated to him and who look for a vastly better order of things when He takes his great power and assumes control of this world, there comes his call to stand separate from this corrupt and doomed system. "Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues". That injunction is not to withdraw from the world as such and adopt a hermit-like, separatist and exclusive existence, eschewing even the good things and the beautiful things and all that is upright and just and moral in the world; there is much of that even though the evil things appear to be in the ascendancy. The command is to withdraw from co-operation with, and support of, the evil elements which are driving the world to destruction. Christians are to stand as lights in the world, "having no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprovng them" (Eph. 5.11).

The reaction of men to this collapse of the world system is vividly portrayed in the remainder of this chapter, all depicted as part of the message declared by the present Lord at the relevant time. The position is markedly similar to that obtaining at the time of the Flood. Jesus likened his own Advent to that time. As it was in the days of Noah, He said, so shall it be in the days of the Son of Man. The world of that day went on its way, completely heedless of the prophet in its midst who warned of the cataclysm that was imminent and would put an end to that world and all the evil that was in it (2 Pet. 2.5). (The details of Noah's preaching and witness to the coming destruction are not elaborated in Genesis but are related in fuller degree in the "Book of Enoch".) So it will be now. The message will be given; in fact has been given, consistently and persistently, by Christian groups large and small, warning those who would listen of the inevitable consequence of the world's present course. As in the days of Noah, the

warning has been ignored, and will be, until the end comes. Here in this chapter three distinct classes of society are mentioned, each lamenting the disaster which has come upon them. The kings of the earth, the rulers of men, the political powers and organisations, (vss. 9-10) will, more or less unavailingly in all probability, hurriedly try to dissociate themselves from the system which is crashing into ruins in their midst, and bewail the end of all that in which for so long they have put their trust. And be it remembered that the end of organised political rule in the earth invites anarchy and no man can foresee what form it will take. Hence the commercial interests of the earth (vss. 11-16) join in the general apprehension as they see their own particular interests threatened and their commercial empires vanish overnight. "No man buyeth their merchandise any more" is the eloquent comment in vs. 11. The commercial men have relied upon the political powers to keep the world safe for their activities and the political powers have failed them. Finally the trading systems of the world, pictured here in vss. 17-19 as shipowners (not "shipmaster" as in the A.V.) and all who have to do with trade by sea, join in the general outcry, like the others chiefly concerned over the effect upon their own interests, "whereby were made rich all that had ships in the sea" (vs. 19).

The suddenness of the catastrophe is clearly marked. "In one hour is thy judgment come" (vs.10) say the kings and rulers of the earth. "In one hour so great riches is come to nought" (vs. 17) echo the commercial men, the merchants. "In one hour is she made desolate" (vs.17) cry the trading tycoons. The implication is that when the crash does come, it will be swift and decisive. This old world has been a long time dying; it was not really until the twentieth century that it has become more or less a single unit with each nation or area interdependent upon all the others. But almost at once the rot began and for most of the century the forces of disintegration have been active and gathering strength. So many observers have said that the year 1914 was the beginning of the end and nothing has gone right since. The structure of modern society—political, commercial, social—is such to-day that it only wants one king-pin to be knocked out of place for the entire edifice to come down with a crash. That aspect of the matter is vividly forth-shown by the sequel to this vision. John listened to the message to its end and then he beheld while "a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone, and cast it into the sea, saying, Thus with violence shall that great city Babylon be thrown down, and shall be found no more at

all" (ch. 18.21). That which John thus witnessed was a repetition of a similar incident in the story of literal Babylon. A few years prior to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians at the time of the Captivity, when Babylon was at the height of its power and magnificence under its famous king Nebuchadnezzar II, Jeremiah the prophet sent an emissary to Babylon with a book—probably a parchment or leather scroll—in which he had written a complete prophecy of the eventual doom and destruction of Babylon, then more than half a century distant. That denunciation is recorded for modern readers in the 50th and 51st chapters of Jeremiah. Arrived at Babylon, Seraiah was to read the entire message in public and then, tying the parchment to a stone, throw it into the midst of Euphrates, which ran through the centre of the city. He probably stood in the centre of the stone bridge which spanned the river near the celebrated Tower of Babel to do so—as public a place as Westminster Bridge in London; the Euphrates at Babylon was as wide as is the Thames at Westminster. And as he thus cast the book into the water, he was to say "*thus shall Babylon sink, and shall not rise from the evil that I will bring upon her*" (Jer. 51.64).

So, suddenly but not without warning, the existing worn-out world order crumbles to dust and vanishes away. "That which decayeth and waxeth old" said the writer to the Hebrews "is ready to vanish away" (Heb. 8.13). It will be a drastic and a terrible end to a world order which has been built up during thousands of years and has served the needs of humanity tolerably well for much of that time, but because injustice and inequity, to say nothing of downright evil, has been built into its structure there is only one possible end. Whatever is of evil contains within itself the seeds of its own destruction. And there is a better world to succeed it. Babylon falls, as fall it must, but by the grace and mercy of God its fall is timed to occur at just that period when the kingdom of Christ on earth is ready to take its place. The transition will give rise to violence, for after Babylon's fall the powers of earth make one final attempt to resist the incoming kingdom, but the influences of Heaven will be victorious, and humanity will enter upon the Millennium, the thousand years of peace, with Christ in full and effective control.

* * *

It is that last conflict which is the subject of vision 9. The story is found in the nineteenth chapter of Revelation. Following an important sequence in which the Revelator hears the announcement of the "marriage supper of the Lamb", indicating that at this point the com-

pleted Church of this present Age has been fully gathered to eternal association in the heavens with the Lord Christ, there comes an aspect of the Advent in which that resurrected and glorified company directly participates from the celestial realm. This is the point of history at which the reality of the Advent is forced home upon the peoples of earth. In some unmistakable manner no one will be able to deny the fact; it will be true that in some very definite manner all peoples of earth shall "*see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory*", as Jesus predicted in Matt. 24.30.

The vision as it is unfolded in ch. 19. 11-21 opens with the spectacle of a majestic figure upon a white horse descending from the heavens. He is a martial figure, armed for combat, crowned to denote that he is also a king—in fact his name is given as "*King of kings and Lord of lords*". He is also designated "*The Word (Logos) of God*". Both titles identify the Rider as the Lord Jesus Christ. He comes as a warrior; "*in righteousness he doth judge and make war*" (ch. 19.11). He is followed by "*the armies which were in heaven*" all upon white horses and clothed in fine linen (ch. 19.14). This is a symbol of the resurrected Church, for "*to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints*" (ch. 19.8). This then is the revelation of Christ and his Church to the world at the extreme end of the Age when Heaven actively intervenes in earth's affairs to quell all opposition and initiate the Millennial or Messianic era. Thus verse 15 comes in naturally at this point: "*out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword that with it he should smite the nations; and he shall rule them with a rod of iron*". This is an allusion from the Old Testament. The "rod of iron" is the *shebet*, which is the word used for both a king's sceptre and a shepherd's crook. In this case, where "rule" is *poimaino*, meaning to shepherd a flock, the true meaning of the phrase is that Christ will shepherd the nations with his shepherding crook, by no means so oppressive a process as might be surmised from the mistranslation "rule them with a rod of iron". The "sharp sword", be it noted, comes from his mouth; it is the piercing and penetrating power of his message and his teaching which will "smite" the nations, a clear and incisive exposition of right and wrong which will vindicate the righteously inclined and condemn the unrighteous. Isaiah had the same idea in mind when he said, referring to this precise same event in history "*he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked*" (Isa. 11.4). So our Lord is revealed to the world as

their Deliverer, to put down all forces of evil and injustice and establish an era of peace and security in which all men will be able to develop their full potential for useful and happy living.

At this point battle is joined. *"I saw the wild beast; and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him that sat on the horse, and against his army"* (ch. 19.19).

The "wild beast" is a symbolic figure appearing at various points in the Book of Revelation to picture, in general terms, the whole conglomeration of religious-cum-political power which, arising from the ruins of the Roman empire in the early centuries of the Christian era, progressively extended its scope and influence until a thousand or more years later it had attained world-wide dimensions. Upon the well-known principle that "all power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely" the "wild-beast" justified its Biblical name by using its power to the oppression of men in general. Now here there is pictured a complete alliance between what is left of this system in the Last Days, and the kings and rulers of all the earth, of whatever ideology or political complexion, to resist the threat to their interests from above. In what way they are able to sense the nature of this celestial invasion, and with what kind of weapons they propose to achieve their object, is by no means clear in the Revelation passage. It is evident, however, that this vision in Revelation is a highly symbolised representation of the same event in history that is foreseen by the prophet

Ezekiel and Zechariah (Ezek. chaps. 38-39 and Zech. chap. 14). They saw the last conflict of this Age in terms of a united onslaught by the nations from the four quarters of the earth upon the earthly people of God, purified Israel, dwelling at peace in its own land, and the intervention of Heaven to save Israel, defeat the attackers, and immediately establish the Millennial kingdom. Be the details what they may, the vision here in Revelation pictures a final conflict at the end of this Age between the incoming beneficent powers of Heaven and the united powers of evil of the earth, determined to resist and prevent the introduction of a completely just and beneficent rulership over mankind. As might be expected, Heaven is the victor and the opponents are dispersed. As Isaiah (chaps. 11 & 32), says of this stupendous event and the era of peace and blessing that will follow, *"Behold, a king shall reign in righteousness, and princes shall rule in judgment . . . the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the reverence of the Lord . . . and my people shall dwell in a peaceable habitation, and in sure dwellings, and in quiet resting-places . . . they shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy kingdom, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea . . . and the work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever"*.

To be concluded.

METAMORPHOSIS

When Jesus told Nicodemus that no one can see the kingdom unless he is born again, Nicodemus replied "But how is it possible for a man to be born again when he is old? Can he enter his mother's womb a second time to be born?". We can well understand the thinking behind the question, for this was something quite beyond human understanding. Even today this spirit-birth is much misunderstood, largely because it is equated with conception and birth in the physical sense. However, there are other natural pictures which may be used to illustrate this change. (The word "change" is used here because, as we shall see, this new birth involves a fundamental change.) One of these pictures is used in John 12.24. Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies it remains just one grain, but if it dies it produces many others and yields a rich harvest. Our Lord's death upon the cross

was the climax of a daily dying, involving a ministry and preaching such as was never seen, before or since, but the process began even before his coming to earth. This is made clear in Phil. 2.5-9. *"Let this be your example of humility. He did not think equality with God was a thing to be retained, but stripped (kenosis, emptied) himself of all privileges and dignity and became like men and was born a human being. Therefore"* (because he stopped so low) *"God has highly exalted him and given him a name which is above every name."* Pondering this statement will bring at least some idea of the profound change which led to the birth of the first-born of a new creation.

This process of change is seen in another natural process known to zoologists as metamorphosis. There are many variations of this, but two instances come to mind which can be

used to illustrate that spiritual birth referred to at the beginning of this article.

First, the dragonfly. The egg develops into an ugly, brown sluggish but voracious larva, moving about at the bottom of a fresh-water pond, seizing its food with its curious jaw-like appendages. In time it climbs up the stem of a water-plant, a rather ugly bulbous creature. Its skin cracks open and the winged creature emerges, dries its wings in the warm sunshine and begins its darting flight. Similarly, the egg of the emperor moth becomes a larva, enveloped by a cocoon shaped somewhat like a flask with a narrow neck. After a while the insect forces its way out of this restricting neck and becomes a beautiful moth. This struggle to escape creates a pressure which forces the vital juices into the vessels of the wings, and it has been demonstrated that cutting the neck of the cocoon to make escape easier results in the emergence of an ugly swollen body with shrivelled wings. In each case the final stages of change involve the shedding of the drab unlovely skin that for a while has hidden the developing beautiful creature.

The Greek word *metamorphosis* occurs several times in the New Testament. It is used in Matt. 17 in which the scene on the mount of transfiguration is described. Jesus was "transformed" before three of his disciples. His face shone like the sun, his clothes became white as light. This may have been an instantaneous and fleeting change, but it was an indication of a phase in the process of change which took place between our Lord's descent from heaven and his return to receive that Name which is above every name. Metamorphosis is translated "transformed" in Rom. 12.2. Phillip's translation reads "Do not let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould, but let God REMOULD your minds from within".

We must all be conscious of the pressure of the worldly spirit around us, and we need to take positive thought and action to overcome it; our

efforts to do this are like the struggles of the larva of the moth which brings about its change into a beautiful moth. Metamorphosis is again seen in 2 Cor. 3.18. The Amplified Bible puts it "And all of us, as with unveiled face, because we continued to behold as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are constantly being transfigured into his very own image in ever increasing splendour, and from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord who is spirit".

In Phil 3.21 Paul writes of the change of our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, but "vile body" is not a good translation. The human body itself is not vile, but we have no illusions concerning the fallen state of the human heart or spirit which controls it. Other translations refer rather to the "body of our humiliation". The Amplified Bible reads, "Jesus Christ will transform and fashion anew the body of our humiliation to conform to and be like the body of his glory and majesty, by exerting that power which enables him to subject every thing to himself". In 2 Cor. 4.7 (TEV) Paul declares "we who have this treasure are like common clay pots". This is reminiscent of the ugly grey skin which covers the ugly bulbous creature which becomes the graceful dragonfly.

True it is, as Jesus declared, that this new birth comes through water and spirit but we are to be workers together with God; we have to climb up out of the "pond" of this life, we need to struggle out of the restricting cocoon of this body of our humiliation; then, one day, we shall be free of all human limitations and wing our way triumphantly into the Kingdom of God, there to live a new life on a higher plane, giving glory to the Creator of all that is beautiful.

*Changed from glory into glory,
Till in heaven we take our place,
Till we cast our crowns before thee,
Lost in wonder, love and praise.*

BACK TO THE CROSS

A flower that stops short at its flowering misses its purpose. We were created for more than our spiritual development: reproduction, not mere development, is the goal of matured being—reproduction in other lives. There is a tendency in some characters running parallel to the high cultivation that spends its whole energy on the production of bloom at the expense of seed. The famed Japanese cherry blossoms at Washington illustrate this, they bring forth a marvellous profusion of blossoms, but they produce no fruit. The flowers that are bent on perfecting themselves by becoming

double, end in barrenness, and like barrenness comes to the soul whose interests are all concentrated upon its own spiritual well-being, heedless of the needs of those around. The ideal flower is the one that uses its gifts as means to an end, the brightness and sweetness are not for its own glory, they are but to attract the bees and butterflies that will fertilize it to make it fruitful. All else may go when that work is done." "It is more blessed to give than to receive." The problem then is, how are we to escape from the self-life that holds us, even after the sin-life has loosed its grasp?

Back to the Cross we must go. Not only from the world of condemnation, and from the world of sinning, does it free us as we accept it, but from the power of outward things, and from the thralldom of self. Not only does death open the door into the world of acquittal, and again into that of holiness, but also into the realm of sur-

render, and thence into that of sacrifice. For the essential idea of the Cross is a life lost, to be found again in those around. "*For whosoever will save his life shall lose it, and whosoever will lose his life for My sake shall find it.*"—Matt. 16. 26.

(The "*Herald of Christ's Kingdom.*")

THE TIME OF THE SINGING OF BIRDS

"*Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away*" (Song Sol. 2.10).

The song of Solomon is poetry. It is not a treatise on doctrine, neither is it a book on prophecy. It should not be viewed as the visions of the prophets, symbolic pictures each element of which is intended to delineate some aspect of the future outworking of the Divine Plan. It is a poetic drama in which the two central characters sing and act the love which exists between them. But their singing and their acting faithfully mirrors the relation which exists between Christ and his Church. Because of that there can be little doubt that this idyllic song is intended by the Holy Spirit to present to every lover of the Lord a picture of that relationship which could not be so well expressed in the more prosaic language of doctrine or even in the impassioned symbolism of prophecy. And for this reason it is possible to detect behind the poetry a shadowy image of the Church in her waiting time and the coming of her Lord to take her to himself.

Each little section of the song is one little cameo, presenting one or another aspect of that mystic relationship. Successive sections do not necessarily connect one with the other. Sometimes a section stands distinct by itself. Verses 8 to 13 of chapter 2 form one such distinct section, and the poetic picture it presents is one that is dear to the hearts of all the Lord's disciples; the union of the Church with the Lord at the end of her experience in the flesh.

It may be nothing more than an analogy. It may only be a reading of already established doctrine into what is perhaps a poetic fantasy; but the application fits and if it can thus clothe an expectation already held with the delicate colours of a poetic reverie then it can in some small measure help to encourage and inspire in the Christian way.

"*The voice of my beloved!*" exclaims the Bride. She does not see him as yet, but she hears the tones of his voice speaking to her, calling to her, from beyond the Vail. He is coming, and she knows He is coming, and her heart thrills at the prospect. "*Behold, he cometh, leaping upon the*

mountains, bounding (not "skipping") *upon the hills.*" Here is an intimation not given us in the more sober prophetic descriptions of his Coming which denotes the eagerness, almost the impatience with which He comes at the Age's end to claim his Bride. "Behold, I come quickly" He said to John the Revelator. The prophet, watching diligently for his coming, cries out "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings . . . that saith unto to Zion, Thy God reigneth" (Isa. 52.7). "His feet shall stand in that day on the Mount of Olives" said Zechariah (14.4). This is the Lord on the way to take his Church to himself.

