



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

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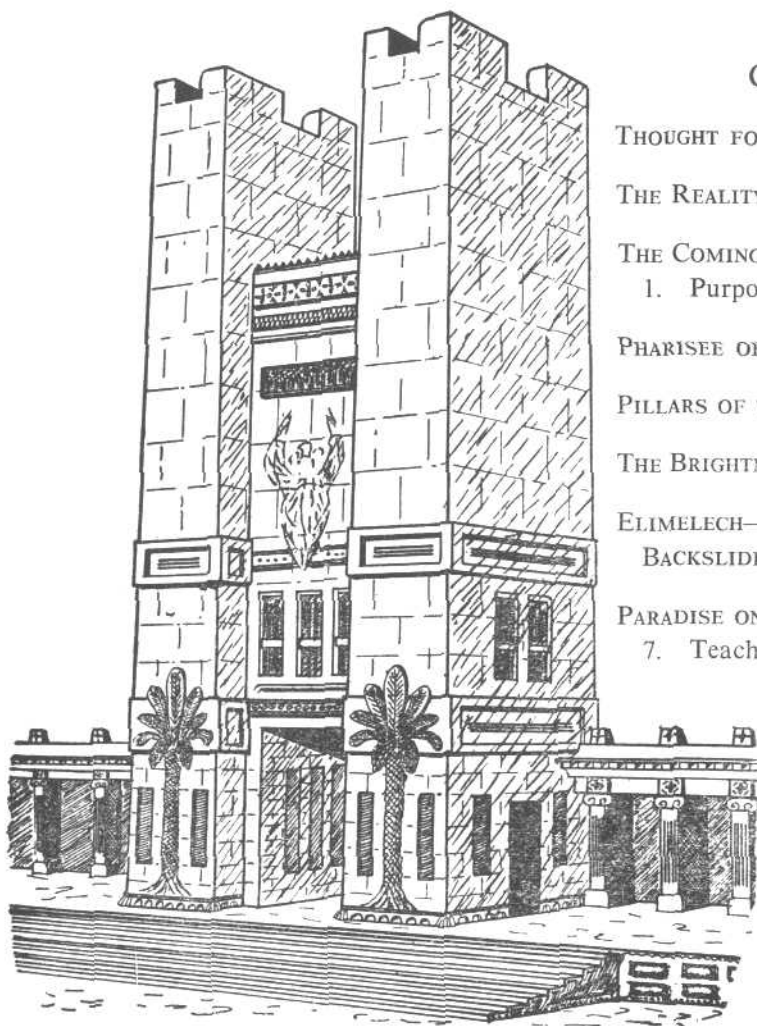
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*Lift up your heads, O ye gates
And be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors,
And the King of glory shall come in.*

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THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH

"God that made the world and all things therein . . . hath made of one blood all nations of men to dwell on all the face of the earth" (Acts 17. 24-26).

The mingling of varied nations—a better term than the modern "ethnic groups"—is becoming a characteristic of to-day's world and particularly so in Great Britain, evoking the endorsement of some and disparagement of others. It is not often that a voice is raised querying what God thinks of it all. Granted that according to the story of the Tower of Babel He told men to scatter and distribute themselves over the face of the earth, a process that was only completed by about the 13th Century of the Christian era, He might well now have reasons for reversing the position. One has to accept that it is God who is responsible for the production of man in five colours—black, brown, red, yellow and white—that the variety in the animal and vegetable worlds so characteristic of God is to an extent mimicked in his designs for man. Remembering all this, Christians, of all people, should not look askance at men of another race because they are "different"; they are all the work of God's hands. What is more difficult to adjust to are the different religions the newcomers bring with them, not so much because they are different but because the Christian faith has always demanded and still demands that the destiny of each man is bound up with his personal acceptance of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and that implies that Christianity, if not the only true religion, is at least the truest of true religions. And of course it is the case that every monarch of this country has to promise at his or her coronation to uphold Christianity as the national faith, so that all loyal subjects of the British crown should feel themselves in honour bound to do the same. Which in some circumstances could pose something of a dilemma.

The modern idea that all religion springs from the human mind and the various faiths are merely different ways of saying the same thing

is a fallacy. Modern research has shown that prior to the mid-3rd millennium BC, all men worshipped the One God. Monotheism was the order of the day and paganism with its many gods was unknown. Then came the differentiation into the many personifications of natural objects and forces, each becoming a manifestation of God in one sphere, soon becoming gods in their own right; the sun-god, the moon-god, the storm god, and so on, leading eventually to the many faiths and philosophies of today. One day the wheel will turn full circle and all men come back to the One God, revealed in Christ. For that reason there can be no real union between Christianity and other faiths. God revealed himself to man at the beginning. Men departed from his standards and made themselves gods in their own image and likeness, philosophies of life which left God out of the calculation. Christianity is now the highest expression of the Divine revelation to men. Only in Christ can man attain the life of eternity, because life comes literally through Christ and from no other source. It is the duty of all Christians to remember that inescapable fact.

NOTICES

New Features. Some twenty years ago we published a booklet entitled "The Coming of the King" on the nature and manner of the Second Advent, including the arguments for holding that this present century is witnessing the early and unseen stage of that Advent. "The Coming of the King" enjoyed a wide circulation on both sides of the Atlantic, but regrettably has now for some time been out of print. It is not practicable to republish in that form at present, and in consequence the book is planned to be reproduced in the pages of the "Monthly" in serial form during the whole of this year. It is hoped that this will prove of equal interest to present readers as did its original appearance twenty years ago.