What is the first intimation of his arrival. Does he come along the broad high road, with sound of trumpets and a vast array of attendants? Does he come as in the parable, by night with lanterns and shouting, to the close shut house where the Bride is waiting? Not in this delicate song does He thus come. "*Behold, he standeth behind our wall, he looketh in* (not "forth") *at the windows, showing himself through the lattice*" (vs.9). He comes quietly, unobtrusively, not with loud knock on the door, but as it were semi-hidden behind the house wall, seen only dimly through the curtains which shroud the windows. "Lattice", the only occurrence of the word in the O.T., means a net or network, and probably refers to a window-covering which lets in the light but obscures clear sight. "Shewing" denotes to glance forth, to look by stealth, as through the holes of a veil. How better can one describe the initial unseen phase of his Advent, that span of time leading up to the full end of the Age, when the "watchers" realise by the signs of the times that the event is upon them and that the powers of Heaven are already intruding upon the affairs of men and gathering the nations to the battle of the great day of God Almighty? How better describe the coming of our Lord in his Divine spiritual glory into the world of men, this creation of space and time, to gather his Church silently and unnoticeably to himself? He is standing just out of sight behind the wall; but He is there. His form can just be made out behind

the curtains, all but invisible; but He is there. Later on He will be fully manifested, for "every eye shall see him" (Rev. 1.7) but for the present He is unseen, there behind the wall, shrouded by the curtains, but He is there. "I come as a thief" He told John (Rev. 16.15) and a thief comes not through the door, but by means of the windows, as said Joel (2.9).

But though unseen the Bride hears his voice. "Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away. For lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone. The flowers appear in the earth, the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle-dove is heard in our land. The fig tree putteth forth her green figs, and the vines are in blossom; they give forth their fragrance. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away" (vs. 10-13). The time has come for the Bride to be joined to her Bridegroom and taken to her new home, for the Church to leave this earthly scene and be "changed" to the glorious spiritual life and sphere which is to be her lot throughout eternity. This is the call which all who truly love the Lord are awaiting.

"The winter is past, the rain is over and gone." What can the winter be but the whole of human history from the Fall, this dark time of man's subjection to the "rain"—sin and all its consequences in misery, disease, death. In the days of Noah the wickedness of men was so great that God saw that every imagination of the thoughts of men's hearts was only evil, and that continually. In the days of Abraham, the world was given to idolatry and the Lord could find only one man for his purpose. When Moses met with the Lord on Sinai and made a covenant with God on Israel's behalf, it was not long before Israel had broken and repudiated the covenant. Christ appeared, and the nation to whom He appeared rejected him. During the whole of this present Age, of all those who have taken the name of Christ the many have been apostates and only the few faithful. The rain has been heavy and continuous and the winter has been long, but now the winter is past and the rain is over and gone; the genial days of summer are at hand.

"The flowers appear on the earth." These are the signs of the Millennial reign of Christ due to commence directly He has taken his Church to himself. The desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose, says Isaiah. The sunlit beauty of Eden will return and the dark days be no more. Both Ezekiel and John saw the vision of the River of Life flowing from the dwelling place of God, and the Trees of Life on either side nourished by the waters of the river and yielding fruit for the spiritual sustenance of mankind and leaves for

their healing.

"The time of the singing of birds is come". There are two occasions when the singing of birds is more than usually noticeable. One is in the early dawn when the light of a new day is commencing to overspread the earth and the birds herald it with the wellknown "dawn chorus". The other is in the springtime when the world is entering upon its annual time of the springing up of new life. So it is here; the Dawn of the New Day, the coming of what will be for all mankind the acceptable year of our Lord, the promised Times of Restitution of all things, this is heralded by the singing of birds. And what is this singing? There are two Hebrew words used to express the act of singing. One is *rinnah* which denotes singing in general without the particular kind of song and the other is *Zamir* which means to sing praises. And here in this text it is the word *Zamir* that is used. The singing of praises is here intended. Who are they who sing praises at the dawn of the Millennial Age. "Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice, with the voice together shall they sing, for they shall see, eye to eye, the Lord returning to Zion" (Isa. 52.8). There is a wonderful vision in the 14th chapter of Revelation in which the entire Church in the flesh is pictured as standing on Mount Zion singing a new song which no man could learn save those who are Christ's and have pledged themselves to his service; and that song is the prelude to a series of world-wide messages starting with the announcement of the coming Kingdom, and calling on men to believe because the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand, continuing with the declaration of judgment upon the anti-Christian institutions of the world, and concluding with the revelation of our Lord at his Second Advent coming in royal power to conduct the harvest of the Age, the gathering of his saints, and the execution of Divine judicial condemnation upon all that opposes his Kingdom. This is the song, the whole content of dispensational truth, "Present Truth" as Peter called it and we call it, due to be proclaimed at this end of the Age. In very truth, the time of the singing of birds has come.

"And the voice of the turtle-dove is heard in our land." The voice of the dove was heard on one memorable occasion in the past. When Jesus entered the baptismal waters of Jordan, the Holy Spirit descended upon him "in bodily shape like a dove" and there came a voice from heaven "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear ye him". That is the only instance in all the Scriptures of the Holy Spirit being likened to an earthly creature. The voice of the dove; the voice of the Holy Spirit. Nothing of all

that the disciples of Christ have proclaimed or achieved in this closing period of the Age could have been so done without the underlying inspiring and energising power of the Holy Spirit. Our Lord told his disciples that He would be with them, even to the end of the Age; He further said that although He must needs in his personal presence return to his Father He would nevertheless send them the Holy Spirit which would abide with them until He should again be present at his Second Advent. So the Holy Spirit has been the channel of Divine guidance and revelation through all the centuries of Christian history until the present. The knowledge we have of the Divine Plans for mankind, the knowledge of our own place and service in those plans; the knowledge of the imminence of our Lord's coming again and all the changes that are associated therewith; all this has been imparted to us by the Holy Spirit, which our Lord said would guide us into all truth and show us things to come. Truly the voice of the turtle-dove has been heard in our land.

"The fig tree putteth forth her green figs." For many centuries it has been recognised that in Scripture the fig tree is used in prophetic symbol to present God's earthly covenant people, Israel. Examples of this appear in Jer. 24.1-8, Joel 1.7.12 and Hos. 9.10. Our Lord used the same symbol in his parable of the fruitless fig tree in Luke 13.6-7 and an obvious prophetic allusion in Matt. 24.32-33. Now this fig tree is putting forth her green figs. Under normal conditions a great many unripe figs remain on the tree throughout the winter and then ripen very early the following year, becoming large and ready for plucking in March or April, just as the new leaves begin to appear and Spring is at hand. These figs were called *paq*, green figs, to distinguish them from the later summer crop. Here it is said that the fig tree "putteth forth" her green figs. This word "putteth forth" is *chanat* which means to mature or preserve. It is used only four other times in the O.T. and there rendered "embalm". So we have come to a time which the fig tree has matured her fruit, which has been developing throughout the winter but in an unripe condition; now it is spring and the fruit is ripe and mature and ready for use. What better picture is there of Israel being regathered and made ready for her future Millennial work, Jesus said that when we saw the fig tree putting forth her leaves we were to know that the time is at hand; this is what He meant. The prophet Habakkuk vowed that even if the fig tree did not blossom and no fruit appeared on the vine he would still believe and expect the Kingdom of Heaven in God's due time; in this our day we see

the sign of the fig tree which assures us that his faith was not misplaced. So, now that the singing of the birds and the voice of the turtle-dove have given their testimony to the imminence of the Day of Christ, the maturing of the green figs adds an outwardly perceptible testimony to the verity of all that the Scriptures foretell.

"The vines are in blossom; they give forth their fragrance." Here is something that must come to its fruition in a later season. The fig trees are bearing their fruit but the vines as yet are only in blossom; the time of harvesting the fruit is a little later on. But the blossom is giving forth its fragrance, an earnest of that which is to come. In Old Testament days the vine also was a symbol of Israel, but a vine that had to be rejected and cast away because it failed to bring forth fruit (Isa. 5.1-6; Jer. 2. 21-22; Hos. 10.1). Our Lord gave this theme a New Testament setting and declared that the highest calling of all, to be joint heirs with Christ in the heavens, was denied them because of that failure and the privilege given to the Christian Church of this present Age. (Matt. 21.33-41). So the vines which are now in blossom and giving forth their fragrance are the members of the Church, believers in Christ, dedicated to his service and endeavouring in all ways to be conformed to his likeness. The time of fruitage is not yet; the Master Reaper has not yet gathered his own into the heavenly storehouse. We are still in the flowering stage but that is evidence that the time of harvest is not very far away. And it does not take very much imagination to sense that the fragrance can only be the fruits and graces of the Spirit which we, the branches of the Vine (John 15.5) are developing within ourselves and manifesting to others around us while life endures, "The fruit of the Spirit" says our mentor, Paul, "is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance" (Gal. 5. 22). These things constitute the fragrance which the vine blossoms give forth now; in a later day the fruit of the vine will be for the life of all mankind, for the "Spirit and the Bride say come, and whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely" (Rev. 22.17). The earnest expectation of the creation, says Paul again, waiteth for the manifestation of the Sons of God.

So, our beloved One stands there, behind the wall, looking in at the windows, hidden from sight by the curtains, but—He is there. He has come to call his own to himself, to take them and present them before the presence of the Father with exceeding joy, to accompany them into that wonderful but unimaginable experience which the Book of Revelation calls the marriage of the Lamb, preparatory to appearing with them

to all the world for the world's salvation. He comes, at last, to take his Church to himself and so set in motion that chain of events which is to characterise the final end of human probation and culminate in the fulfilment, at last, of the

Church's age-old prayer "Thy will be done in earth as it is done in heaven". He stands there, behind the wall, and his accents come, soft and low, but pregnant with meaning, "Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away".

THE RETRIBUTIVE CHARACTER OF DIVINE LAW

A Doctrinal Essay

"Be not deceived; God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap." (Gal. 6.7).

The Apostle Paul, addressing the Church, announces a principle of Divine Law which is applicable not only to the Church, but to all men everywhere. Hosea expresses the same truth, saying that if we sow to the wind we shall reap the whirlwind. (Hos. 8.7). Solomon says if we sow iniquity, we reap vanity. (Prov. 22.8). St. Paul says if we sow sparingly, we reap sparingly, and if we sow bountifully, we reap bountifully (2 Cor. 9.6). This is equally true whether we sow wild oats or good wheat.

It is in view of the harvest of the world's sowing that we are informed that "the eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good" (Prov. 15.3); that "God shall bring every work into judgment with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil" (Eccl. 12.14); and that "there is nothing covered that shall not be revealed, neither hid that shall not be known". (Luke 12.2).

But when will this reckoning time come? Now, as saith the Prophet Malachi (3.15), men "call the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up; yea, they that tempt God are even delivered". With the Psalmist (Psa. 94. 3, 4) we inquire, "Lord, how long shall the wicked triumph, and all the workers of iniquity boast themselves?" The Apostle Paul answers that the Lord "hath appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom He hath ordained"—Jesus Christ (Acts 17.31).

But take heed. The prophet Malachi raises a suggestive question, which all would do well to ponder. He asks, "Who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for He is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap. . . . And I will come near to you to judgment, and I will be a swift witness against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, and the widow and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear not Me, saith the Lord of hosts" (Mal. 3. 2, 5).

The reference of these Scriptures is to the

great judgment of the Day of the Lord—the day of trouble with which this Gospel Dispensation is to close—variously described as a day "of wrath", "of vengeance", "of recompense", and as a "time of trouble such as was not since there was a nation". But while this great judgment will have to do with the world in general — with nations and corporations and all civil, social and religious organisations of men; and while it will touch the cases of all the individuals living at that time, we naturally inquire where retributive justice came, or is to come in, in dealing with all the generations of the past?

Our Lord answers the question when He says, "The hour is coming in which all that are in the graves shall hear the voice of the Son of Man and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection by judgment" (John 5. 28, 29; see R.V. and *Diaglott*). The whole Messianic Age is set forth as a "day" of reckoning, of trial, of judgment. In that searching judgment there will be a reckoning, even for every pernicious word (Matt. 12.36); and by submitting and learning obedience under those judgments, the masses of mankind who will to obey are to be gradually raised up to perfection of being, as well as of knowledge.

But here a philosophic and important question arises as to the extent to which the *justification* of a sinner, through faith in the precious blood of Christ, and his full consecration to do the Father's will, may intercept the course of the Law that a man must reap what he has sown. In other words. Will his new relationship to God save him from a miserable harvest of a former sowing of wild oats?

The Scriptures, as well as observation, assure us that our *justification* before God does not remove at once and without our co-operation all the results of previous transgression. The harvest is like in kind to the sowing; but the penitent and forgiven one has the promise of grace to help in the battle with his inherited as well as cultivated weaknesses, and so we read (1 John 1.9), "God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness". It is in this *cleansing process* which

follows justification that the consecrated believer must of necessity suffer from some of the baneful results of a past course of sin — reap the reward of his former sowing. While the Lord will be very merciful in dealing with him, nevertheless, as a Wise Physician, He will not spare the necessary experience to eradicate the deep-seated evil propensities of long cultivation in the past.

Here the retributive character of Divine Law is especially noteworthy. Men often make a distinction between the law of *nature* and the *moral law*, calling the one *natural* and the other *Divine*. But the fixed principles of both are of *Divine origin*, and accomplish the *Divine will* in their *operation*. Both operate on the basis of retributive justice. All Divine Law, whether of nature or of morals, is but the operation of certain fixed principles of righteousness, having for their object the peace and happiness of all intelligent creatures under its jurisdiction. Obedience to this Law brings its reward of happiness, while any interference with it incurs its certain penalty.

If you hold your hand *before* the fire, it will be warmed, and your comfort and happiness will be thus ministered to; if you put your hand *into* the fire, it will be burned, and you will suffer pain. Thus the law of nature, which was designed to comfort and bless us, is also prepared to punish us if we *violate its proper use*. And not only so, but it is prepared to grade its penalties in proportion to the aggravation of the *offence against it*.

If you put your hand into the fire for a very short time, it will be *scorched*; persist a little longer, and it will be *blistered*; and a little longer still, and it will be *consumed*. Applied properly to the cooking of your food, fire will reward you with a savoury meal; but applied improperly, it may render the food undesirable or unfit for use. Water, also one of our greatest blessings, becomes, if the law of nature be disregarded, an agent of death and destruction. So throughout the laws of nature we might trace retribution.

In the realm of moral law, the case is the same. If you violate the principles of righteousness, you deface the image of God in your being. Impure thoughts write in clearly legible signs upon the countenance the dark lines of a bad character; while pure, just and noble thoughts illuminate the countenance and render the pure character transparent to beholders. And the operations of moral law are as sure and reliable as are those of natural law.

The fact that the retribution—the reward or the penalty—is often delayed is frequently presumed upon by some, who think they can sow their crop of wild oats and never realise their harvest. Both individuals and nations have long

presumed to act upon this hazardous hypothesis; well indeed would it be if they would hearken to the Apostle's warning: "*Be not deceived; God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap*".

The operations of this law are most manifest upon classes and nations — first, because their prominence gives them world-wide publicity; and second, because their judgment must of necessity be in the present life, since beyond the grave the present order of society will have no existence. A glance at the pages of history reveals the fact that all the nations of the past have reaped a bitter harvest, and amid harrowing scenes have breathed their last. They had their rising, their *struggling periods*, and their *flourishing eras*; and then "pride and fulness of bread" caused them to rest in fancied security, and to sink in the scale of morals, until their decline was followed by their fall. The reaped what they had sown.

Just now, all the nations of the world are fast approaching the most terrible crises of their national existences. In the great time of unparalleled trouble which is imminent, they are about to reap what they have sown. They have sown to the wind the seeds of selfishness; now they are about to reap the whirlwind of terror and the destruction of all law and order, and of national and social organisation.

The operation of this law in individual cases is none the less sure. Every thought harboured, every disposition exercised and cultivated, becomes a component part of individual character; and this character, which is more or less tender in early life, becomes fixed in the course of years. If the cultivation of character has been along the lines of righteousness and truth, according to the light possessed — whether of conscience merely, or of revelation also—the ripened fruit of an established, right-preferring and benevolent character is a blessed harvest in comparison with others. If the cultivation has been along the lines of depravity, self-gratification and degradation, the terrible fruits are a fearful penalty.

Even though such a one be freely forgiven upon repentance and faith in the Redeemer—fully absolved from legal condemnation through Christ, who bore its Divinely pronounced penalty—death—nevertheless, the fruits of his sowing are manifest in his character. Evil propensities must be rooted out and a proper character formed at a considerable cost of painful, but valuable experience; for God is just, not only to forgive us our sins, but also to *cleanse us* from all unrighteousness. The eradicating of these evil dispositions, propensities and appetites, deep-rooted and long-cultivated, will cause great disturbances of the soil in which they have grown; and pain

as well as joy will attend their removal, and their replacement with the graces of the Spirit.