Twenty-five years ago we featured a series of stories of incidents in the life of the Apostle Paul; it has been suggested by one or two readers of long standing that their republication could be of interest to a later generation and to more recent readers. The series commences in this issue and will continue for the next three years, relating the history of Paul's travels and work and ministry from the time of the stoning of Stephen to Paul's own death outside the gates of Rome.

THE REALITY OF GOD

The greatest mystery known to man is God! Is He there, or is He not? Does He exist, or does He not? Is there really a transcendent super-human personal Being up there in the sky controlling all things, or is what we call God just an impersonal force pervading all creation? Is the observable universe itself God, slowly becoming conscious of itself? Is the idea of God nothing more than a projection of the human mind, so that in a sense man creates God in his own image and likeness? Each of these hypotheses has its advocates and satisfies some enquirers but none of them satisfies all; probably most thinking people feel that none of them adequately defines the truth.

Nevertheless the universe is a fact; its existence cannot be denied. We live, are conscious of our surroundings, and are affected by them. That cannot be denied either. We are biological creatures inhabiting an environment from which we draw the energy needed to maintain our lives and power our actions. So accurately is that environment fitted to our needs that only a small variation of any one of its physical factors would render human life on earth impossible. This planet is ninety-three million miles from the sun; if it were less than seventy-five millions or more than a hundred, men could not live on its surface. Neither could they if its diameter of eight thousand miles was reduced to six thousand, or increased to ten thousand, nor yet if its twenty-four hour day was increased to eighty hours, or the average heat of summer was twenty degrees higher than it is, or cold of winter twenty degrees lower. So with many others of the characteristic features of our habitat. And in our saner moments we are driven to ask of ourselves how this came to be, how the earth was made like this, so admirably fitted to our needs, how the universe came into existence and how we received the life we have. From that, if we are sufficiently serious in our thinking, we go on to ask ourselves how long all this is going to last and what is the purpose of it all. And so we come inevitably to the question of God.

The fact that the universe does exist implies that it had a beginning, a source. Whether it came into existence by the working of some blind impersonal force or the will of a supreme intelligent Mind, the fact remains that the material of which the universe is made must have been created and therefore must have had a creative source. All matter, whether solid, liquid or gaseous, is made up of atoms, nearly a hundred

varieties of them. An iron bar is made of iron atoms; a gold coin of gold atoms; the air we breathe, of a mixture of oxygen and nitrogen atoms, and water, a chemical combination of oxygen and hydrogen atoms. All these varieties of atoms are derived from the simplest and most common of all—hydrogen. More than ninety-nine per cent of the material in the universe is hydrogen, and nuclear processes going on in the stars are continuously manufacturing atoms of all other known materials from hydrogen and distributing them through space, so making possible the formation of worlds such as the one we inhabit. We have therefore to look down the vista of the ages to a fantastically remote time when an unimaginably vast quantity of hydrogen came into existence, and the creation of the universe began.

Of the two main theories purporting to explain the origin of the universe which at present hold the field, one, first mooted and made famous by the work of the noted cosmologist, Prof. Fred Hoyle of Cambridge University, and his associates, claims that hydrogen atoms are being continuously created out of nothing, appearing from nowhere at a uniform rate and adding to the total content of the universe as time goes on. Although according to Hoyle's calculations only one atom of hydrogen appears in a space the size of an ordinary living room in every three million years, this still makes enough new material to form many thousands of new stars the size of our sun in every second of time, which only goes to show how vast our universe really is. But even if Hoyle's view is ultimately shown to be erroneous, (many scientists favouring the "Big Bang" theory assert this to be the case) and all the atoms in the universe did appear at one moment in the inconceivably distant past, the questions still remain—how did they come into existence, where did they come from, and who made them? Not only so, but it must also be asked, who devised the intricate chemical processes by which hydrogen turns into helium, and helium into beryllium and so on up the scale until all the basic elements to uranium are produced? And by what means did these elements learn to combine with each other to produce such widely dissimilar substances as the granite cliffs of a mountain and the delicate texture of a water-lily? The one is easily answered, says the geologist; granite is a mixture of compounds formed chiefly from oxygen, carbon, hydrogen, silicon, iron, aluminium and potassium, compacted together by the action

of heat and pressure. The other is easily answered, says the biologist; the water-lily is a mixture of compounds formed chiefly from oxygen, carbon, silicon, iron, aluminium and potassium, given form by the action of sunlight. By what means or wondrous alchemy, then, are the same materials brought together to emerge on the one hand as a block of granite and on the other as a water-lily? And how was it decided, and by whom, how much granite the world should contain and how many water-lilies? Those water-lilies, too, possess a characteristic which the granite does not have; they grow from small beginnings, adding to themselves, and they reproduce their kind; they have life! How do they grow? Away in the sun, where hydrogen is being converted into helium, part of the hydrogen is transformed into energy—solar radiation is the technical term—which wings its way to the earth and is manifest as sunlight. Falling upon the leaves of the water-lily that energy performs a series of chemical changes in which the water and air surrounding the plant are associated, and reappears as solid plant substance. The plant has grown a little more, and part of its new material was substance in the sun only eight minutes previously, transferred into energy for its swift passage to earth and then back into substance again. Whence does that energy originate and how did it start? No man has yet found the answer to that question in scientific research. It is known that matter and energy are interchangeable; the one can be converted into the other and vice versa, and today it is a commonplace to picture matter as “frozen energy”. But where the energy comes from and how it is sustained, and where life comes from and how that is sustained, no man can say; these are the twin enigmas of the universe. Their existence cannot be denied but their origin cannot be fathomed.

So, once again, we inevitably come back to the question of God.

The search for God involves these two incontrovertible factors—the presence of life and the phenomena of energy. Life we do not understand although we possess it and we perceive its effects in our fellows and in our environment. Energy we understand dimly; we know it as a power or force that does things and changes things, and can be “locked-up”, as it were, in the shape of atoms to form solid matter. Matter we know; we see it in the world around us and in our own bodies, and we touch it and feel it and call it “solid”, but the physicist tells us that the atoms of which all things consist are basically centres of inter-acting electrical forces and that in actual fact there is nothing “solid” there at all and by that time we are more or less out of our depth

and disinclined to pursue this subject further. Much more appealing to the average person's range of thinking could be the simple yet illuminating words of Scripture “*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth . . . and the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters, and God said, Let there be light, and there was light*” (Gen. 1. 1-3). The Spirit of God in active operation, the emergence of light; these are the simple expressions used to convey the idea that energy, Divine energy, was at work in creation. So with the coming of life. “*The Lord God made man of the dust of the ground*”—the atoms—“*and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life*”—life which is of God—“*and man became a living soul*” (Gen. 2.7) Man, then, is a combination of life and energy, the two basic factors of existence as we know it, originating from the great First Cause which we call God.

Men of science have realised this although their language is not always easy to follow. Thus Sir James Jeans, a former Astronomer-royal, had this to say “*The universe begins to look more like a great thought than a great machine. Mind no longer appears as an accidental intruder into the realm of matter; we are beginning to suspect that we ought rather to hail it as the creator and governor of the realm of matter—not, of course, our individual minds, but the mind in which the atoms out of which our individual minds have grown exist as thoughts*”. (*The Mysterious Universe* 1930). Atoms—thoughts in the mind of God; the idea may sound more like the muse of a poet than the pronouncement of a scientist but it may yet be found to enshrine a fundamental truth. A later writer, Kenneth Gatland, in “*The Inhabited Universe*” (1957) speaks for many present-day scientists when he says “*Science has looked beyond the molecular structure of “solid” matter to its atomic existence, and has found nothing more “material” than empty space and fields of energy. The universe is much more a creation of thought than of structure, like thought-waves rippling towards an idea. The question we must strive to answer is whether the universe is purposive. That is to say, has man emerged from the shapeless dust clouds of interstellar space merely as the result of blind throws of chance, or is there some special kind of direction behind it all? The inevitable question must be faced; is the purposefulness revealed in the universe an attribute of God? What is God? At best, we can only think of an Infinite Consciousness which is beyond our powers of understanding. And though we might apply great ingenuity to our quest, any theories we may have will be unavoidably conditioned by our dimensional limitations*”.

Acknowledged as the greatest scientist and mathematician of our times, Dr. Albert Einstein, whose discoveries and reasoning have revolutionised human knowledge regarding the physical universe, has given his personal testimony in these words: *"My religion consists of a humble admiration of the illimitable superior Spirit who reveals himself in the slight details we are able to perceive with our frail and feeble minds. That deeply emotional conviction of the presence of a superior reasoning power, which is revealed in the incomprehensible universe, forms my idea of God"* (Lincoln Barnett—*"The Universe and Dr. Einstein"* 1959).

Beyond the confines of this universe, outside the restrictions of space and time as we understand those terms, independent of all things and pre-existing all things, then, there exists that from which all life and continuing energy, that which is responsible for the causation of all observable phenomena and its orderly progress, that which has made it possible for sentient beings such as men to exist, and to know they exist, to think and reason intelligently, and make use of their environment and take from it what they need to continue their conscious existence. That Force, or Power, call it what we will, is God. Because that Power is the primal source of all energy and life and intelligence wherever found, its energy must infinitely exceed the sum total of all energy residing in creation, its life infinitely more vital than all the life of which we know, its intelligence infinitely superior to the highest level of intelligence to which man will ever attain. Because that Power is supremely intelligent we cannot apply the impersonal pronoun "it"; we must use the personal pronoun "He". And because the only intelligent personal beings we can picture in our minds eyes are men like ourselves, immediately we use the pronoun "He" we start thinking of God in man-like terms.

But God cannot really exist in the form conjured up in ancient times, a majestic king-like human figure seated upon a jewelled throne up in the sky. Neither, on the other hand, can He be imagined as a kind of abstract super-intelligence inherent in the material universe and inseparable from it. Because God, who created, must have existed before the creation of the universe, because the universe itself is altogether the fruit of Divine power exerted in space and time, it must follow that God is independent of the universe as regards his Person, although He pervades the universe as regards his Power and Presence. Since it is impossible—despite the best endeavours of Dr. Einstein and his co-workers—for the human brain to visualise any boundary to space outside of which space does not exist,

or any beginning of time prior to which time was not, it is inevitable that we picture God as inside our universe in some such fashion as a super-potentate in the starry heavens watching over and ruling this world of men which owes its creation to him. When Jesus was asked by Philip to "show us the Father" he could only tell them "he who has seen me has seen the Father"; Jesus himself in the glory of his sinless humanity conveyed the only possible concrete idea of God to their minds and one that was adequate to their needs. Despite the seeming scorn with which Dr. John Robinson, when Bishop of Woolwich, in his book *"Honest to God"*, treated those who picture God as being "up there" or "above the bright blue sky", it appears from the storm his remarks aroused that his own definition of God as *"the ground of our being"* was understood in the main only by professional theologians and not by all of them. It is, of course, quite true that God is the "ground of our being" in the sense that we exist only in him; St. Paul said that, long before the Bishop thought of it: *"In him we live, and move, and have our being"* (Acts 17. 28). At any level of culture or intellect normal among men it is probably the most rational thing to picture God in the traditional manner, heavenly throne with attendant angels and all, within the bounds of the universe but far away from man's interfering space probes and rocket ships, even although we know perfectly well that this is but a symbol of a spiritual reality which itself is utterly beyond our intellectual power.