The Lord, as a wise Physician, will be as merciful and tender with his patient as the necessities of the case will permit. All will be shown their need of his aid, but no patient will be treated further except with his own consent and co-operation. With the Church this treatment takes place in the present life and is a treatment of the *will* rather than of the body; for although the body will be greatly helped by the treatment, it is not the Great Physician's purpose to *cure* these marred bodies, but to give to this class perfect spiritual bodies in the resurrection. In these the consecrated *will* is being transformed and renewed to perfect harmony with the will of God, the mind of Christ. The "overcomers", the true Church, passing through difficulties and cleansing and trials of faith and afflictions now, and being approved of the Lord, will not come into the judgment trial of the next Age (1 Cor. 11. 32); but, with the Redeemer, their Lord, will be Kings and Priests of God, who shall judge the world and recompense to them good or evil, impartially, under the terms of the New Covenant (1 Cor. 6.2).

A feature of retribution upon the world during their trial will be the publicity which will then be given to the reaping and to the deeds of the past. Our Lord has so intimated, saying, "*There is nothing covered that shall not be revealed; neither hid that shall not be known*" (Matt. 10. 26; Luke 12. 2, 3). This also will come about in a natural way, when in that day all that are in their graves shall come forth. The murderer and his victim, the debtor and his creditor, the thief and his dupe, the defamer and the defamed, must face each other, and the facts, with even the secret motives, will be discerned. The terms of their reconciliation to each other and to the Judge will be equitable, and will be known to all.

Past history has proclaimed to the world the character of many a Nero; but additionally, there will be the necessity of seeing the former victims of their ignoble cruelty, and facing them in the light of a new and healthy public sentiment, which will manifest crime in all its horrid deformity. Truly such "shall awake to shame and lasting (Heb. *olam*) contempt", even in their own eyes; for as the renewed manhood of the race begins to assert itself, they will the more fully realise the depth of the pit of degradation whence they were digged; and even the generous forgiveness of formerly injured and outraged fellow men will be a great humiliation. It will truly be, as the Scriptures suggest, the heaping of coals of fire on their heads (Prov. 25. 21, 22; Rom. 12. 20).

It should be borne in mind, too, that the only standard of judgment in public sentiment at that time will be *character*. None of the *false* standards — wealth, noble birth, or aristocracy of power, by which men are often measured now, and under which cloaks they often take shelter — will then avail anything; for under the New Dispensation men will come forth shorn of all their former possessions. They will have neither wealth nor power; and in the light of that Age, heredity will be nothing whereof to boast.

The same conditions which will thus expose the evils of the past life and thus, in the natural operations of moral law, bring about a measure of retribution to evil-doers, will also make manifest the good deeds of the righteous, so that even the slightest favours done for others, deeds which at the time blessed the characters of the doers, will be recognised and appreciated.

In this view of the matter it can be seen how, in a perfectly natural way, a man must reap the harvest of his sowing of wild oats, even though he has been freely forgiven, absolved from guilt and its penalty, death, and legally justified through faith in Christ. He will reap it, not only in the difficulties he will have piled up for himself in the hardening of his own character, making the steps up to perfection more painful and slow, and requiring severer discipline, but also in the just disapproval, or indignation of a righteous public sentiment in that Day of Judgment.

Such will be the natural and inevitable results of present wrong-doing. One consolation, however, will be the fact that this humiliation, in some measure, at least, will be *shared by all*; "*for there is none righteous (none perfect), no, not one*" (Rom. 3.10); and all must pray, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive others". It will indeed be a time for melting and mellowing all hearts. Thus the Lord will take away the stony heart and give to all who under the New Covenant shall become *his* people a heart of flesh, according to his promise (Ezek. 36.22-28).

In some instances a portion of the reaping is experienced in the present life; in some it will be in the life to come, as the Apostle intimates in 1 Tim. 5. 24, 25. So also good works are sometimes manifest now, and rightly appreciated and rewarded. But whether now or hereafter, our Lord's assurance is that even the gift of a cup of cold water to one of his disciples, *because* he is his disciple, shall have its reward (Matt. 10. 40-42). So minute will be the Lord's cognisance of character and works, and his rewards therefor; and they will be none the less *his* rewards because accomplished in the natural operation of retributive laws.

A murderer, for example, may meet with a just recompense for his crime at the hands of his fellow men, and yet in due time come forth from his grave *unto* (the privileges and opportunities of) a resurrection (lifting up—all the way up) by judgment (trial, discipline). If obedient, he may reach the height of perfection and life everlasting although the sins of his past life may have made mountains of difficulties in his character for him to clamber over during that Judgment Age.

On the other hand, there may be a moral man, who has "tasted the good Word of God, and the powers of the Age to come" and who has been made a partaker of the spirit of holiness through faith in Christ, yet permits envy and strife to take possession of his heart. He may *hate his brother*, though he outwardly violates no law and is esteemed among men. Such a one is a *murderer* at heart (1 John 3. 15), though restrained from outward violence by respect for the opinions of others or by fear of the consequences. Who will deny that such a one, because of the light enjoyed, may have greater difficulties to overcome in the reformation of his character than the grosser, but ignorant, murderer? To

whom much is given in the way of knowledge, opportunity, of him much will be required. (Luke 12. 48). That judgment will be according to knowledge and ability to do right—a just recompense of reward.

Christ "*brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel*" (2 Tim. 1.10). Since then, proportionately as men have come directly or indirectly in contact with that Gospel, their responsibility has been increased, whether they accepted or rejected, opposed or ignored it. It is written, "*This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil*" (John 3.19).

This is our judgment day; the judgment of the world will proceed upon the same general principles. They will first be brought to a knowledge of the Truth, and will then be judged according to their use or abuse of that knowledge after they receive it, as worthy or unworthy of life. The good and bad actions of their life, previous to their knowledge of the Truth, will enter into this judgment only in the natural order of the retributive character of moral Law.

HIGH TIME TO AWAKE OUT OF SLEEP

Instruction for today in the light of the past

"... and that, knowing the time, it is high time to awake out of sleep, for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed."

(Rom. 13.11).

Those words were penned at a time when the Apostle Paul, and many of the Early Church with him, had come to realise that the promised Second Coming of the Lord to set up his Kingdom of life and light was much farther away than they had thought. In the first flush of Christian enthusiasm the early believers had expected the Return to take place in their own lifetime; to what extent Paul now realised the long period destined to elapse before that longed-for happening would materialise we cannot say, but he did at least know that he and his generation would be laid aside to await their crown of life, and many centuries pass, before the returning Lord would come to raise his faithful ones from the dead and set up his Kingdom. And if, under such circumstances, Paul could assure his readers it was high time to awake out of sleep because their salvation was nearer now than when they became believers, how much more forceful must the same exhortation be to us, we who live so much closer to the time of his revelation and his Kingdom?

Paul was probably not speaking altogether from the dispensational point of view. He must have used the words largely from the personal standpoint. He and his converts were growing old together; their first impetuous rush of youthful energy was giving place to the slower stream of age, and Paul knew that for many of them the end of life's experience was within measurable distance. Whether or no the Lord was to return within the century, or not for another thousand years or more, he knew that his companions must pass into death without seeing the fulfilment of their hopes — and they knew it too. Hence there would creep upon some, quite naturally, a lessening of the first enthusiasm, a resigning of one's self to life as it was, a turning back, if ever so little, to the interests and distractions of this world — and a corresponding partial indifference to the Calling. So Paul deemed necessary an exhortation to continued and unabated zeal for Christ, a shaking off the bands of apathy which were slowly closing upon some, for life was hastening on and the "Day of Salvation" running its course. Only they that should endure to the end could hope to receive this "so great salvation" and to those who already were coming near the end of their allot-

ted span that salvation was indeed nearer than when they first believed!

This almost rhythmic process, this waning and flagging of zeal and love followed by a call to awaken, a revival of hope and enthusiasm, and a consequent "reform movement", seems to be characteristic, not only of the history of the Christian Church, but of the whole history of man in his relation to God. Very little is known of conditions on earth between the Fall and the Flood. It is clear though that the human race as a whole lapsed very quickly into ignorance of God and apathy as to the destiny of man. "Let us eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we shall die" might fairly sum up their philosophy if our Lord's allusion to the days that were before the Flood is appreciated. When one remembers the great length of time that Adam was alive and the clear knowledge of God he must have retained even in his fallen condition, it seems surprising that godlessness should so quickly become rampant, but the history of Cain's descendants shows that such was the case. Turning for a moment to the discoveries of archaeologists and geologists, it is clear that whilst a high state of human civilisation and culture prevailed over part of the antediluvian world, there were many peoples that had become depraved and bestial, both physically and mentally. The discoveries relating to what are known as "Neanderthal" men can only be harmonised with the Bible account by supposing them to have been more or less savage antediluvian tribes, and it is probable that they sank to that low stage of existence within a very few centuries after Eden. It need occasion no surprise to reflect upon the implication of Gen. 6 that by the time of the Flood God, and the ways of God, were practically unknown in the world of men.

The catastrophe of the Flood caused a swift revulsion of feeling. Whether one reads the Bible account as demanding that only Noah and his family survived, or whether, as some consider, the Genesis story refers only to the central "civilised" area, and outlying peoples were untouched by the Flood, it appears that the first few generations after that event were intensely religious. It is highly probable that there was a very sincere return to God—perhaps those in the Ark realised that from the point of view of God's redemptive Plan it was "high time to awake out of sleep". One may surely take it as certain that righteous Noah sensed the opportunity to make a fresh start in the world that God had given his family. And probably there was great enthusiasm and there were high hopes when his sons set out to rebuild the shattered land of their birth. But from the records of

Genesis, brief though they be, it appears that the enthusiasm waned away again, until by the time of Terah, Abraham's father, even the line of Shem through whom Abraham came had relapsed into idolatry. A new and interesting light is shed upon this idolatry from the discoveries of recent years. The period immediately after the Flood is still very largely a closed book and it is not possible to be dogmatic as to the number of centuries that elapsed between that event and the earliest reliable dates we have, at the time of Abraham. There is however a wealth of information available concerning Abraham's day and the century or so immediately preceding him, and from that information it is fairly clear that the idolatry of Abraham's native land was a corruption of a formerly pure and intelligent worship of the true God. The elaborate mythology of Babylon, which has been the model for nearly all subsequent false religions, bears a remarkable analogy with what we regard as the truth of Scripture. It seems clear that in those centuries there had been a steady decline in understanding of God and his plans, and that the true knowledge of God had all but vanished from the earth—until God called Abraham!

Once more it could truly be said that a call came, "high time to awake out of sleep". Abraham bestirred himself to reject the worship and interests of the land of his birth and set out to follow the leading of his God.

There is no need to repeat the story here. Suffice to remind ourselves that the bright light which blazed out over the lives of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph, and made their epoch one of the best known and most fully described in the whole of Scripture, a record of rare activity and great triumphs of faith, flickered out again in the darkness which settled over the tribes in Egypt; then was fulfilled the prophecy which had declared "Know of a surety that thy seed shall be stranger in a land that is not theirs, and they shall afflict them four hundred years".

At the end of those years it was again high time to awake out of sleep, for another great step forward in the Plan of God was due to be taken. God called Moses, prepared him over many years for the task for which He had called him, and sent him to Egypt to lead his people away. In the strength and power of that great awakening they went forty years in the wilderness until they reached the Promised Land, battled and fought until they had won for themselves and their children a place in which to dwell, and then—ceased from their early zeal and went to sleep again. Once more the darkness settled down, illumined now and then by fitful flashes of national revival, none of which were

long-lived, until the final carrying away into Babylon at the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, and the subsequent fall of that city before the conquering armies of Cyrus. Again had come the time for a fresh development in the outworking of the Plan, and again a national awakening out of sleep. The liberated captives, with songs on their lips and gladness in their hearts, pressed across the desert to rebuild their Temple and city, in full expectation that the darkness would never more close in upon them.

But of course, it did; and it needed the preaching of John the Baptist to awaken the nation to consciousness of the importance of the time. And now the Plan was working itself out in rapid steps—John had a new, an urgent message, never before heard: "*The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!*" Almost before the purport of his preaching had been grasped, there came another, One Who brought life and truth to the world and called to an eternal awakening in which there should never be any more darkness at all. But those who had not heeded Moses and the prophets did not heed even although Christ rose from the dead: and of those who did at first listen to his words there were many who, as the centuries began to pile up again, left their first love: so the darkness descended. "While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept." The Reformation, later, was a time of partial awakening, but sleep overpowered the partially awakened ones, and it was not until the first rosy gleams betokening the coming change of dispensation, and the approaching Millennial Age, began to dawn, that the age-old call went out, this time with greater force than ever before, "It is high time to awake out of sleep, for now ^{we} is our salvation nearer than when ~~we~~ believed;

That is the call for to-day and it is more insistent than ever. It may be that activity on an organised scale has not been pronounced, but there is no doubt that individual believers have continued to the extent of their ability in the proclamation of the Kingdom message, and little groups here and there have laid their hands to tasks that have accomplished something for the Lord and his Kingdom. We should not decry such contributions to the work of spreading the Kingdom Gospel just because they do not come

within the ambit of some great and prominent Christian organisation. Neither should we disparage them because they do not attract widespread public attention or display noticeable fruitage. It has always been a case of "not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts". And the first and most important purpose of Christian activity during this Age is the training and qualification of the Christian believer himself for the greater work of the next Age. That is the most effective fruitage of all our evangelistic efforts, of whatsoever kind they be.

This, then, is the background of the Apostle's exhortation to awake out of sleep. At every important time of dispensational change in past history there has been such an awakening. Now, in face of the most important change of all, the transition from "this present evil world" to the "new heavens and new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness", we need to be alert and waking, quick to discern the significance of current events and eager to grasp such opportunities of service as may be open to us or such as we can create. The Apostle in writing to the Thessalonian Christians (1 Thess. 5) lays down three vital admonitions "*Therefore let us not sleep, as do others . . . let us watch and be sober . . . and . . . be at peace among yourselves!*" There can be no marked advance, as a fellowship or as a community, in the understanding of the signs of the times unless we are united in spirit and purpose, manifesting the Spirit of Christ in our dealings one with another. Neither can there be effective joint service and evangelistic effort unless we arm ourselves with that spiritual dynamic which comes from the consciousness of a common ideal and a common purpose. Before we can wake up to dispensational light and evangelical opportunities we need a heart-searching revival of our first faith and zeal leading to a spirit of brotherliness which over-rides all other considerations and fulfils within and between us the words of our Lord Jesus "One is your Master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren". That is the awakening that must precede our next advance in the Master's service and it is to that awakening we must now apply the Apostle's words "*Knowing the time, it is high time to awake out of sleep, for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed!*"

Things are not necessarily done by rush and bustle. Spring glides in from day to day quite smoothly. The harvest matures without din and noise. The final conquest of evil comes "not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts." (Zech. 4: 6.)

Simon the coward became Simon the courageous. Simon who denied his Master three times before soldiers and servant, spoke to thousands of men without flinching, and declared that it was the Spirit of the living God that had been received.

My Dickman



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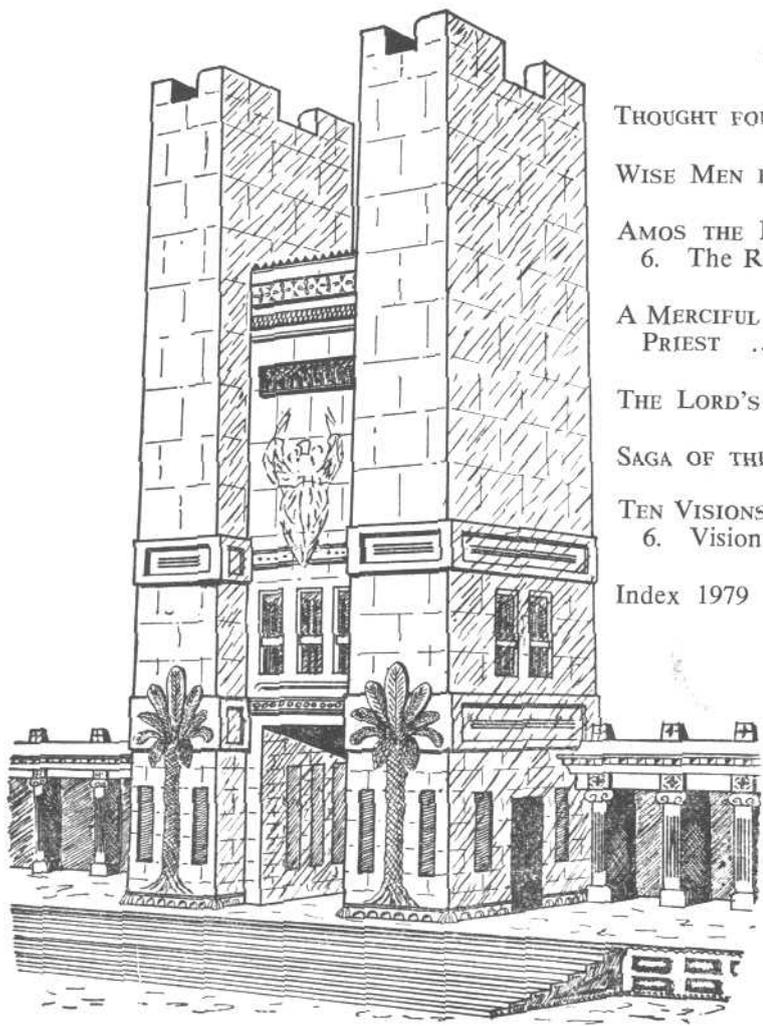
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Thou, therefore, endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ

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

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Thought for the Month

"Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof; and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit." (Eccl. 7. 8).