After all, if there existed at the bottom of the sea a colony of intelligent oysters which had never moved from their native rocks and to whom the gospel of God was preached, their conception of God could hardly have been other than that of a super oyster of infinite power inhabiting a region above the surface of the sea. And since the Bible does offer casual evidences of the existence of higher levels of sentient intelligent life above that of the terrestrial human, we men might well stand in relation to those levels of life as oysters do to us. Much more important than our visual conception of the Person of God is our realisation and conviction that He does exist, that in him resides the highest expression of every moral attribute, so that beside infinite Power we also credit him with infinite Goodness. It is this latter factor which makes possible a personal relationship between man and God, a possibility which the existence of the Bible as God's revelation of himself to men exalts into reality.

Now if the Bible is in fact such a Divine revelation it is logical to expect some direct declaration within its covers conveying to men

as accurate a conception of the Divine nature and handiwork as men could be expected to understand; this is even so. There are many such statements. *"Thus says the high and lofty One who inhabits eternity. I dwell in the high and lofty place, and also with him who is of a contrite and humble spirit"* (Isa. 57.15). In a couple of short sentences the omnipresence of God is declared; He dwells in eternity, outside of space and time, yet is also present with the man, a creature of space and time, whose heart reaches out to communion and union with him. *"The King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, who dwells in unapproachable light whom no man has ever seen or can see"* (1 Tim. 1. 17 & 6. 16). Since light is energy, that declaration is scientifically as well as theologically true. What is perhaps the most tremendous of all such statements is that which, as rendered from the Hebrew by Fenton, says *"I only am God; I existed before Time itself"* (Isa. 43. 12-13). The idea of an existence outside Time or before Time began has only been discussed by men in this modern age; they have been anticipated by the Holy Spirit of God, speaking through his prophet, two and a half millenniums ago. In like manner what has been discovered in recent times respecting the creation of the universe from an unknown source of pure energy and the associated formation of stars, suns and planets is well supported by words written in days when the world was young and men generally were in closer touch with God than they are, in the main, today. *"By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, and all their host by the breath of his mouth. He spake, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood forth"* (Psa. 33. 6-9). *"My hand laid the foundation of the earth"*—this is God speaking—*"and my right hand spread forth the heavens. When I call to them, they stand forth together"* (Isa. 48.13). Then this challenging word which, taken literally, must arouse the wonder and excite the envy of any modern astronomer; *"He determines the number of the stars; He gives to all of them their names"* (Psa. 147.4). Astronomers have long since run out of names for stars and designate newly discovered ones by code numbers. Words like these express in terms simple enough for all to understand how what Gatland calls the "Infinite Consciousness" brought all things into existence

by an exercise of will, of thought, by Divine Word.

If one should enquire how such a Consciousness itself came into existence, or if it is conceivable that in fact He always existed, He never had a beginning, the only answer to matters that lie so completely outside the range of human understanding and reasoning is that given by the Arabian philosopher Elihu four thousand years ago; *"God is great, and we know him not; the number of his years is unsearchable"* (Job. 36. 26). We can never hope to perceive more than an infinitesimal fraction of the nature and activity of God; Elihu's contemporary, Job, grasped that fact very clearly when, after recounting examples of the mightiest phenomena of the natural world and accrediting them all to God, he said *"Lo, these are but the outskirts of his ways; and how small a whisper do we hear of him!"* (Job 26. 14).

So, then, life and energy are characteristics of God and have their origin in him. All creation stems from that. These twin factors imply intelligence associated with action, activity. That too is characteristic of God. Omnipotent, all-powerful, as the heavenly chorus in Rev. 19. 6 has it *"Alleluia, for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth"*. Omnipresent, his presence in every part of his wide-flung creation a reality so that no one need feel far away from him or that events are slipping out of his control. *"The eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good"* (Prov. 15.3). Omniscient, knowing all things and fully cognisant of all things, from the most profound mysteries of creation to the faintest half-formed thoughts in the hearts of men. *"Stop and consider the wondrous works of God, the wondrous works of him who is perfect in knowledge"* (Job. 37.16). *"Even before a word is on my tongue, lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether"* (Psa. 139.4). It is impossible to ignore the fact that these men of ancient times possessed a positive knowledge of the existence of God which the discoveries and principles of modern science are increasingly tending to confirm and cannot overturn.

This, then, is God.

God is!

And God is great.

Power of the Brain

According to the "Moody Monthly" (1964), experts say that no man has ever used more than one five hundredth part of his brain capacity. If that statement is correct, and bearing in mind that God certainly did not provide man with a brain that was not intended to be used, we can visualise what mighty increase in mental powers must be the order of the day in the next Age

when evil is restrained and men are encouraged to use all the powers which God has given them in the manner he intended. Doubtless sin and death are responsible for the limited use we now make of our brains; in that glad day when sin and death are things of the past men will indeed "enter into the inheritance prepared for them from the foundation of the world."

THE COMING OF THE KING

1. The Purpose of the Second Advent

*A series of studies
concerning the
Second Advent*

"...sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead..."

So runs the well known Creed; most Christians pay lip-service to the words even although many give but little attention to the fundamental truth it enshrines, and some do not even believe that the event will ever happen. The doctrine of the Second Advent lies under a double cloud; in the first place the Augustinian theology, of a post-Millennial Advent requiring the world to be converted and the Church to rule the nations before Christ comes, is still, after fifteen centuries, the accepted standard. In the second place the failure of many unjustified expectations of the Advent, unjustified largely owing to incorrect systems of Biblical interpretation, has had the effect of bringing the subject into general disrepute, both among Christians and non-Christians. Despite the sincerity and fervour of the not inconsiderable body of Christian students who do maintain and preach the certainty of the Second Advent these two factors still preclude the Christian's brightest hope, as it has been called, from becoming an accepted object of prayer and expectation in Christian communities generally. Every time that the Lord's prayer is repeated the worshippers voice their plea *"Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven"*, but all too often they either miss the purport of the words or do not really mean them. Jesus Christ made it perfectly clear that the only means by which either element in the prayer can be realised is his personal return to the world of man to bring sin and death to an end and complete the Divine purpose for this terrestrial creation.

Much of this apathy and scorn is directly due to the failure of Christian thought to keep up-to-date. Apart from the work of a minority of ministers and students and relatively minor groups there has been no change in the understanding of the subject or in the terms in which it is visualised and expressed for upwards of a thousand years. The general idea is still, as it was in mediæval times, that upon a certain future day Christ will appear visibly, descending from the sky in human form to the accompaniment of angelic trumpets, for the purpose of conducting the "Last Assize" when—all during the scope of a solar day of twenty-four earth hours—He will raise the dead, examine every human being as to the deeds done in this life,

take the worthy back with him to heavenly glory and consign the remainder, the unregenerate, to everlasting damnation, rounding off the process by the destruction of this earth and all material things in a universal conflagration. About the only concession to modern thought which this century has made is to express some doubt as to whether after all the fires of Hell are literal—and quite a few very sincere and worthy ministers still insist that they are! The idea of purpose in creation, or the use God will make of the redeemed after all this is over, is not so much as broached; neither is in fact that whereas the Fifth century, or the Fifteenth, for that matter, had no idea that the universe contained anything else besides this earth and the sun as its satellite, we now know that the creation is vaster by far than our minds can conceive. To think that the Deity can be satisfied with bringing into existence a handful of creatures on this speck of dust which we call earth when even men today are hoping and planning to do great things in remote parts of outer space is no evidence of Christian intelligence. It is rather an indication of unthinking egocentricism.

The necessity—that the certainty—of the Second Advent stems from the purpose of human creation. Man has been designed to occupy a definite and unique place in the Divine scheme of things. No other conceivable order of sentient beings, fitted as they might be for their own ordained place, can or will fill the position intended for man. The Bible does in fact indicate that the mode of existence we know is not the only one; that this earth is not the only scene of life, that there is at the very least one other world not perceptible by human senses, the citizens of which are always and altogether in absolute harmony with each other and with God—so much so that the ideal is set before men that God's will might eventually be universally accepted here as it is there. The main principle of the Second Advent, then, is that it is the process by which that object is to be accomplished.

The Second Advent is the logical—and necessary—sequel to the First Advent. This is not the place to enter upon a consideration of the philosophy of the Atonement, and there is much in that tremendous subject which even yet is far from clear. The Scriptures are positive that enduring life can only come to man through Christ, involving intelligent acceptance of the fact and full acquiescence in the Will of God,

and that in order to recover men from the power and effect of evil it was necessary that Christ allow himself to be put to death, giving his life a willing offering for the benefit of humanity. But the death and resurrection of Christ occurred nearly two thousand years ago, and today the world seems farther from the Divine ideal than ever. Obviously there is a further chapter in the book before the finale, another scene in the drama which has to be enacted before all that was ensured by the life and death of Christ blossoms and fruits into the reality of human maturity, and the dark shadow of evil flees, to return no more. That chapter, that scene, is the Second Advent.

The intervening time, this Christian era, between the two Advents, has not been a time of inactivity. It is seeing the development, and will see the completion, of the Christian Church. There is still a lot of rather hazy thinking over this question of the Church and many still follow St. Augustine in hoping and working for the time when the whole world of man shall be included within its membership. That hope seemed logical enough in the great theologian's time when Christianity was expanding by leaps and bounds and seemed destined to assume the reins of world control, but it appears a forlorn hope now when non Christianity is increasing faster, relatively to the increase in world population, than Christianity. The whole concept is in error. The New Testament presentation defines the Church as that company of convinced and dedicated followers of Christ in this Age who will become his lieutenants and agents in the work of world conversion and reconstruction in the next—the Age of the Second Advent. Once that fact is realised it can the more easily be seen why the New Testament says that the "saints"—the Church—shall "judge the world" (1 Cor. 6. 2) in that Age; that they shall "live and reign with Christ a thousand years" (Rev. 20. 4). There has always been a degree of perplexity among expositors of the older school over the apparent anomaly of nations remaining on earth to be ruled *after the Day of Judgment and the resurrection of the Church*, when, according to the old theology, earth's affairs are finally wound up. Jesus' words in Matt. 19. 28 concerning his disciples ruling and administering his laws during the "regeneration", which means a giving of new life, at a time when according to mediæval theology all opportunity for gaining new life had gone because the Second Coming was a matter of the past, does not easily fit into current theology. But when it is seen that the Second Advent and the Millennium are synonymous terms so far as time is concerned and that

the Day of Judgment involves more, far more, than the mere arraignment of men before a tribunal and passing judicial sentence on their past misdeeds, the door is opened to a wider and far more rational and satisfying view of God's purposes.

The Second Advent, then, should be viewed as a period, a span of time during the whole of which the personal presence of the Lord Jesus Christ is manifested in the earth, in power, in a manner which has not been true of preceding times. This period commences as this present Christian Age draws to its close and continues until the Divine purpose is fully realised, until every man who can be persuaded to yield himself and his life and his potentialities into full acquiescence with the will and purpose of God has so done, until every trace of sin and evil has been banished from human society, until not one remains among all of God's human creatures who is not consciously, intelligently, willingly—yea, and enthusiastically— in fullest possible accord with his plans and designs. Everlasting life is a conception almost too hard for the human mind to grasp; everlasting continuance in the growth of knowledge, in the accumulation of experience, in achievement following achievement, is an idea even more difficult to receive, but nothing less than this is the destiny of every man,—if he will, for God will coerce no man, and loyalty to him and co-operation with him must be of love and free-will, not of fear and compulsion. So there may be some at the end who will not accept life in this creation which is all of God, and will deliberately cast away the blessing of conscious existence. But of those who align themselves with the Divine standards it shall be true that, as Isaiah the prophet foretold twenty-five centuries ago, "*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). For this will be the consequence of the Second Advent.