The writer of Ecclesiastes was by no means the doleful pessimist he is so often accused of being. Granted that he saw very little in this present world and present life to extol, and gave us his song in the most minor of minor keys; granted that his words read like the despairing epilogue to a play which is set against a background of dark shadows and no light at all, in which nothing has been presented that is at all worth while and enduring, all, as he himself was so fond of repeating, is "vanity and vexation of spirit" or as Ferrar Fenton has so succinctly put it "frailty and a striving after wind". Granted all this, the fact is that the Preacher—the name the writer of this strange book gave himself—was a man possessed of deep spiritual insight and profoundly conscious that only in the outworking purpose of God and the final triumphant consummation of that purpose could the enigma of human life and the explanation of human frailty and failure be found and understood. The Preacher drew attention, in those pungent, vivid epigrams which adorn his book, to the unsatisfactory nature of all the ways of man now, and then by contrast, the certainty of a better and fully satisfactory condition of things in the day that the Divine purpose is fully revealed and fully attained.

The whole purpose of the Book of Ecclesiastes is to show that no matter how frustrating and apparently pointless the present life and the present world order, it is a necessary stage in the development of man and in his onward progress to the destiny God has appointed for him. *"This sore travail hath God given to the sons of men*

that they might be exercised therewith" (Eccl. 1. 13). There is no hope for the present world; it is doomed to perish and with it all the works of man which have not been wrought in company with God. But this is not the end. *"The righteous, and the wise, and their works, are in the hand of God"* (Eccl. 9. 1), and, at the last, *"God shall bring every work into judgment, whether it be good, or whether it be evil"* (Eccl. 12. 14). The implication is plain; that which is good shall endure, that which is evil shall not endure. That is why he says, in this text, *"Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof"*. It is the life and experience and history of man and man's world of which he is speaking. The end will be better than the beginning. As Zechariah says "At evening time it shall be light". And the long-sighted man is the man who realises this truth. *"The patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit"*. "Patient" in that text means to wait, to tarry, to take the long view and wait for its accomplishment. "Proud" means to be lifted up in arrogance and refuse to see anything outside the immediate present and that which is of immediate advantage. The long-sighted man is better than the arrogant man because he looks beyond the situation as it is to-day and realises that in a future day God will have achieved his purpose and gathered together all things in Christ and the ideal of his creation will have been achieved. "Behold, the dwelling-place of God is with men... and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away" (Rev. 21. 3-4). The Book of Ecclesiastes, contrary to appearances, is really a most optimistic book, because it knows that the things which are to follow are better than the things which are now.

WISE MEN FROM THE EAST

Mysterious visitors from the East! Better known and more clearly defined in mediaeval legend and modern Christmas card artistry than they could ever hope to be by the original story in Matthew's Gospel. Coming upon the scene from the unknown and vanishing without trace whence they came; their nationality, their religion, their status among men, not revealed, nor even how many of them there were—for the popular conception of "three wise men" owes its birth to church tradition and not to Biblical history. The material given in one account, Matthew's, of this intriguing happening is so scanty that one might almost be forgiven for concluding that nothing more definite could ever be known about these strangers from a distant land. Nevertheless a closer examination of the simple narrative which comprises the second chapter of the first synoptic Gospel yields sufficient to justify a compilation which might reasonably be included among the stories of Jesus.

"Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem" (Matt. 2. 1). This is one of the two historical notices by which the date of Jesus' birth can be fixed. The other is the statement by Luke (2.1) to the effect that He was born at the time a decree went out from Augustus Caesar requiring "all the world to be taxed"—more properly, enrolled. An undue reliance on Josephus and other historians of the period has in the past led to some confusion and error as to the true date. (It is generally known, of course, that the present Anno Domini era does not commence with our Lord's birth; the date A.D. 1 was determined at first by the monk Dionysius Exiguus in the sixth century and afterwards modified by the chronologist Scaliger in the sixteenth century). It seems reasonably certain in the light of modern investigation that the enrolment recorded by St. Luke was a population census taken in the reign of Augustus Cæsar, at some time after March, B.C.2. Independent evidences go to show that the death of Herod occurred early in A.D.1 and that Jesus was born between the two happenings, at the end of September, B.C.2. The tradition which placed the event on 25th December did not have its rise until the time of Chrysostom in the 4th century.

It is within the framework of this period of some two years, between the birth of Jesus and the death of Herod, that the story of the wise men is to be placed.

No one knows who they were. The Greek word is *Magi*. The magi were Persian astrologers who had succeeded to the wisdom and status of the Chaldeans, the "wise men of Babylon", who figure so much in the Book of Daniel. Daniel himself was the chief—the "*Rab-mag*", chief magician—of that fraternity at one time in his career (Dan. 2. 48). It is more than likely that during the intervening five centuries a great deal of Jewish belief and religious thought had been incorporated in the philosophy of the fast decaying system. After the destruction of Babylon and its Temple, centre of the Chaldeans' worship and the symbol of their power, the caste diminished in numbers and influence until by the time of Jesus it was virtually non-existent. This party of Magi which came to adore before the child Jesus might have represented a few of them who had accepted a great deal of Old Testament teaching and were more than half ready to reject the last vestiges of their old beliefs in the face of this revelation. The extent to which they had any clear conception of the nature of God does not appear. There is the one statement in verse 12 that they were "warned of God in a dream" and obeyed the warning, but that need not imply that they were adherents of the Jewish faith. It is probable that their religion was a mixture of Judaism, paganism and Eastern mysticism. It does not seem that they were Jews; the question in verse 2 "*Where is he that is born King of the Jews?*" is one that would hardly be put in that form by a Jew. Neither would any true Jew admit to Divine guidance by means of a star in the sky; that is altogether alien to Jewish instinct. They were probably Gentiles, of Persian or Babylonian origin, cognisant of the Messianic hopes of Israel, instructed in the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament, and by the laws of their own science convinced that the star they had seen was the announcement of the birth of that Messiah. Incidentally the Church festival of Epiphany, meaning the "manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles", which commemorates the visit of the Magi, is testimony to ancient Church belief that they were in fact Gentiles although the choice of a date only twelve days after the Nativity does not rest upon any historical evidence whatsoever.

Neither is there any Scriptural basis for the popular impression that the visiting Magi were three in number. Mediæval drama and art, and ecclesiastical tradition, in the Middle Ages, em-

bellished Matthew's story with the added refinement of Caspar, King of India, Melchior, King of Persia, and Balthasar, King of Arabia—in sublime disregard of the facts of ancient history—coming together before the mother and babe in the inn and presenting their gifts. Cologne Cathedral houses a shrine to the three kings and claims that their bodies are buried in the vaults below, but that claim need not be taken very seriously. We can be certain only of one thing, that a party of philosophers, wise men of this world, believers in the promise of Israel's Messiah, by a means not clearly known to us, discerned in their distant home by Euphrates or Tigris that the Messiah had been born in Judea, and they journeyed to see him and acknowledge him and pay him homage. Perhaps that is the greatest thing in the story, that the wise men of this world, the learned, the mighty and the wealthy, should be represented by some of their own kind, adoring and worshipping the Lord of glory, just as the poor, the mean, and the simple of this world had previously performed the same homage through the instrumentality of the Judean shepherds. It might not be altogether without significance that it was the poor and simple who got there first!

It may reasonably be concluded that these men, though Gentiles having no part or lot in the Israel covenant and no claim to being of the people of God, were nevertheless sincere worshippers of God, even though their devotion may have been mingled with a certain amount of paganism. In the first place they evidently had a tolerably definite knowledge of the Messianic hope of Israel and a belief in it, that one day God would send his Messiah to reign over his people Israel and lead them to the fulfilment of their destiny, the enlightenment of all the world. But there is one hint that their knowledge went deeper than that of many in Israel. "Where is he that is *born* King of the Jews" (verse 2) they asked. They knew that Messiah was to be born a babe and thus come to man's estate and his Messiahship. The majority in Israel did not know that; they expected Messiah to appear suddenly in the full martial glory of conquering power, fully armed and supported for the overthrow of all enemies and the exaltation of Israel to the headship of the nations. These wise men must have interpreted correctly the famous prophecy of Isaiah "*Unto us a child is born; unto us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder . . . of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it and to establish it with justice and with judgment even for ever*" (Isa. 9.6-7). Israel, to whom that

prophecy was given, never really understood it; it was left to these Gentile Magi to announce the fulfilment of the prophecy and call attention to the One who was its fulfilment. What matter that their assertion "*we have seen his star in the east*" may only have been an application of their astrological principles which on this occasion did coincide with the actual event; they go on to say "*and are come to worship him*". The long journey they had undertaken to prove their faith and attest their devotion is evidence enough of their sincerity. "*And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him*" (verse 11). This is the act of truly pious men who really believed that, like the aged Simeon in the Temple not so long previously, their eyes had looked upon the Lord's Christ.

This raises the question to what extent their revelation and their journey was inspired by God. Quite worthy folk have argued that God would not use for so signal an event in the story of the Nativity men who were self-confessed adherents of an ancient pagan cult, and astrologers into the bargain; that it is much more likely these Magi came with far less worthy motives than is suggested, or that at any rate God had nothing to do with their coming. It is to be feared that the argument arises from reluctance to admit that God would recognise the faith and watchfulness of men who were not inside the chosen circle of the faithful and who may have mingled with their faith a proportion of pagan elements which admittedly were not of God. Jesus, grown to manhood, met with the same attitude in his ministry, and He told those who thus argued that many would come from the east and the west, from outside the commonwealth of Israel, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of God, while they themselves would be thrust out (Matt. 8. 11-12). The narrative itself makes it plain that God was in this thing, for after finding the child and rendering their worship and presenting their gifts, they were "*warned of God in a dream*" not to return to King Herod in Jerusalem as he had requested; they returned to their own country by another route in order to avoid him. There are three stories of the reception of the infant Jesus into this world; the angelic revelation to the shepherds and their subsequent adoration at the birth, this visit of the Magi, and the blessing of the Child in the Temple by Simeon and Anna. These stories all stand on one level; they indicate his reception and acceptance by representatives, respectively, of the people of Israel, the people of the Gentile world, and the class known in all ages as the "watchers", for both Simeon and Anna were members of

that closely knit little community known at that time as the Redemptionists, a community which more than any others possessed a tolerably clear knowledge of the nature and time of Messiah's advent and were ready to receive him in the way He came. It is of tremendous interest to know that in this latter end of the Age when all prophetic teaching no less than the signs of the times indicate that we live in the period of the Second Advent just as the characters in these stories lived in that of the First, there are those among Christian believers who have the same clear perception of the manner and time of his Advent as did Simeon and Anna, Zacharias and Elizabeth and others of that long-past day.

So the Wise Men came to Jerusalem, guided by a star. That star has fascinated astronomers, both professional and amateur. A tremendous amount of time must have been spent during the Age calculating just what was the nature of the appearance. Kepler, a great Christian and astronomer, in the 17th Century decided that it was a conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn which would make a brilliant display in the heavens; it is known now that no such conjunction took place anywhere near that time. It is calculated that there was a conjunction of Jupiter and Venus in the year 6 B.C. but that was a great deal too early. A modern suggestion is that it was a "nova", one of those mysterious explosions in distant space which cause a normally faint star to shine out with hundredfold brilliance for a few days or weeks and then to disappear. There are some, of course, who picture it as a heavenly light which travelled across the sky guiding the Magi over the desert and through Judea until it stood just over the very house, thus indicating that they had reached the goal of their quest. The text however makes it fairly plain that there was no question of their following a moving light; that is rather a fantasy of later Christian legend and a useful adornment for Christmas cards. According to verse 2 they saw a star while in their own homes which by the science of their faith indicated the birth of the Messiah of the Jews; they thereupon took their journey to Jerusalem the capital of Judea as being the most likely place to find the new-born King, were directed to Bethlehem and when they came in sight of the house, and not until then, saw the same star again, this being taken by them as indication they had found the right place. From the scanty information given it would be unwise to dogmatise as to the precise nature of the star; it may very well have been a perfectly normal kind of celestial phenomenon, one of several possible varieties and easily understandable by modern astronomers if we only knew for certain which one it was; it

could equally well have been a special manifestation of Divine power for the occasion; what is of real importance is to realise that, natural phenomenon or not, it was manifested at precisely the correct moment to achieve the result it did achieve, and therefore must have been under the direct control of the Holy Spirit of God performing his work in the earth.

Perhaps they did not altogether expect the reception they got. "*When Herod the King heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him*" (verse 3). Herod the Great had reigned some forty years at this time; he both obtained and retained his throne by treachery and cruelty and lived more or less in a constant state of apprehension. He had already murdered his wife and two sons, largely on account of jealousy and fear lest he lose his throne to one of them; (it was of this king that Augustus the then Emperor of Rome made the scornful comment "I would rather be one of Herod's swine than one of his sons"). Several years before the coming of the Wise Men he had been informed by Augustus that he was in future to regard his independent kingdom as permitted to exist as such only by permission of Rome. Now here come strangers from the East declaring that a new king had been born and they sought him to do honour to him. No wonder Herod and his supporters were troubled.

The ensuing narrative is quite in accord with the known character of this king. He first summoned the chief priests and scribes and demanded of them where Messiah was to be born. Herod himself was not a Jew; he was an Idumean, a descendant of Esau, and his knowledge of the Scriptures was probably as defective as that of most professional military politicians. The chief priests could quote prophecy, whether they understood its meaning or not. In this case they could hardly go wrong. They showed him the passage in Micah which predicted that out of Bethlehem should come the Governor who would rule the people of Israel. (Micah 5.2). Cunningly, Herod sent the visitors to Bethlehem, with the injunction that they return and tell him where the child was to be found, under pretence that he wished to worship him also. The diabolical plan which he afterwards put into execution was forming in his mind; Herod had already put several possible rivals for the kingship out of the way and he was not going to allow a mere child, Messiah or not, to become another threat to his position!

It has often been remarked that in Matthew's account the Wise Men found the family in a house whereas the Lucian account of the shepherds tells of his being laid in a manger because there was no room in the inn. It is at this point

that a brief examination of the time features connected with the nativity of Jesus becomes appropriate. Whereas Matthew records that Joseph took the child and his mother into Egypt after the visit of the Magi, and only after the death of Herod did he return to Nazareth, the story of Luke (2. 39) says that they went straight from Bethlehem to Nazareth, with no reference to the flight into Egypt. Now that the date B.C.4 as that of Herod's death, based upon the rather confused record of Josephus, has been established inaccurate, and that of A.D.1 found to be more correct, it is possible to draw a reasonable sequence of events which allows both records to fit together harmoniously.

It would appear that the census (the enrolment or "taxing" of Luke 2.1) was conducted during the year B.C.2. Sometime toward the end of this census, during September of that year, Joseph and Mary came to Bethlehem from their home in Nazareth, in order to be registered in what was evidently at least Joseph's native town. It is almost certain that Joseph was born in Bethlehem and possible that Mary was likewise. The birth of Jesus occurred at about the end of September. At this time the shepherds saw a vision of angels and came to the inn to see and to worship, afterward spreading the story of what they had seen and heard among their associates and friends (Luke 2.17). It is unlikely however that the story penetrated very far outside Bethlehem; no one in high quarters or of the educated classes would pay much heed to the story of a few men who claimed they had seen a visitation of angels directing them to a particular child born in the most primitive of circumstances.

Eight days after the birth the child was circumcised in accordance with custom. Whether by then, Joseph had succeeded in finding better quarters for his wife and child does not appear. What is certain is that they remained at Bethlehem for forty days, the period of ceremonial uncleanness laid down in the Mosaic law following the birth of a boy child. At the end of the forty days the mother had to appear before the priest for ceremonial cleansing, with an offering. According to Luke 2.22 they went to Jerusalem, a few miles distant, and appeared in the Temple itself for this purpose. This therefore must have been about the middle of November, B.C. 2. It was on this occasion that the aged Simeon, in the courts of the Temple, took the child in his arms and praised God that his old eyes at last looked upon the Messiah, and Anna came in and added her word (Luke 2.25-38). Following the completion of the ceremonial, according to Luke 2.39, they returned to Nazareth—before the Magi had so much as arrived in Jerusalem. This verse 39

ends Luke's account of the nativity and verse 40 begins to speak of Jesus' boyhood.

The clue to the time of the Wise Men's visit lies in Luke 2. 41, "*Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the Passover*". It was not incumbent upon a Jew to go to the capital for this purpose but in fact many of pious mind did so. Josephus records that at the time of the Roman siege of Jerusalem in A.D. 69 the city was crowded with visitors because of the Passover. It would seem that Joseph and Mary were of the reverential spirit which led them to make the journey every year for that purpose. It would follow therefore that after returning to Nazareth with the newly born child in November of 2 B.C. it would not be long before the Spring of 1 B.C. was upon them and they were on their way south once more. There was not likely to be such an influx of visitors on this occasion as there had been at the time of the Census and they probably had friends or relatives in Bethlehem who could give them shelter and so enable them to keep the Passover at Jerusalem a few miles away. Jesus would now be six months old, and it was probably during this second sojourn in Bethlehem that the Wise Men arrived, finding him, not in the inn, but as Matthew puts it, in a house. Here they presented their gifts, the gold and frankincense and myrrh, symbolic, as some have said, of his royalty and Divinity, his future life of dedication to the Father's purpose and the acceptableness of his earthly life to the Father, and the severity of the trial and suffering which was to characterise that earthly life; myrrh, a bitter herb, was a symbol of suffering. So they worshipped and made obeisance to the One whom they recognised as the promised Saviour of the world; talked, doubtless, with Joseph and Mary on the wonder and grandeur of this thing, and took their leave. The young couple must have seen them go with a feeling of awe; they did not move in a circle which included the wise and the noble of this world, and the visit of these grave and scholarly men would have caused them a certain amount of trepidation. The shepherds had been of their own kind; these must have seemed like visitors from another world, but the whole experience must have strengthened their faith in the reality of the things the angel had said to Mary at the very beginning.

That night Joseph dreamed. The Lord appeared to him in his dream and told him that Herod was plotting to destroy the child. He was to go quickly into Egypt, a journey of some two hundred miles, out of Herod's jurisdiction, and there stay until told to return. Joseph seems to have been a man of unquestioning faith; he took Mary as his wife without hesitation when the

angel of the Lord had so bidden him in a previous dream. Now without delay he took his wife and the child and set out on the journey to what was certainly an unknown land. So it came about that while Herod sat in his palace waiting for the clue that would enable him to put his dark design into execution, the Wise Men were well on their journey eastward and the child he sought to slay well on the way southward out of his power.

The Wise Men were probably well advanced in years. It is hardly likely that any of them survived until thirty years later to hear of the fame of the prophet Jesus of Nazareth. They must have closed their eyes in death with the same thoughts as the aged Simeon; they had seen the Lord of glory with their own eyes; the promise had been fulfilled and one day all would be well; they would stand up in the resurrection and rejoice in the glorious salvation God had promised the willing and obedient of all mankind. Herod also, although he did not know it at this time, was destined to live less than another twelve months. He waited a while for the return of the Wise Men but finally realised that they had seen through his hypocrisy and were not going to return. It was then that he committed the fearful act which has made his name a byword, although compared with others of the acts of Herod the slaughter of the children at Bethlehem was comparatively trivial.

He may have waited several months. We do not know. When he did act, he singled out all the children in Bethlehem up to two years old and sent his soldiers to massacre them. He evidently intended to make quite sure that the reputed new-born King of the Jews would not escape him. The horror of the act has burned itself deeply into the imagination of Christians in every generation; it has been reliably estimated, though, that the population of Bethlehem at the time probably did not exceed two thousand and it is unlikely that more than about thirty or forty children suffered under the king's cruelty.

Herod died less than a year later after six months of intense unrelieved suffering, the climax to a malignant disease with which he had long been afflicted. As he lay dying he tried to make plans and give orders for the wholesale execution of all the highly-placed and nobility of Jerusalem immediately upon his expiry so that there would be a general time of sorrow and grief coincident with his own death. His orders were disregarded and when at length the tyrant expired there was only relief and satisfaction in Judea.

It is not likely that Joseph returned at once. Matthew says that when he did return, Archelaus

was reigning in Judea and in consequence he went on to Nazareth in Galilee. Archelaus was the son of Herod but before taking office he went to Rome to have the kingship formally confirmed by the Emperor Augustus. It was more than a year before he returned and mounted the throne. In the meantime rebellious elements had plunged the country into tumult; Sabinus, the Roman governor of Syria, had invaded Judea with his troops, and all Israel, from Galilee to the south, rose up in arms against him. The Romans speedily found themselves in trouble and more legions were despatched from Syria. Ravaging, burning and slaying as they advanced, the soldiers slowly quelled the insurrection and crucified two thousand of its leaders. Archelaus came back to a kingdom desolated by the horrors of war.

From all of this the little family in Egypt was spared; Joseph would have found work to do at his own trade and been able to support his wife and the child. At last, and probably at least eighteen months or so after the flight into Egypt, and perhaps even more, when the country had settled down into a semblance of peace, Joseph again saw the angel of the Lord in his dreams. "Arise" said the angel "and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel, for they are dead which sought the young child's life" (Luke 2. 20). Obedient as always, Joseph did as he was bidden, taking the high road which led up into Judea through Beer-Sheba and Hebron, thence to Bethlehem and Jerusalem, leading onward after that through Samaria into Galilee. It must have been on his arrival in the south of the country, perhaps in Beer-Sheba, that he learned of the current political position. Archelaus reigned as king of Judea and Archelaus was turning out as great a tyrant as Herod. Joseph evidently felt that while Archelaus reigned it was too risky to consider settling in Bethlehem. But of Herod's far-flung dominions, the Jewish State as it had existed since the days of the Maccabees, Herod had bequeathed to Archelaus only Judea, Samaria and Idumea. Galilee in the north had been given to the brother of Archelaus, Antipas (who thirty years later appeared in the lives of John the Baptist and of Jesus). Antipas was a man of much more mild disposition; Joseph decided it would be better to settle in his dominions and so from Beer-Sheba he turned aside to the road which ran by the sea coast through Joppa and Caesarea, eventually reaching his old home in Nazareth of Galilee.

There the story of the child Jesus comes to an end. He would be possibly about two years old. Nothing more is known of him until twelve years of age when He went up to the Passover at Jeru-

salem with Joseph and Mary (Luke 2. 42). All that is said about the intervening time is contained in Luke 2. 40 "*And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon him*". By the time He was twelve there was no king of Judea; Archelaus, after a reign of nine years characterised by injustice and cruelty, was arraigned before the Emperor Augustus, stripped of his possessions, and banished to Gaul. Judea was reduced to the

status of a Roman province and Roman governors exercised control in Jerusalem.

So the child whom the Wise Men worshipped grew quietly to manhood until the day He stood before John at Jordan ready to commence the mission for which He had come into the world, and for which He had been protected from the enemies who in those early days "*sought the young child's life*".

A NOTE ON JOHN 20. 22-23

"And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Spirit, Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained." (John 20.22-23).

Were the disciples really given power to remit sins, a power which we normally believe to be the prerogative of God only? An acquaintance with the customs of the times can help us to a better understanding of this incident. It was a characteristic of the people of the East not many generations ago to consider it a great honour should a saintly or "holy" man breathe upon them as he passed. In ceremonial form such a holy man would deliberately perform this act toward one who came before him as a disciple or in some subservient manner. It was evidently a survival from ancient times and almost certainly the same custom existed in the days of Jesus. His breathing on his disciples was an outward sign of the authority and power He possessed to impart the Holy Spirit to them in due time. The act was evidently connected with the charge concerning the remission of sins that follows in the next verse, and that in turn would seem to point to the commission upon which they were embarking—the preaching of the Gospel. Jesus had just been raised from the dead and the disciples were now to represent him in the world by the proclamation of his message. The sins of men would be remitted or retained according to their response or lack of response to that preaching.

Both Paul and Peter in their early sermons made it plain that acceptance of the Gospel would bring forgiveness of sins. "Repent, and be converted, that your sins might be blotted out" were Peter's words on the Day of Pentecost. Therefore the Lord was identifying the Gospel that was to be preached so closely with those who were to preach it, that instead of saying "the power of the Holy Spirit operating through the Gospel will bring forgiveness of sins to men" it was as if He had said "the power of the Holy Spirit operating through you will bring forgiveness". The disciples, empowered by the Holy Spirit, by the preaching of the Gospel would bring either forgiveness of sins to men who believed, or leave in their sins those who did not believe.

It is important to note that this "retaining" of sin on the part of the unbelievers is not final. God still has appointed the Millennial judgment day to give full and fair opportunity to all men. But so far as this Gospel Age is concerned and the immediate commission given to the disciples is concerned, the word of these men, and their successors, moved by the Spirit, in preaching the Gospel "in all the world for a witness", does have the effect of converting some and leading many such to the life of consecration, the High Calling, and leaving others just where they were, "in their sins". All such latter must eventually, in the Millennial Day, face up to the challenge and accept the message of the Gospel, or reap the inevitable consequence of wilful sin in the final cutting off from life.

Light enters the smallest opening accessible to it. It searches out the recesses that would otherwise remain dismal and dark, thus penetrating the gloom. It is a fact disclosed by science that it lays hold of the lurking germs of disease whether in the home or in the human system. Of him who came as the world's light, such is his ministry. Instead of sin fastening upon him it could not even stand in his presence.

Every member, in proportion as it is in harmony with the head and its spirit of love for the members, will be prompt to act. Sometimes in our human bodies the hand may stretch forth assistance to the injured member so quickly that it seems impossible to conceive that the message first went to the head, and that our hand was subsequently directed by the head to assist; and so it is with the members of the body of Christ.

AMOS THE HERDSMAN

6. The Rejected Priesthood

Amos 5. 1 - 27

In the picturesque language of the Old Testament Israel is often described as a virgin, pure and chaste when faithful to God and the Covenant, dishonoured and disgraced when apostate. The symbol is generally used when the religious aspect of Israel's nationhood is the subject, and the priesthood and the national worship is involved. So it is here, when Amos turns his attention to the unfaithful priesthood and first of all tells the people of the danger into which they have entered because of their continued toleration of these apostate priests.

Again the stentorian voice of Amos was raised; this time it was the turn of the priests to look uncomfortable. *"Hear this word which I take up against you, O house of Israel. The virgin of Israel is fallen; she shall not rise again, and there is no one to raise her up. For thus saith the Lord God, The city that marched out to war a thousand strong shall have but a hundred left; that which marched out a hundred strong shall have but ten left, of the house of Israel"* (ch. 5.1-3). This is a preliminary announcement, directed to the people gathered in the court of the idol sanctuary at Bethel. His usage of the expression "virgin of Israel" was to remind them of their relationship to God, that they were a covenant people, bound to him in a sacred relationship which they had now repudiated by reason of their acceptance of idol worship. The penalty; they would go out to fight their enemies, the ever-present menacing Assyrians, and would be decimated. Only a hundred out of a thousand, or ten out of a hundred, would return to tell the tale. Thus would the nation fall before her enemies, and not rise.

There was one hope—repentance and reform. This has always been the case in all of God's dealings with man through history. *"Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand"* was the clarion cry of John the Baptist to a much later generation where the condition of things was very much the same. So in the Christian Age; *"believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved"* has ever been the foundation principle of the Christian gospel. So now the youthful prophet declared to his listeners the way of escape. *"For thus saith the Lord unto the house of Israel, Seek ye me, and ye shall live. But seek not Bethel, nor enter in Gilgal, and pass not to Beer-sheba: for Gilgal shall surely go into captivity, and Bethel shall come to nought. Seek the Lord, and ye shall live, or he will break out like*

fire in the house of Joseph, and devour it, and there will be no one in Bethel to quench it" (ch. 5.4-6). Bethel, and Gilgal, and Beer-sheba, were all centres of idolatry. They were all sacred places, honoured names in Israel, and because of their very sanctity had become places of resort for worship, but the worship of God had degenerated into that of idols and God was placed on a level with pagan deities. Bethel was where Jacob had his dwelling when he returned from exile and God re-affirmed the covenant with him; Beer-sheba where Abraham established his headquarters when resident in Canaan, and Gilgal where the Tabernacle was erected after the people had crossed Jordan and taken possession of the Promised Land. Famous places in the glorious history of Israel, but now centres of idolatry! Forsake them, said the Lord, and seek unto me if ye would live peacefully in the land. And if not, I will come forth to destroy Israel—the "house of Joseph" comprised Ephraim and Manasseh, the two leading tribes of the northern kingdom—and if I do, He went on scornfully, you can look to your idols in Bethel for help if you will, but there will be none there with power to resist my coming forth.

With this word of exhortation and warning to the people Amos turns to the priesthood, which is the main object of his prophecy in this chapter. *"You that turn justice upside down, and bring righteousness to the ground"* he cries *"Seek him who created Pleiades and Orion, who turned darkness into morning and day into night; who called for the waters of the sea and poured them out over the face of the earth—the Lord is his name—He dispenses ruin to strength and brings distress upon the fortress. But ye hate him who brings the wrongdoer to court and loathed him who speaks the whole truth. Forasmuch then because you levy taxes on the poor and exact tribute of grain from them; though ye have built houses of hewn stone, ye shall not dwell in them, and though ye have planted pleasant vineyards ye shall not drink wine from them. For I know how many are your crimes, and how countless your sins, you who persecute the guiltless, hold men to ransom, and thrust the destitute out of court"* (ch. 5.7-12). This is his terrible indictment of the men who should have been the shepherds of Israel, pastors and ministers to the people of God. They used their sacred office instead to enrich themselves and indulge their tastes at the expense of those to whom they should have been

ministers and protectors. The same thing has happened so many times since in the history of man and all too often the offenders, unlike the pagan priests of Amos' day, have retained the name and nominal worship of the true God while being completely alien from his spirit and principles. But Amos reminds all such that they are rejecting the One who is responsible for all creation and is in complete control of that creation, and will not overlook their apostasy. He goes right back to the beginning, to the Book of Genesis. "Seek him who created Pleiades and Orion" he exhorts. The very first verse of the Bible tells that in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, and the heavens came first. The two constellations, Pleiades and Orion, are the governing signs of spring and winter respectively (see Job 38.31). "Who turned darkness into morning and day into night"; the second great creative event was "let there be light, and there was light... and God divided the light from the darkness, and the evening and the morning were the first day". Then as if these two great examples of Divine power were not enough, Amos refers to a later supreme manifestation of Divine judgment, the coming of the Flood of Noah's day, "who called for the waters of the sea and poured them out over the face of the earth". At that dramatic point he breaks off abruptly and declaims "the LORD, is his name". This is God, the God of Israel, the God who delivered them from Egypt and led them through that waste and terrible desert, safely into the Promised Land. This is the God who defended their forefathers from all their enemies the while they trusted in him and caused them to dwell safely and to prosper in their land. This is the God, cried Amos vehemently, whom you priests have despised and rejected. Therefore you shall lose all your ill-gotten gains, all your fine houses and well-laden vineyards, and be left with nothing.

It is here, in the days of Amos and his Judean counterpart, Joel, in this 8th century B.C. that there appears the first intimation of a theme which is later expanded in Old Testament theology and onward into the New Testament known generally as the "doctrine of the remnant". Throughout history, amid all the vicissitudes of apostasy and unfaithfulness to God which has characterised the waywardness of man, there have always been a few, submerged and unnoticed by the generality of men, who have kept the faith alive and retained a clear knowledge of the outworking purpose of God. In the days of the First Advent that "remnant" formed the company which accepted Jesus as Messiah and became the nucleus of the Christian Church. In

the days of the Second Advent the "remnant" comprises those who are alert to the signs of the times and are ready and waiting for the change of sovereignty when the Lord Christ assumes his power and the kingdoms of this world become the kingdom of Christ. So in the days of Amos there is a word for "the remnant". "The knowledgeable shall keep silence in that time, for it is an evil time. Seek good, and not evil, that ye may live, and so the Lord, the God of hosts, shall be with you. Hate evil, and love good, and establish justice in the courts; it may be that the God of Israel will be gracious unto the remnant of Joseph" (ch. 5.13-15). "Joseph", the Ephraim-Manasseh section of the nation, is here representative of the whole, and this "remnant" is the more or less unknown and certainly very minor body of Israelites who had maintained their loyalty to God in the midst of the prevailing apostasy. The Divine promise was that by continuing in their loyalty God would find a way to be gracious unto them when the inevitable judgment of Assyrian invasion came upon their fellows. How this was to be achieved does not readily appear but one can recall the case of Jeremiah, who was involved in the horrors of the Babylonian siege and capture of Jerusalem a couple of centuries later. Whilst his apostate countrymen were either mercilessly slain or carried off into captivity, he himself was preserved from harm by those same Babylonians and given liberty and freedom to go where he pleased (Jer. 40). This, then, is the earliest instance in Biblical history of the preservation of the remnant, a feature of the Divine supervision of events which was destined to recur time and again as history unfolded, and will yet recur before the end.

There is not much doubt that this idolatrous worship of Israel was intermingled with a good deal of what we would now call good theology. In other words, much of their former expectations and hopes inherited from their more godly forefathers remained, but they looked to their present false gods for the fulfilment of these promises rather than the true God of Israel. In this next section of Amos' words there seems to be an allusion to one of these expectations, the coming of the day of the Lord, which in that day, as in this, was synonymous with the coming of Messiah and the establishment of his Kingdom on earth, that which will bring peace and blessing to all. Amos is at pains to show that so far as they are concerned, in their idolatry, the day of the Lord is going to bring them something very different. These few verses are evidently addressed, not to apostate priests, but to the people who have allowed themselves to be duped by

them. The N.E.B. translation is superior to the A.V. and is therefore quoted at this point.