The commencement of the Advent, the time at which it must be said that the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ in the earth has become a fact, obviously implies that this present world-age dominated by man is then approaching its imminent end. There is no need to tie this down to specific years and dates—the endeavour to do that in the past has led to some mass disappointments and invoked a certain amount of ridicule upon a good many quite sincere people who started as prophetic students and finished up as prophets. It is much safer and altogether more satisfactory to take note of the order of events and the nature of the various factors which go

to make up the work of the Second Advent. The first overt act—and this is stressed repeatedly in the New Testament—is the resurrection or “change” of the Church, the joining of all those dedicated believers, of whatever generation between Pentecost and the end, to the Lord in Heaven. St. Paul describes this in 1 Cor. 15 as a change from the terrestrial state of being to the celestial, a change not only of habitat but also of nature. The celestial is of a superior and totally different order of being, and the celestial world, as real to its own citizens as the earth is to humanity, is one in which powers and potentialities, and consequently activities and achievements, are upon an immensely wider basis than are those of man upon earth. Since the Church is to have a great deal to do with the work of Christ in the earth during his Advent it is obvious that this change to spiritual conditions must precede the visible establishment of the Messianic Kingdom and the commencement of the Millennium.

The second aspect of the Advent, and one that must become evident in its early days, involves that restraint and overthrow of the powers of evil in the world which must logically precede the open manifestation of the Kingdom of Christ in power. The rule of the Millennial Age is to be a righteous and just rule in which men may live their lives and go about their business in peace and security without the threats and dangers of oppression, violence and war which overshadow life as it is lived in the present. That means not only the supersession of present day political and commercial powers by the superior power of Christ but the suppression of all those harmful institutions and petty forms of evil which wreak such havoc upon the ordinary man. The Divine rule of that coming day is “*They shall not hurt nor destroy*” (Isa. 65. 25) and the power of the Prince of Peace will be abroad in the earth to ensure that condition. There must therefore be expected, at the beginning of the Advent period and therefore more or less at the ending of this present Age, a joining of battle between the incoming forces of righteousness and the doomed forces of evil in the earth. This is depicted in many a strongly metaphorical passage of Scripture—the descent of the Rider on the white horse from Heaven to do battle with the kings of all the earth in Revelation 19, the binding of Satan with a great chain in Revelation 20, the revealing of the Lord from heaven in a setting of storm and tempest to execute judgment upon all things evil, in Daniel 7 and 2 Thess. 1, the consuming and destruction of the “Man of Sin” by the spirit of the Lord’s mouth and the radiance of his presence in 2

Thess. 2, and many others. The reality behind the Biblical “Armageddon” is nothing so grossly material as a mere blood bath of contending military forces—it is the final conflict at the end of this Age when the defenders of earth’s corrupt and doomed systems of oppression and injustice find all their boasted strength powerless against the heavenly weapons of earth’s new Ruler—weapons they can neither understand nor overcome.

It is only when this suppression of the powers of evil has been accomplished that the revelation of the returned Christ to all men can take place. This is the supreme hour when, to adopt Scriptural metaphor, the Son of Man takes his seat upon his throne of glory and before him are gathered all nations. This is the third stage of the Advent and the one which is to endure throughout the whole period of the Messianic Age, until its close when the Son shall have “*delivered up the Kingdom to the Father . . . that God may be all in all*” (1 Cor. 15. 24-28). But that will be when the entire work of the Advent has been completed, when the Day of Judgment has run its course and is at an end. At the time the King takes his place upon the throne of his glory that consummation is still a thousand years away. In the meantime the whole world of man is to come under a system of education and discipline such as never has been dreamed of before, and the laws of Creation, which are the laws of God, made plain to all so that none may ever be able to plead ignorance or inability. This is the truth which lies behind all the vividly materialistic pictures of the Messianic Kingdom in the Old Testament—the lion shall lie down with the lamb and so forth—and the more sober statements of the New Testament which depict the dead of this world rising to newly awakened consciousness, hearing the voice of the Son of God calling them from their graves, and taking their stand before the Great White Throne of Rev. 20 to have the standards of Divine Law set before them for final acceptance or rejection—the “judgment” of the “book of life”.

An adequate perception of the manner in which Christ is manifested to mankind during his Second Advent rests upon a careful consideration of much Scriptural metaphor and analogy and its relation to what is known of the celestial order of existence. Jesus Christ appeared on earth in human form in the days of his First Advent for a purpose that was at that time fulfilled. His position as supreme over the whole of Divine creation, which it were the height of conceit on man’s part to imagine could not ultimately embrace intelligently beings physically

different from man but equally children of God and made in his image and likeness, precludes the dogmatic assertion that He must of necessity retain human form or lineaments. His presence could conceivably be visibly manifested through *chosen earthly instruments exerting his authority* and representing him amongst men, and his Advent still be as real as if his Person was visible to human eyes. A clear understanding of the relation between the celestial and the terrestrial worlds and their respective orders of life, and of the manner as well as the purpose and time of our Lord's Return, is very necessary to the Christian who would be like the "scribe instructed unto the Kingdom of heaven" mentioned by Jesus, who "bringeth forth out of his storeroom things new and old" (Matt. 13. 52) and truly understand the significance of the day in which he lives and his own position in relation to the Divine Plan.