"Therefore these are the words of the Lord the God of Hosts. There shall be wailing in every street, and in all open places cries of woe. The farmer shall be called to mourning and those skilled in the dirge to wailing; there shall be lamentation in every vineyard, for I will pass through the midst of you, says the Lord. Fools, who long for the day of the Lord! What will the day of the Lord mean to you? It will be darkness, not light! It will be as when a man runs from a lion, and a bear meets him, or turns into a house and leans his hand on the wall and a snake bites him. The day of the Lord is indeed darkness, not light, a day of gloom with no dawn". (ch. 5.16-20).

Jesus said (Jno. 5.28-29) that in the day of his Advent and the general resurrection of all men some would come forth to a resurrection of life and some to a resurrection of judgment. The revealing angel who appeared to Daniel told him something of a very similar nature (Dan. 12.2). A further slant on the same subject is afforded by our Lord's intimation to the unbelieving cities of his day that it would be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah, for Tyre and Sidon, classical examples of degradation, in the day of judgment, than for them, for had the gospel been preached to these former, they would have repented and reformed (Matt. 10.15; 11.20-23). These statements illustrate a vital principle embodied in the Divine purpose. When the Messianic kingdom on earth is established and all men return from the grave to face their final opportunity to accept Christ and enter into life, there will be due retribution upon those who have knowingly and deliberately set themselves against God and his holiness. "What a man soweth, that shall he also reap" said Paul, and this principle, which holds throughout all Nature and all created things, holds true for man also. It follows therefore that in that future day of Christ's reign over the earth those who have degraded their characters and hardened themselves against right-doing in this life will find the going much heavier than those who have led more upright lives, and will do so unless and until in their turn they reform and come to Christ as Lord and begin to walk in his ways. Thus the day of the Lord, which will be a day of peace and blessing to the upright, will, at first at any rate, be a dark and gloomy one to the unregenerate, and remain so until they "turn from idols to serve the living God" (I Thess. 1.9). Hence Amos' scornful declamation to the idol-worshippers of his day "*Fools, who long for the day of the Lord! What will the day of the Lord mean to you? It will be*

darkness, not light!" There will be wailing and lamentation over the then present distresses of Assyrian invasion and desolation and captivity, and the people will long for the day of the Lord to come to deliver them from all this tribulation, not realising that in their godless condition the day of the Lord will also have its hardships for them. They will run from the lion and meet a bear; turn into the house for ease and comfort and suffer the bite of a serpent. God will certainly deliver into his "afterward of peace" eventually, but some must certainly go through a "resurrection of judgment" first.

There now appears the most savage indictment of the apostate priesthood in the whole of the Book of Amos. For the first time in this chapter the Lord is speaking in the first person. Up to verse 20 Amos has been declaring the words of the Lord, repeating what God has said to him. Now it is as if God himself interrupts, uttering his own feelings directly to the priests, with Amos as mouthpiece, in such fashion as to leave no doubt of the revulsion with which He views them. "*I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not accept the incense of your sacred ceremonies. Though ye offer me burnt offerings and meat offerings, I will not accept them, neither will I have regard to your thank offerings of choice bulls. Take away the sound of your songs for I will not listen to the music of your harps—yet justice shall roll on as a river, and righteousness as an ever-flowing stream. Ye did offer me sacrifices and gifts those forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel—but now ye carry the shrine of Moloch and the image of Kaiwan your star-god, which ye have made for yourselves".*

"Therefore I will send you into captivity beyond Damascus, saith the Lord, whose name is the God of Hosts" (ch. 5.21-27).

Here is another evidence of the mixture of religion which characterised Israel at the time. The worship of God was mingled with that of Moloch the Canaanite deity and Kaiwan (Saturn) an Assyrian deity. The first law given to Moses was "Thou shalt have no other gods before me" (Exod. 20.3). The making and worshipping of images was expressly prohibited. "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one God" was the national watchword for many generations. Now the Lord looked down and saw the original pure worship of Israel adulterated with homage paid to gods which were no gods, and all the abuses and degradation which went with that homage. And so He rejected them. He spurned their contaminated offerings and closed his ears to their insincere praises. For more than six centuries He had borne with them but now the end had come.

To be continued.

A MERCIFUL AND FAITHFUL HIGH PRIEST

A study in the Book of Hebrews

The Book of Hebrews is a book of contrasts. In Hebrews 5: 6-11 we have one of these contrasts in which Christ is set forth as the priest greater than Aaron, a "priest after the order of Melchisedek". This latter is a quotation from Psalm 110, verse 4, which reads "*The Lord hath sworn and will not repent, Thou art a Priest forever after the order of Melchisedek*", following verse 1, "*The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit Thou at my right hand until I make thine enemies thy footstool*". Quite obviously, therefore, this Psalm refers to Christ, after his resurrection and ascension to the Father's right hand. The same period is referred to in Hebrews, Chapter 1, verse 6 "*And let all the angels of God worship Him*". (Psalm 97: 7). When Jesus was speaking to the Pharisees, He took the very words of this Psalm and applied them to himself (Matt. 22:42-46). "*What think ye of Christ, whose Son is he; they say unto him, the Son of David. He saith unto them, How then doth David in Spirit call him Lord, saying 'The Lord said unto my Lord. Sit thou on my right hand till I make thine enemies thy footstool'?*" The whole of the seventh chapter deals with the contrast between Aaron, the High Priest of the Levitical order, and Christ as the Melchisedek priest; here the writer deals with how Christ qualified to become this great priest and king: Verse 7;—"Who in the days of his flesh when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that He feared".

"In the days of his flesh!" This refers to Christ's earthly life when He was here among men, and in particular to that period when his development as the future Priest was in process, between Jordan and Calvary. From beginning to end, his life was one of prayer; He spent all night in prayer on many occasions. Prayer is many sided; it is worship and adoration, communion and fellowship, petition and supplication and intercession. Jesus often supplicated the Father on behalf of others, but we have only the one record of supplicating on behalf of himself, which would suggest that this verse is specially applicable to the agony He was passing through in Gethsemane, when, as it says, "*with strong cryings and tears*" He prayed to the Father that if it were possible this cup might pass from him. Just how strong was this crying, we cannot know, but an idea is given when it says that "*His sweat was as it were great drops of blood*". "*Unto him that*

was able to save him from death"; the Diaglott, Weymouth and the Concordant all render this "out of death", and this seems more understandable, for Christ did not ask the Father to save him from death. The whole object of his coming to this earth and becoming bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, was that He might go into death, and pay the penalty for sin, and thus release Adam and all his race from the dreadful consequences of sin, namely, death. The fate of the whole human family rested on him, and the question would arise in his mind, "*Have I been faithful in carrying out the Father's will, so that I may be able thus to redeem the race?*" According to the Book of Revelation, until that time no one had been found worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof. Three times Matthew records that He prayed the same words "O my Father, if it be possible let this cup pass from me, nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt".

Thus before He prayed thus, He spoke to the three disciples, Peter, James and John, saying "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death". So He well knew that death was before him. Luke, alone of the evangelists, records the dreadful agony that He passed through in the garden of Gethsemane, when the account says "*And being in an agony He prayed the more earnestly, and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground*". None of the Gospels record that He shed tears at this particular time, though it is quite possible and reasonable to think that He did. There are only two recorded instances of Jesus weeping; the one at the grave of Lazarus, and the other when He wept over Jerusalem. Tears as a rule come as a relief when one is in great distress of mind, so if He wept in Gethsemane, it would only be natural.

"Unto him who was able to save him out of death." Death could not hold him as it holds the human family, except in the sense that He was the substitute for Adam, for He who knew no sin was made the sin-bearer for Adam and all in him. So He had to commit his cause, and life itself, into the hands of his Father, who alone was able to raise him out of death. We read in Ephesians 1: 19 that it took the mighty power of God to raise Christ from the dead and set him at his own right hand. So on the cross; "*When Jesus had cried with a loud voice, He said 'Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit.'*"

Low in the grave He lay, Jesus my Saviour,

*Waiting the coming day, Jesus my Lord.
Death cannot keep his prey, Jesus my Saviour,
God tore the bars away, for Jesus my Lord.
Up from the grave He arose,*

*With a mighty triumph o'er his foes,
He arose a victor from the dark domain,
And He lives forever with his saints to reign,
He arose, He arose, Hallelujah, Christ arose.*

"And was heard in that He feared" or "for piety" as the margin of the AV has it. The Diaglott renders "And was heard for his devotion", and Moffatt "He was heard because of his godly fear". There are a number of other different interpretations of this sentence, which makes it rather difficult to explain. That He was heard is evident. Luke alone says that "there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him". At the grave of Lazarus, Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, "Father, I thank Thee that Thou hast heard me, and I know that Thou hearest me always". It is one thing to have our prayer heard by God, and another thing to have it answered in the way that we desire. The important thing is that, like Jesus, we say from the heart "Not my will, but thine, be done". There was a great deal included in that prayer to his Father. That He was to die He knew, but was death not enough, He might reason, to pay the ransom price, without all the dreadful suffering of mind and body that was attached to such a painful death as that of the cross; was it necessary that He bear all that terrible ignominy, and all that lay between Gethsemane and Calvary, the mocking, the spitting, the crown of thorns so cruel and painful, the nails in his hands and feet, and the spear wound in his side, an exhibition to all who passed by; and besides, the denial of Peter with curses, the forsaking by all the disciples, and the betrayal by one? All these trials must have weighed heavily upon him, for, being a perfect man, He would feel these things much more than an imperfect individual. If He visualised all He had to go through in his mind, what about his final test on the cross when He cried "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken me"? Did he expect this, or did it come as a surprise to him? To have all his disciples forsake him was bad enough, but his Father; why? One wonders if He realised that *this* was before him when He prayed in Gethsemane that the cup might pass from him. These were the very words recorded in the 22nd Psalm, verse 1; no doubt Jesus knew that they applied to himself, as also did many other of the verses of that Psalm.

A lesson we can take to ourselves in this prayer of our Lord is, that like him, we can say "Father, I know that Thou hearest me always. You may in wisdom not answer my prayer the way I would

like, but since Thou knowest what is for my best interest and highest good, I leave the answering or otherwise to Thee". Paul, who thrice asked for the thorn in his flesh to be removed, received the answer "My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness". His prayer was answered in a different way from that which might have been expected when he asked.

Another comfort we can take from this verse is that God has promised He will never forsake us. "I will never, never leave thee, I will never, never let go thy hand", as one version puts it. "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee, and they shall not overflow thee".

Verse 8:—"Though He were a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered". Weymouth says "Although He were God's Son". The things that He suffered reached their consummation in those experiences He went through in Gethsemane and on the Cross, but besides all that, He endured the contradiction of sinners against himself, in an unfriendly world, with imperfection all around him, unbelief amongst his nearest and dearest, and so often misunderstood. To think that these were the people He had come to save! Yes, He suffered in all those ways, but He suffered most as Philipians puts it (Chap. 2.8) when "He humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross".

Verse 9:—"And being made perfect, He became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him". "And being made perfect"! Have we not just finished saying that He was perfect? As a man He was perfect, as Adam was perfect, and like Adam He also was tested. This testing took place during the thirty years of his life before Jordan, and while we have little record given in the Bible of that period of his life, we know that He alone of all men must have kept the Law of God perfectly, and given loyal obedience to all God's commands. We read that He grew in stature and favour with God and man, thus demonstrating that it was within the ability of a perfect man to keep God's Law perfectly.

At thirty, however, He entered upon a different aspect of his life's career. He gave himself at Jordan in consecration to God to do his will. Had only a ransom been necessary, then God could have taken his life there and then. More than a ransom was required. The three and a half years of suffering was necessary to fit him as a priest, one who would have compassion on the ignorant and those who were out of the way. So as a priest He was perfected. "In all points He was tempted like as we (his brethren) are, yet without sin". Matt. 8. 17 declares that "Himself

took our infirmities and bare our sicknesses". This is supposed to be a quotation from Isaiah 53, but in reading this chapter, it does not suggest that Jesus took our sicknesses. Infirmities, yes, but Jesus was always perfect. Though perfect, that did not mean that He did not feel frailty. When He healed the woman with the issue of blood, He perceived that virtue had gone out from him and healed her. He was so tired on one occasion that the disciples took him, as He was, in the boat to the other side of the lake. A night in communion and prayer with his Father, however, was all that was necessary to restore him. It only needed a word of command to cast out an evil spirit, or many spirits, and when He healed a leper, He did not become a leper, or in giving sight to the blind, or hearing to the deaf, He did not become deaf or blind. In all these things He was demonstrating his coming power and glory in the Kingdom.

"The author of eternal salvation" is rendered in the Diaglott and the Concordant as "Became the cause of *Eonian* salvation". It is the duty of a Priest to mediate between two or more who are at enmity with each other, and this is just what Christ qualified to do. He *became* the author, through his laying down his life daily on behalf of others, and finally gave up life itself to redeem them from death. As the one who purchased mankind by the shedding of his own blood, it is therefore through him that salvation comes to all. There is, however, an important qualification. He is the author of eternal salvation, not of necessity to all, *but to all them that obey him*. God coerces no one. The gift of salvation is freely offered to all, but on condition. "God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son, that *whosoever believeth* on him should not perish, but have everlasting life".

INGERSOLL'S VISION

"A vision of the future arises. I see a world where thrones have crumbled and where kings are dust. The aristocracy of idleness has perished from the earth.

"I see a world without a slave. Man at last is free. Nature's forces have by science been enslaved. Lightning and light, wind and waves, frost and flame, and all the subtle powers of earth and air are the tireless toilers for the human race.

"I see a world at peace, adorned with every form of art, with music's myriad voices thrilled; where lips are rich with words of love and truth; a world in which no exile sighs, no prisoner mourns, a world on which the gibbet's shadow does not fall; a world where labour reaps its full reward, where work and worth go hand in hand.

"I see a world without the beggar's outstretched palm, the miser's heartless, stony stare, the piteous wail of want, the livid lips of lies, the cruel eyes of scorn.

"I see a race without disease of flesh or brain—shapely and fair, perfect harmony of form and function—and, as I look, life lengthens, joy deepens, Love canopies the earth; and over all, in the great dome of Heaven, shines the eternal star of faith."

Those words are from the writings of Robert Ingersoll (1833-1899) a noted American agnostic

of the nineteenth century. Because of his attacks on Christianity and the Bible his name was anathema in respectable households. Sober judgment to-day tends to show that his attitude was probably dictated more by the manifest defects of nominal Christianity in that day rather than an accurate knowledge of the Christ of the Bible. The quotation reveals his belief that increasing human knowledge and power over the forces of Nature would eventually bring in universal happiness. He expected that happy state to be attained by man without God. A century later the utter hopelessness of his expectation is manifest to everyone. Every element of his vision is possible of attainment to-day by the aid of powers now at man's command; every evidence shows that the selfishness and sin of man will prevent that attainment. Only if God intervenes can Ingersoll's prediction come true.

The Scriptures declare in no uncertain voice that it will come true. The earth is to be full of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. The conclusion is irresistible that God will intervene, will suppress with firm hand the evil things which now afflict human society, will bend down from Heaven to teach men the better way, so ushering into their eternal inheritance all who are capable of conversion and reconciliation. Thus will Ingersoll's dream become reality.

Travellers we needs must be, since here we have no continuing city; but it is left to us to determine whether as aimless wanderers we will journey along the road of life or whether it shall be as pilgrims that we will take that road. The

pilgrim is he who has the wishing heart; who has seen a vision of the City of God and has willed to seek it along the pilgrim's way, his heart like a compass is ever pointing to that city of his fondest hopes.

THE LORD'S GARDEN

A Pen-Picture from the Song of Solomon

The beauty and virtue of the glorified Church of Christ transcends anything we can visualise. Various pen pictures of this company are drawn in the Word for instruction and edification, each in its own peculiar way revealing to the mind some aspect of those graces and qualities which must be developed in each member ere they are ready for the great Home-gathering which unites them to their Lord. Among these pictures there is one in the Song of Songs which is not only beautiful as viewed by the natural eye, but also conveys to the mind something of the character, the development, and the blessedness of the members of the New Creation. This is the picture of the Lord's garden. Take a look at this garden as it is described in Cant. 4. 12-16.

As we approach, we see that it is surrounded by a high hedge, "a garden enclosed, a fountain barred." It is not for every eye to behold, but reserved for those who can appreciate its beauty and respect its sanctity. On gaining entrance, a wonderful blending of nature's colours meets our eyes; an "orchard of pomegranates" ablaze with their beautiful blood-red flowers. Among the trees there are bushes of camphire, small shrubs with pale green leaves like lilac, covered with sweet smelling white and yellow blossoms. Cinnamon too, in abundance; small trees like laurel, with broad ribbed leaves and white blossoms. The larger trees, similar to our mountain ash, are frankincense, with their long glossy leaves and green star-like flowers, tipped with red, giving forth a fragrant lemon aroma. The aloes and the thorny myrrh, although not so colourful, supply the background of darker greens; one remembers their usefulness in the perfumes obtained from their bark and roots. Down by the spring the stately calamus reeds sway in the breeze, on the slopes the grass-like spikenard, and, peeping out from among the trees and shrubs, myriads of yellow, crocus-like flowers—the saffrons. To complete this pleasing picture, note the crystal springs bubbling along between gently sloping grass-covered banks and the dancing fountains sparkling in the sunshine.

Not only is this garden pleasant to the eye, but it radiates a wonderfully subtle perfume arising from the mingling of these aromatic plants and flowers. One has aptly written: "A garden composed of such odoriferous plants must have been like a bed of perfume; and every breath of heaven which passed over it must have filled the surrounding atmosphere with a richness and

sweetness unsurpassed in all the world."

What does this picture convey to the mind?

The blood-red flowers of the pomegranates speak of the Ransom, which makes this New Creation possible, and the golden fruits, with their abundance of seeds and rich juice, from which, in that land, a refreshing drink was made, speak of the fruitful days of the Kingdom, when the after-fruit of that Ransom will be brought forth.

Calamus is the "sweet cane" of Isa. 43.24, and well pictures love, the motive which prompts the sacrifice made by the anointed ones. There can be other motives which are not acceptable, as we read in Jer. 6.20: "To what purpose cometh there to me incense from Sheba, and the sweet cane from a far country? Your burnt offerings are not acceptable, nor your sacrifices sweet unto me." The inner bark of the cinnamon is used as a spice and as a medicine, reminding one of the great joy which Jesus had, and which we, as his Church, can share, that joy which comes through complete obedience to the Father's will. Such joy is indeed as the spice of life, and is the sure cure for many of life's ills.

Myrrh was distilled from the gum which exudes from the plant of that name, and was used as a perfume, and for embalming. In Psalm 45.8 it is said of our Lord, "all thy garments smell of myrrh, aloes and cassia", and this last ingredient of the anointing oil (myrrh) which so pervaded the atmosphere in which our Lord, the High Priest, moved seems to represent that peace which comes with complete trust in our Heavenly Father.

"O blessed peace of a perfect trust,

That looks away from all;

That sees thy hand in everything,

In great events or small;

That hears thy voice—a Father's voice—

Directing for the best—

O blessed peace of a perfect trust,

A heart with thee at rest."

Myrrh was also used to make a drink to deaden pain. So we find the painful experiences of life easier to bear, if, being willingly submissive, we maintain that peace of mind which can only come through perfect trust in a loving Father. Combined with aloes, myrrh was also used to preserve the bodies of the dead (John 19.39); the fragrant centre-wood of the aloes, together with myrrh, was used to embalm the body of our Lord. What sweet memories of his loving words and

actions remained with his disciples! What of us? Will the myrrh and aloes preserve any fragrant memories of our lives?

*"Shall we be missed, though by others
succeeded?*

*Ever remembered by what we have done?
Only the truth that in life we have spoken,
Only the seed we on earth have sown,
These shall pass onward when we are forgotten,
Fruits of the harvest and what we have
done."*

Camphire provided the women of the land with a delicate perfume; from the leaves they made a dye to ornament their finger-nails. So with the adornment of 1 Pet. 3.4 *"the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price."*

From the aromatic root of the spikenard came perfume and ointment. The "precious perfume" (not ointment) which filled the house with its aroma when Mary opened her alabaster jar and anointed the Lord, came from the spikenard, and this well pictures that deep love and devotion which all of the Lord's followers should have for him and his brethren. In Cant. 1.12 (Youngs), the Bride says: *"While the King is in his circle my spikenard hath given its fragrance"*. So, when we meet together within that "circle" our love and devotion for each other should be as sweet perfume.

A very costly perfume is obtained from the style and stigma of the saffron, costly because of its scantiness. From it is also obtained colouring and flavouring for bread and drink. This can picture the Christian grace of gentleness of speech, so essential to a rounded Christian character. Paul exhorted the Colossians *"Let your language be always seasoned with salt of grace."* If it is, men will have cause to say of us as they did of our Lord, "never man spake like He spake." The wise man says (Prov. 25.11, Leeser) *"A word spoken in a proper manner is like apples of gold in silver baskets"*.

Frankincense is a bitter aromatic resin, yielded by the shrub of that name. It was used in the meat offering and in the offering of the first fruits. It was placed on top of the two piles of shewbread in the Tabernacle, but it was not to be used with the sin-offering or the jealousy offering, because they brought iniquity to remembrance; so frankincense seems to picture our appreciation and gratitude as we acknowledge God as the Giver of every good and perfect gift, and give to him our all. Frankincense was also an ingredient of the incense used in the Tabernacle ceremony, and as such symbolises praise

and heart adoration on the part of the sacrificing priests.

Both myrrh and frankincense, although sweet perfumes, are bitter to the taste, and only yield the fulness of their aroma when brought into contact with heat, as when the incense was crumbled over the fire in the censer of the Golden Altar of the Tabernacle. So we, as prospective members of the Bride, can only yield the perfume of gratitude, praise and heart adoration as we are obedient and submissive in the fiery experiences of life, so bringing forth that "sweet savour" so pleasing to our Lord and Master.

Such a garden must have filled the surrounding atmosphere with a richness and sweetness unsurpassed; the Christian can, and should, manifest to an ever-increasing extent the Christian graces which this garden pictures, that the atmosphere in which we move may be pervaded by the same sweet perfume which surrounded our Lord as He moved among men at his First Advent. To do this, we need a plentiful supply of the water of life. This brings in view the last part of the description of the garden (verse 15): *"A fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon."* These symbols combine to give the thought of a superabundance of water. The well of living waters may well refer to the great storage cisterns which Solomon constructed at El Burak, which later on supplied the water for the service of the Temple in Jerusalem. So, likewise, we have an inexhaustible store of living water, shut up in the eternal heavens. Of the "streams of Lebanon" another has written: *"There is a deep rupture in the side of Lebanon, both sides steep and high, clothed with fragrant groves from top to bottom, everywhere refreshed with fountains falling down from the rocks in pleasant cascades, the streams all uniting at the bottom to form a rapid stream which murmurs pleasantly through the valley. What an apt picture of the wonderfully refreshing streams which combine to form the glorious river of truth which it is our privilege to enjoy"*.

Following the Bridegroom's description of his Bride, she herself continues (Cant. 4.16): *"Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out. Let my beloved come into his garden and eat his pleasant fruits"*. The first part of this verse reminds us that adversity (north wind) as well as felicity (south wind) should cause us to yield the same precious perfume which pervaded our Lord's life, in both joy and adversity; the latter part, that this garden is not only a bed of perfume, but also that it produces an abundance of fruit—fruit which will satisfy our beloved Lord when He comes into his garden.

SAGA OF THE SECOND TEMPLE

*The story of a
great awakening*

Somewhere in the Book of Isaiah there is a passage that describes the spirit in which the Jewish exiles, returning from Babylon to rebuild the Temple at Jerusalem in the days of Cyrus king of Persia, journeyed across the desert and climbed the steep, ragged Judean hills to their ruined city. *"Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice; with the voice together shall they sing: for they shall see eye to eye, when the Lord shall bring again Zion... Break forth into joy, sing together, ye waste places of Jerusalem: for the Lord hath comforted his people, he hath redeemed Jerusalem..."* (Isa. 52. 8-12). That deliverance from Babylonian captivity was a very different thing from the Exodus out of Egypt. Under Moses the earlier Israelites had gone out in haste and by flight, first eating the Passover girded as for a journey and with every evidence of urgency. They had gone out against the wishes of the Egypt that had held them captive for four generations. But this time things were different. *"Ye shall not go out with haste, nor yet by flight."* Cyrus had issued a decree encouraging them to go, and given them necessities for the journey and the wherewithal to commence a new life in an empty and desolate land. He had restored to them the holy treasures that Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the Temple and brought to Babylon fifty years previously, and had commanded them to build again the magnificent building that his predecessor had destroyed. No wonder they rejoiced! No wonder that, in the words of the Psalmist, singing of this very event, *"When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream. Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing; then said they among the nations, The Lord hath done great things for them. The Lord hath done great things for us; we are glad."* (Psa. 126. 1-3).

It was in this spirit that fifty thousand immigrants came into the land and immediately set about raising the walls of the Temple. The enthusiasm was great at first, for the influence of Daniel, the man who had once been Nebuchadnezzar's Prime Minister, was still strong upon them. Daniel, too old now to come back to Judea, had blessed their going. Now in the seventh month, the time of the Feast of Tabernacles, that commemorated their journeying in the wilderness for forty years after their departure from Egypt, they were gathered together in Jerusalem. From all the villages and hamlets of Judea they

had come to worship before God at the first ceremonial to be conducted on the sacred site since Nebuzar-Adan the commander-in-chief of Nebuchadnezzar's army had set fire to the Temple, and burned it to the ground. That had been a time of disaster and sorrow; this was one of hope and expectation. The house of the Lord was to be rebuilt and the ancient ceremonies restored, and Israel would once more bear a name among the nations. This was the faith that burned brightly in every breast.

The little community had two leaders of sterling worth, Zerubbabel the prince and Joshua the High Priest. Zerubbabel was of the kingly line; he traced his natural descent from Nathan the son of David. The royal pedigree from Solomon had become extinct in Jehoiachin, and the humbler line of Nathan took its place after the Captivity; thus Zerubbabel was its present representative. Through him, though he knew it not, the royal line was to be carried on until of his descendants, one day, Jesus would be born in Bethlehem. Joshua the son of Jehozadek was a High Priest for the times. Nothing is known of his father, who was Israel's High Priest during the Babylonian captivity. His grandfather, Seraiah, High Priest in the days of Zedekiah, was executed by the Babylonians at the capture of the city. Jeremiah's picture of the political intrigues of that period indicate that the priests were hand in glove with the king and very possibly Seraiah was entangled with politics more than he should have been and suffered a fate he might have avoided had he been more devoted to his own commission before God. Nebuchadnezzar had a shrewd insight into the honesty or otherwise of men and it is impossible not to notice the difference between the respective treatments he meted out to Seraiah and to Jeremiah, who had kept out of politics and maintained, very faithfully, his witness to God. (Jer. 39. 11-14 and 52. 24-27). But it is evident that Joshua was of sterling worth. The approving tone of Zechariah's third chapter shows that he was a man the Lord could use. Under these two men, Zerubbabel and Joshua, Israel could have risen very quickly to a place of honour and power among the nations.

The people failed them. The people, who had come back from Babylon with songs of praise on their lips for so great deliverance, in joy that the Lord had turned again their captivity, began to lose their first fine enthusiasm, began to care

more for their own farms and gardens and houses than for the house of the Lord. The affairs of daily life loomed as of greater moment than the service of God, and when the adversaries of Judah began to put obstacles in the way of the restoration work Israel in the mass were not at all averse to letting the case go by default.

While Cyrus lived, the work went on, but not at the pace originally planned. The Samaritans, bitter enemies of Judah, hindered the work. It was not entirely stopped, but neither was it pressed ahead with zeal and expedition. And they made one great and grievous mistake.

If the Samaritan complaint to Cambyses, the successor of Cyrus, recorded in Ezra 4, was true, and not a malicious misrepresentation on their part, then the Jews were at that time engaged in building, not only the Temple, but also the walls and foundations of the city. Now it is important to notice that the decree of Cyrus gave no mandate to build the city; it was to build the Temple only. There was a deep truth here for Israel to learn. Their Temple was to rise, undefended, in the midst of a hostile population. The Lord himself would defend both his Temple and his people—but they would not. They fell after the same example of unbelief that has been seen so often in world history—resource to material means of defence to defend Divine interests. They would not understand that God is able to defend his own.

That was a test on the people. Now, at all events, they could have said, as did Peter on a certain memorable occasion "*Whether it be right to hearken unto men rather than unto God, judge ye; but as for us...*" They could have defied both the Samaritans and the king's edict, and taken themselves in prayer to God for his leading and his protection, and gone forward in faith that his purposes would be accomplished. But they did not. Therefore in consequence "*then ceased the work of the house of God which is at Jerusalem. So it ceased unto the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia.*" (Ezra. 4. 24).

So the whole glorious dream faded and the golden hopes with which the exiles had set out to return to their own land were in less than a decade dashed to the ground. At the first breath of opposition the people had wilted and laid down their tools, and turned themselves to the secular pursuits of every day, tilling the land and gaining livelihoods, building houses and organising communal life, buying and selling, marrying and giving in marriage, the while the deserted, half-finished house of God stood on Mount Moriah, a crumbling monument to the fickleness of man and the weakness of faith.

But in the second year of Darius, nineteen years after the exiles had returned from Babylon and ten years after work on the Temple had been completely stopped, something momentous happened.

Two young men, Haggai and Zechariah, suddenly came into the public eye and commenced preaching in Jerusalem and Judea. Haggai started first; two months later he was joined by his fellow-prophet Zechariah. These two young men, without any material resources, accomplished in the short space of four years what twenty years of time backed by all the material wealth of the thousands of Israel, the influence of Zerubbabel and Joshua, the authority of the decree of Cyrus, had failed to do. They achieved the rebuilding and the dedication of the Temple!

If the Zechariah and Iddo of Neh. 12 are the same as the prophet and his forebear of those names mentioned in Zech. 1. 1, which is probable, then Zechariah must have been a very young man, certainly at most in his early twenties, for Iddo his grandfather would then have returned to Judea in the first year of Cyrus, probably an old man. On this assumption, it is likely that Haggai, about whose antecedents we know nothing, was a young man also. There is a freshness and vigour about both their prophecies that seems to suggest as much. Zerubbabel the prince and Joshua the High Priest would by this time, twenty years after the Return, be getting on in years, at the very least in late middle-age; Neh. 12. 16 indicates that later on Zechariah held office in the priesthood under Joiakim, the High Priest who succeeded Joshua. The two older men would probably be to some extent dispirited and discouraged at the failure of their high hopes, the adverse decision of Artaxerxes and the apathy of the people of Israel combining to dissuade them from any considerable activity in the direction of restoring the Temple. Then like a thunder-bolt came the message, declaimed in the streets and squares of the city, told in the ears of shepherds and peasants in the countryside, brought to the notice of the prince and the High Priest, word that prophets were arisen again in Israel. A message for the times, a message that told with decision and conviction to what cause was due their unhappy condition and the failure of their one-time high ideals and hopes. "*Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your cieled houses, and this house lie waste?*" demanded Haggai. "*Now therefore thus saith the Lord of hosts, Consider your ways!*" Scarcely had the tones of his accusation died upon the air than the equally penetrating voice of his brother-prophet Zechariah commanded attention. "*The Lord hath been sore displeased with your fathers.*"

Therefore . . . thus saith the Lord of hosts 'Turn ye unto me . . . and I will turn unto you'." Then Haggai again *"Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the Lord."* To Joshua, the people's High Priest, Zechariah addressed himself deliberately *"Thus saith the Lord of hosts; if thou wilt walk in my ways, and if thou wilt keep my charge, then thou shalt also judge my house, and shalt also keep my courts";* with Haggai rejoining *"Be strong, O Zerubbabel, saith the Lord, and be strong, O Joshua, son of Josedech, the High Priest, and be strong, all ye people of the land, saith the Lord, and work; for I am with you."*

Haggai and Zechariah had put their fingers upon the source of the trouble. Faith and zeal had sunk to a low ebb: there was no longer that heavenly vision which had inspired the first emigrants to wend their way across the desert with songs and thanksgiving on their lips, and their faces turned toward Zion. Because faith and zeal had waned, the enemies of Israel and of God had loomed nearer and more menacing, and in fear and doubt the work of God had been stopped.

Behold now the difference! The prohibition of the Persian king was still in force. *"Cause these men to cease, and that this city be not builded, until commandment shall be given from me."* (Ezra 4. 21). The wrath of the king could still be backed by the military might of Persia if this handful of Jews dared to rebel against his express decree. The Samaritans, the ancient enemies at whose instigation the work had been stopped ten years previously, were still there, malignantly watchful, and would not hesitate to report any new activity to the king without delay. There was no change in the circumstances; no reason from the outward and material point of view why any fresh endeavour would not meet the same fate as past ones. And yet, most remarkable of happenings, the fervent preaching of these two youngsters so wrought upon the minds and hearts of the people that they forgot all their fears and apathy, regained their faith, and without so much as giving a thought to the king of Persia, rose up as one man to resume the building of their Temple. *"Then the prophets, Haggai the prophet, and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophesied unto the Jews that were in Judah and Jerusalem, in the name of the God of Israel . . . then rose up Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Jozadak, and began to build the house of God which is at Jerusalem, and with them were the prophets of God helping them."* (Ezra 5. 1). That is only the bald historical note of the happening; let the

books of Haggai and Zechariah tell the splendid story in their own way, how that the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, and Joshua, the high priest, and all the people, so that they came and did work in the house of the Lord (Hag. 1. 14); how the Lord promised *"the glory of this latter house shall be greater than the former"* (Hag. 2. 9) and that wonderful award, set as a gem in this inspiring prophecy *"from the day that the foundation of the Lord's temple was laid . . . FROM THIS DAY WILL I BLESS YOU."* (Hag. 2. 18-19). Let the splendid imagery of Zechariah's visions illuminate those joyful days, the view of Jerusalem inhabited as towns without walls for the multitude of men and cattle therein, of the prosperity of Judah and the defeat of her enemies, and the kingship of the Lord established over all the earth. The wonderful inspiration that we ourselves draw from this thrilling book we owe to the days when those two young men stood in the markets of Jerusalem and bade the people forget their fears, pay no heed to the mandates of the heathen king, and enter the service of the Lord God in the building of his sanctuary.