That is why Jesus laid so much stress upon watchfulness. "Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of Man cometh" (Matt. 25. 13). "What I say unto you I say unto all, Watch" (Mark 13. 37). He likened the Second Advent to the days of Noah. Men would go about their customary pursuits, eating and drinking, planting and building, marrying and giving in marriage, heedless of the signs that a new and hitherto unknown power was coming into earth's affairs, for deliverance on the one hand, for judgment on the other, to bring an old decaying world to an end and establish a new, virile, youthful one. All too often do men think of the Deluge story as one of unreasoning Divine petulance with a sinful world and a wrathful destruction; in reality the

story is one of clearing the ground for a fresh start. That is the position today. Christ comes, not to sweep the earth away with a besom of destruction and end all further hope of human development and achievement, but to replace this admittedly very unsatisfactory order of things by a "new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness" (2 Pet. 3. 13), under which all who so will may attain the Divine ideal and enter upon their inheritance. Only when that consummation has been attained may it be said that "at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth . . . and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2. 10-11). Only then will the day of the Second Advent come to an end and be merged with eternity, into which will enter the sons of men, mature at last and fitted for their destined place in creation.

The source of all this is in the Bible. To some degree it is in the Old Testament and to a much greater extent in the New. There is much of immature and old conceptions to unlearn and discard; a certain amount of unhelpful modern thought also to reject. There is a great deal to be gathered from the painstaking and careful examination of the many passages which deal with one or another of the several aspects of the Second Advent, and the relating of these to the light of modern knowledge. This will be the object of succeeding chapters. The subject is one of far-reaching importance; today, more than ever before, there is a need for clarity of vision and sound conviction on the age-old expectation of the Church—our Lord's Return.

(to be continued)

SEPHAR—A NOTE ON GEN. 10.30

An apparently irrelevant remark in Gen. 10. 30 tells us that the tribes emanating from Joktan son of Heber the ancestor of the Hebrews settled in a land surrounding a place-name Sefhar. Bible scholars and commentators usually identify this with the Akkadian city of Sippar on the Euphrates opposite the present Baghdad, on account of the similarity of the name to the Sefharvaim and Sefharad of Kings, Isaiah and Obadiah, which undoubtedly does denote Sippar. A minority have considered that in fact the Sumerian city of Sifru, near Ur and Uruk (the Erech of Gen. 10) is the place indicated. When treating this passage in the recent BSM series "After the Flood" it was suggested (BSM May/June 1986) that the geographical requirements of the narrative favoured this latter view and in fact it was unlikely that Sippar existed at so early a date.

Some confirmation of this point has come to light. For the past six years the University of Baghdad has been excavating the ruins of Sippar. In a report of operations during 1984 recently issued it would appear that they have now reached virgin soil, the beginning of the city, and found no remains older than the later part of what is called the Early Dynastic period—in Bible terms about the time of Abraham's father Terah. The Joktanite migration must have been before the beginning of that period, at least four centuries before Sippar appears to have been founded, if the recent discoveries prove to be the last word on the subject. The point is of interest as demonstrating the difficulties faced by Bible translators when dealing with geographical names. Standard works of reference tend to follow their predecessors and the light cast by later discoveries goes unheeded.

PHARISEE OF THE PHARISEES

*A story of
St. Paul*

He stood by the little pile of garments, stiffly erect, his lip curling in disdain as he listened to the shouting of the mob. He had chosen this duty, the guarding of the witnesses' clothing, in order to keep away from the scene of the actual execution. Not that he disagreed with the verdict; he himself was a member of the Sanhedrin and sat at the trial of the Christian Stephen and he had given his voice in favour of the death sentence, but he nevertheless despised with all his heart these tumultuous and ignorant Jews of Jerusalem and wished sometimes he was back in his native city of Tarsus in Cilicia, where his own family and all their fellow-Jews had adopted Greek customs and culture and lived their lives on a level of dignity and poise which was completely unknown to the masses here in Judea.

He turned now and looked again towards the crowds, his well-built form standing in an attitude of impatience and his aquiline features making no attempt to conceal the distaste he felt at the whole proceeding. The man deserved his fate—he had clearly been guilty of blasphemy—and he felt no compunction or sympathy for him, but he was thoroughly disgusted with the manner in which the Sanhedrin had handled the trial and allowed things to get out of hand. Saul had wanted the evidence to be carefully presented and the connection of this man Stephen with the crucified felon Jesus of Nazareth clearly demonstrated, so that the whole affair could be made a stern warning to all who felt tempted to listen to the message of the risen Jesus so assiduously being preached in Jerusalem. He had hoped to hear a grave and solemn statement from the High Priest, to be repeated from lip to lip as the news got round, followed by the pronouncement of a salutary sentence which would send a shiver of fear into the hearts of those who professed discipleship of Jesus. This man Jonathan was not a bit like his predecessor Caiaphas, thought Saul bitterly as he turned again and looked moodily at the heap of clothes at his feet. Joseph Caiaphas was a shrewd and crafty politician and knew just how to handle the men around him; Jonathan on the other hand had first lost control of his own feelings when Stephen made that absurd claim of seeing heaven opened and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God, and then allowed the unorganised rabble to take the prisoner by force and hurry him away to the place of stoning before so much as a formal judgment could be uttered. The proud claim of

the Pharisees that whilst they sat on the Sanhedrin no son of Israel should have his blood shed, even judicially, until every means of avoiding that final act had been sought out and found unavailing, was a dead letter whilst these Sadducean High Priests ruled, he thought angrily. First Jesus of Nazareth; now this; even though they deserved what they received it was an offence against God and against Moses that their trial and execution should be dictated by mob law and not by the judicial procedure laid down in the statutes given at Sinai.