Of course it was not long before the Samaritans were there again, taking particulars from the leaders, and sitting down to write another report to the Persian king—Darius this time—at Babylon. Note the difference in the spirit with which their questioning was met on this occasion. *"We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth, and build the house that was builded these many years ago . . ."* (Ezra 5. 11). There was no fear and hesitation now; the same Zerubbabel and Joshua, the same builders and labourers, the same citizens, who ten years ago had laid down their tools at the king's behest, now proudly declared their determination to continue. Last time they ran away from the lion; this time they faced the lion, and defied him in the strength of the Lord their God.

The sequel? Let Darius answer for himself, in his reply to the complainants *"Let the work of this house of God alone; let the governor of the Jews and the elders of the Jews build this house of God in his place. Moreover I make a decree . . ."* and Darius went on to command that assistance be given to these Jews in their work, with materials and money, and offerings to be made to God on the king's behalf; that any who hindered the work or violated the king's word should himself be put to death. *"I Darius have made a decree; let it be done with speed."* (Ezra 6).

How often do we repeat to each other the old saying "Fear knocked at the door; faith opened it; and no one was there!" Here is an instance where that principle was put into practice and a

whole people reaped the reward of faith. But there was much more involved than the building of a house of prayer for that generation. It was from this day, when the Temple began to be built, that there commenced the development of that Jewish people, with its distinctive worship, to which Jesus came nearly five centuries later. It was at this time that the Old Testament as we know it was completed, in the sayings and writings of Haggai and Zechariah and Malachi, to be welded into an authoritative canon of Scripture by Ezra the pious priest fifty years later. Those enthusiastic and zealous Jews under Zerubbabel and Joshua, Haggai and Zechariah, builded better than they knew when they defied the powers of this world and laid their hands to the Lord's work. They brought the work and the story of the Old Testament to its consummation and prepared the way for the New.

"And this house was finished on the third day of the month Adar, which was in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king" (Ezra 6. 15). Four short years. In that brief space of time they had built the sanctuary, erected the great altar, set the golden vessels of Solomon's Temple,

brought back from Babylon, in place, and were ready to reinstate the ceremonial and offerings that were commanded by Moses. It was nearly the season of the Passover. Nisan followed Adar, and from the third day of Adar there would only be some six weeks to the fourteenth day of Nisan and the celebration of Israel's most solemn feast.

Accomplishment, therefore, follows faith and zeal, never doubt and unbelief. We who have been set free from a great bondage are given the privilege of becoming Temple-builders. It is in the strength of God that we play our part in that work of building the Temple which is to be a house of prayer for all nations; as we share together in Passover let us remember that there was a time when the powers of this Age, the powers of evil, had to be defied before God's protection could be manifested and his work go forward. It may be so again. God grant that in such case we are found, not like those who weakly acquiesced in the command to stop work, but those who joyfully and zealously went forward to the execution of their Divine commission, trusting their God for defence while they laboured in the interests of his work in the earth.

THE LORD'S SIDE

"Who is on the Lord's side?" (Exod. 32: 26)

"Who is on the Lord's side

Who will serve the King

By thy grace Divine

We are on the Lord's side

Saviour, we are thine."

There are two sides to every issue in life. Which side we take reveals character. We can either build up or destroy. We can be peace-makers or creators of strife; honest or crooked, merciful or tyrannical. Though many can effect a compromise there are only two sides, right and wrong, good and evil. Our days may run smoothly for a period but sooner or later we will be faced with the challenge, "Which side are you on?". The question will have to be answered and on the answer a great deal depends. Knowledge has increased in all fields and a fight goes on in the mind of man.

Critics of the Bible and of Christianity are wearing down the faith of many. The seeds of doubt have been sown. Love of pleasure replaces love of God. The soul of man is satisfied with good living and feels no need of God. He needs neither guidance, assistance, consolation or heartease. The desire to worship eases, standards

fall and man drifts away on a careless tide, heedless of danger, his attention distracted by the crazes of the day. Religion for the most part is formal and confused but still the challenge is ringing clearly and will be answered.

Who, in the midst of a faithless age, when belief in God is considered old fashioned, will take his side and serve him in spirit and in truth? Who in these days of doubt will say, "I believe with all my heart in the living God and in Christ as my Saviour?" Who in this age of moral dissipation and profanity will hold aloft the standard of justice and purity? Who in an age of general enlightenment will combat the foes of willing ignorance who daily disparage the Word of God and all it stands for?

It is not easy to back a losing cause, to stand steadfastly in your place while thousands fall to doubt and disbelief, to hold aloft the standard of truth and righteousness, when so many desert the field; to remain confident in the glorious outcome, the final victory of God over evil, darkness and indifference when everything seems to be against it. There is an ineffable joy in being on the right side. "The joy of the Lord" shall be the strength of all who enlist in his cause.

Scripture is most explicit that we are called to "follow in his steps". But Jesus never stepped out of sinfulness into sinlessness, hence, till

our sinful estate has been ended by a full and complete acquittal, we cannot even begin to follow in his steps.

TEN VISIONS OF CHRIST TRIUMPHANT

6. Vision 10. The Thousand Years

The culmination of the whole Bible story, its history, prophecy and theology, is reached in the 20th chapter of Revelation where John sees the triumphant Lord, having vanquished all enemies, seizing and rendering impotent the arch-enemy of God and man, the Devil, and then ascending the throne of the earth, in company with his Church, and reigning over the nations for the predicted thousand years, the Millennium. The result of this reign is the conversion of all who can be persuaded of those who formerly had been alien from God, the passing out of life of any who reject the opportunity, and the entry of mankind into the eternal state in a condition of complete unity with God and Christ. Unrighteousness and death will no longer exist; the whole creation in which man is concerned will have attained the position towards which God has been working from the start, and his human creatures will inherit everlasting life in complete peace and contentment.

Here in the vision John first saw a mighty angel descending from heaven with a great chain in his hand (Rev. 20.1), proceeding to lay hold on *"the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan"* and bind him for the thousand years. Having thus bound him, he *"cast him into the abyss, and shut him up, that he should deceive the nations no more, until the thousand years should be fulfilled"*. This, obviously, is an essential preliminary to the resurrection of the dead and their induction, with the then living, into the new order of things in which the outward practice of evil is completely restrained, which is characteristic of the Millennial reign of Christ. Nothing shall hurt nor destroy, says Isaiah, speaking of that blessed time (Isa. 11.9) and again *"the work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever"* (Isa. 32.17). Such condition of society can only obtain when the powers of evil have themselves been eliminated or restrained by a superior power for good. The 19th chapter of Revelation pictures the annihilation of all man-made systems of evil at the end of this Age; there remains only the Devil himself to be dealt with and then the evangelical work of the next Age, the Millennium, will be able to proceed without let or hindrance.

That there is such a malevolent spiritual intelligence actively moving in the affairs of men is plainly inferred in the Scriptures and that this intelligence, the spirit of evil, irrevocably antag-

onistic to God and to every element of right-doing, is to be annihilated at the end, is indicated. The story of man's creation and the Garden of Eden, with which Bible history opens, is founded upon the principle that man was created perfect, upright, sinless and undying, that an evil and hostile intelligence from beyond man's world persuaded our first progenitors into sin, and that death came upon men as a logical consequence. The reason why God has permitted the co-existence of sin and evil with right-doing and good throughout human history until the present is one for thought and discussion but the Bible is clear that this permission is for a wise purpose and will not endure forever. A time is to come in the progress of the Divine Plan, and before that Plan has come to its consummation so far as man is concerned, when the Prince of all evil, and all his works, will perish together.

This final judgment is not pictured here in these first three verses of Rev. 20. The chapter goes on to cover the whole duration of the Millennium and it is only at its close that the restraints on the Prince of evil are relaxed. He is shown then to be still unrepentant and rebellious, and so comes to his final end. When it is remembered that the thousand-year Millennial Age is appointed by God as the final period and opportunity for conversion and acceptance of the way of life for all mankind—and incidentally for the rebellious angels of Gen. 6 also—(see Acts 17.31; I Cor. 6.2-3) it would seem logical that even the one who was responsible for the introduction of evil into the world and has fostered it ever since should have the same opportunity. It is always and gloriously true that our God is *"not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance"* (I Pet. 3.9). It was to Ezekiel that the Lord uttered the immortal words *"Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die, saith the Lord God, and not that he should return from his ways, and live?"* (Ezek. 18.23). But there is a definite inference in the Old Testament that the Most High, in the exercise of his supreme foreknowledge, does know that this particular creation of his own hands will at the end prove impervious to his persuasion and his goodness and will go deliberately into the darkness rather than acknowledge and practice that which is good and right. The two well-known passages in Isaiah and Ezekiel which are taken to be allusions to his career and destiny (Isa. 14.4-20; Ezek. 28.12-29) *"thou shalt be brought down to*

Sheol, to the sides of the pit" "I will bring thee to ashes upon the earth . . . and never shalt thou be any more" have a terrible finality about them which can hardly bear any other interpretation.

So at the beginning of the Millennium the Devil is cast into the abyss. In Jewish lore the abyss was a place, or condition, below and remote from Hades, the abode of the dead, in which contact or communication with the world of the living was impossible. Peter describes the rebellious angels of Gen. 6 as being confined, after their sin, in Tartarus ("God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell"—*tartarus*, the only occurrence of this word in the N.T.—2 Pet. 2.4). Tartarus in Greek mythology was a place as far below Hades as Hades was below Earth, the eternal prison of the Titans, the demi-gods who rebelled against the chief gods—clearly derived from the original Biblical episode of the rebellious angels,—and so the Greek Tartarus is analogous to the Hebrew abyss. (An allusion to this is found in Luke 8.31 where the demons expelled from the demented man besought Jesus "that he would not command them to go out into the *deep*" where "*deep*" is, in the Greek, *abyss*.) For the entire period of the thousand years, then, the Devil is impotent, unable to influence the world of men in any way, and perhaps able only to observe the beneficent results of the Messianic administration and the life-giving results which stem from the reign of Christ.

This "binding of Satan" represents a vital turning-point in the work of the Second Advent. Several of the preceding visions of Christ triumphant in the Book of Revelation picture different aspects of what may be termed the preliminary events of the "days of the Son of Man" and all of these have their place during the closing days of this present Age. The King coming upon a white cloud to reap the harvest of the earth pictures our Lord's Advent for the gathering of his Church; the angel proclaiming the fall of great Babylon his oversight of the forces which disrupt the present corrupt world order and bring it to ruin; the Rider on the White Horse leading the armies of Heaven into battle against the kings of the earth the final conflict which elsewhere is called Armageddon. But after Armageddon the kingship of this earth passes into the hands of our Lord Jesus Christ and thereafter the world enters an era of peace. It seems logical to expect that this "binding of Satan" is the next event on the programme and perhaps almost immediately following the victorious conflict of Rev. 19. Next in order would come the resurrection of the dead and this is where the succeeding verses of Rev. 20 have their place.

"I saw thrones" says John (ch. 20.4) "*and they*

that sat upon them . . . and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years".

The "marriage of the Lamb" will have already taken place—that event, which takes place in the celestial sphere and is not perceptible on earth, is alluded to in chap. 19. Following that climax to the earthly course of the Church comes the descent from Heaven with the Lord himself and the conflict of Rev. 19, which leaves Heaven in full control of Earth and Christ the undisputed ruler. It is significant though that nothing is said in that chapter about the Church reigning with Christ; this appears for the first time in chap. 20. It is almost as if the *de facto* reign of Christ, with his Church, does not commence until the last enemy, the Devil, is rendered powerless. From that point, it may be said, the real work of the Millennium proceeds. And all Scripture doctrine as well as prophecy concurs in saying that the Church of Christ, the complete company of his faithful disciples and followers throughout this present Age, are to be actively associated with him in the work of that Age.

What that work involves is more clearly detailed in chaps. 21 and 22. The remainder of chap. 20 is taken up with a brief summary of the Millennium, leading up to the final judgment at its end. Then John goes back and at greater leisure sketches in the detail of that world which is to be. There is a new world, for the old world has passed away, and God now is going to dwell with men in the persons of his Son Jesus Christ and the members of his Church. There will be no more death, no tears, sorrow nor crying; no more pain. All the former things have passed away and the universal Father in Heaven will make all things new.

In the ecstasy of that revelation John lifted up his eyes to heaven and beheld the resplendent vision of the New Jerusalem descending to earth. Much of the inspiration for that vision must have come from Ezekiel. He too saw the city of God with its central Temple, established in the earth at the time of man's deliverance from evil. Prophet and Apostle alike experienced the same preview, in symbol, of the then far future Millennial world. A glorious city, to be the home of redeemed mankind, surrounding a magnificent Throne from which would flow the life-giving waters of eternal life, a Throne on which were seated the Lord God Almighty, Father and Creator of all men, the Lord Jesus Christ, Saviour and King, and the Church his Bride, all ready for the final phase in the process of human salvation. And John saw what Ezekiel had seen so many centuries before him, a stream, a river, of water of life, issuing forth from the Throne and reaching out into all the world, with trees on

its banks, trees of life, whose fruit should be for food and leaves for healing, for the food and healing of the nations, of all mankind.

So this final aspect of the Second Advent, enduring the full thousand years of the Millennium, will abolish sin and death and all unhappiness, introducing in their stead right and life and eternal felicity. *"The ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall*

flee away." The purpose for which Christ came to earth, suffered and died, will have been fully and gloriously accomplished, and Christ will be triumphant over all. The closing words of the final vision in the last book of God's revelation to man come from our victorious Lord and his exalted Church, his Bride. *"The Spirit and the Bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."* THE END

A NOTE ON 2 COR. 2. 15-16

"We are unto God a sweet savour in Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish. To the one we are the savour of death unto death, and to the other the savour of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things?" (2 Cor. 2. 15-16).

The customary exegesis interprets this passage more or less in line with the known fact that the message of Christ has two receptions and two effects; it is the power of God unto salvation unto every one that believeth and it is a stone of stumbling and rock of offence to those who do not believe. Thus, say the expositors, it is a savour of life to those who believe and a savour of death to those who do not believe. This involves reversing the clauses in verse 16 so that the "death" clause which comes first, relates to those that perish in verse 15, which comes last, and similarly with the "life" clause. To make this clear, some translators render verse 16 *"To these"* (i.e. "them that perish" in verse 15) *"we are the savour of death unto death"* and *"to those"* ("them that are saved" in verse 15) *"the savour of life unto life"* but this is not a fair rendering. There is no real distinction in the Greek showing grammatically which clause in verse 16 applies to which clause in verse 15 so that the decision as to whether the expression "savour of death", for example, applies to them that are saved or to them that perish has to be made on the basis of the interpretation.

It is much more likely that St. Paul was thinking of the fact that those who believe, those who have been justified by faith and thereafter come into Christ and become members of his Church, are themselves said to be dead. Paul's argument in the sixth chapter of Romans is that we are dead to this world and alive unto God. We who are baptised into Christ are baptised into his death;

we are buried with him by that baptism and we rise to walk with him in newness of life. In all of this he is thinking of the Levitical sacrifices in which the bullock and the goat of the sin-offering went into death in order that release from sin might be credited to the people. Hence in Rom. 12. 1 the Apostle exhorts all believers to present their bodies a living sacrifice, devoted to God as irrevocably as were those slain beasts but without the actual cutting off of life. From the Divine viewpoint, then, believers are sacrificially dead that through them, as through Christ their Head, life might ultimately flow to all people, "whosoever will", when Christ reigns over the nations. Hence it can quite logically be said that we are a "sweet savour of death unto death" insofar as those who believe are concerned, for the death of which we are a "sweet savour" is a thing of joy and exultation, and becomes a means in the Divine purpose of bringing life. Likewise we are a "savour of life unto life" toward those who do not believe, in that a day is to come in which the call of the Spirit and the Bride to "whosoever will" (Rev. 22. 17), going out in that day to all men, will result in the gift of eternal life to those who avail themselves of the opportunities of reconciliation with God. Jesus called that still future day the "regeneration", meaning the time of new life (Matt. 19. 28). When Paul said "Know ye not that the saints shall judge the world?" (1 Cor. 6. 2) he was thinking of exactly the same thing—for that judgment includes the whole process of bringing the willing of mankind up to the standard of God's righteousness before final sentence is passed. "When thy judgments are abroad in the earth the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness" (Isa. 26.9). It is true therefore that the saints, believers, go into death *now* that one day mankind in general may enter into *life*, and it was probably this fact which inspired St. Paul's words in this text.

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