He shook his head as though to rid himself of the vision which remained still before his eyes; a countenance looking up to heaven, and appearing as though it was the face of an angel. A prisoner, accused of serious crime against God and Moses, by the stern law of Israel's great lawgiver commanded to be cut off from amongst the people, yet calmly standing there delivering a discourse on the purposes of God and Israel's place in those purposes which had won Saul's ungrudging admiration. That was the kind of sermon he himself liked to give and liked to hear. Stephen was a Greek Jew like himself, a man in every way superior to these clods of Judean Jews and had he not embraced this blasphemous heresy about a Son of Man who was also the Son of God he might have done great things in Israel. But he deserved to die, and for the sake of the purity of Israel's religion and the sanctity of the covenant he must die, and the sooner the whole wretched business was over and done with the better. He turned his head impatiently and through a gap in the crowd he caught a glimpse of that face again, once more a face as it had been that of an angel; upon his ears fell a faint voice borne to him on the wind "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge" and then the crowd closed in again and suddenly there was a great silence.

How long Saul stood there after that he never knew. He was dimly conscious of the witnesses picking up their clothes and speaking to him, but he comprehended nothing of what they said. The mob was dispersing and going down the hillside in twos and threes and groups; the members of the Sanhedrin were coming towards him rubbing their hands and Jonathan the High Priest, a complacent smile on his face, began to say something to Saul of a congratulatory nature. Suddenly, Saul could bear it all no longer; he nodded curtly to Jonathan, turned his back on the group and walked quickly away

—quickly, as though pursued by some nameless thing whose existence he would not admit and yet from which he must try desperately to escape.

Saul of Tarsus was a man of about thirty at this time, four years after the death of Jesus. Born in Tarsus, a seaport town in the Greek-speaking Roman province of Cilicia, some four hundred miles from Jerusalem across the Mediterranean Sea, the greater part of his life had been spent under the influence of Greek life and culture. His father was a Jew of the Dispersion, of the tribe of Benjamin, and a Pharisee. For how many years his forbears had lived among the Gentiles is not known—maybe several centuries, maybe much less. But the father, though resident in an alien land, gave the lad the true training of a son of Israel, and to such good effect that at this early age Saul was already a member of the Sanhedrin at Jerusalem, the highest religious court in the land. His elevation to that position must have been quite recent, for four years earlier when Jesus was arraigned before that same Sanhedrin Saul was not a member; it is quite certain that he never saw Jesus in the flesh and could not have been in Jerusalem during his ministry. In all probability he was, as a young lad, sent to Jerusalem for a few years to study under the Doctors of the Law, this being the time when he “*sat at the feet of Gamaliel*” (Acts 22. 3), returned to his home in Tarsus and was trained there to earn his living as a tentmaker (Acts 18. 3)—Cilicia was noted for its sail cloth and other materials made from the woven hair of Cilician goats and his weaving was probably Saul’s trade—and returned to Jerusalem, after the death of Jesus but before that of Stephen, to take up some official position in the Pharisee community which involved his election to the Sanhedrin.

Great changes had taken place in Jerusalem in those four years. Caiaphas had been deprived of his High Priesthood by the Romans, and Jonathan his brother-in-law appointed in his place. Pontius Pilate had been recalled to Rome in disgrace, exiled to Vienne in Gaul (now France) and had died, it is said, by his own hand. His office as governor in Judea was filled by Marullus. The Emperor Tiberius had died and been succeeded by the insane Gaius Caligula. None of those who shared responsibility for the death of Jesus remained. It was almost as if a new generation was taking over the control of Judea and Jerusalem, and the young man Saul was one of that generation, marked out for high office in Pharisaic circles. Although so young, he was probably already a widower, for one of the qualifications for membership of the

Sanhedrin which was considered almost an essential was that the candidate should have been married; the fact that there is no reference in the New Testament to St. Paul having a wife would seem to infer that if in fact he had been married his wife must have died before his own conversion on the Damascus road. The tones of almost yearning affection in which in after years he referred to Timothy and Onesimus as “sons” might well point to a great disappointment in earlier life in the lack of any sons of his own. It might even be that some great untold sorrow connected with the loss of a wife at an early age may account at least in part for the bitter unsparing frenzy with which he plunged into his work of hunting out and persecuting “to the death” those who to his mind were dis-loyal to the Mosaic law. That he had a married sister and a nephew living in Jerusalem is known from Acts 23. 16, but no other details of his family life are recorded.

The physical appearance of this great champion of the faith has always provoked curiosity. Nothing is known for certain. There is a very common impression that St. Paul was of most unprepossessing appearance — short, dwarfish, bent of figure, hooked nose, shaggy eyebrows, and so on. All these details come from writers of the 6th and 15th centuries and appear to stem from the apocryphal 3rd century work “*The Acts of Paul and Thekla*” which is a fictional account having no authority and resting on no Church tradition at all. Nothing as to Paul’s appearance comes down to us with any authority from his own or immediately subsequent times. A certain amount of play has been made with his own statement in 2 Cor. 10. 10 to the effect that “*his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible*”—“to be accounted nothing of”, is the meaning of the original. The verse need only mean that in the circumstances of his relation to the Corinthian Church he was far more terrible by his letters in his absence than he would be by his words at his presence. The one definite clue to his physical appearance comes from his visit in company with Barnabas to Lystra on his first missionary journey, when the pagan citizens, impressed by the miracle he had performed, decided that the gods Jupiter and Mercury had come down to them in the likeness of men, and identified Paul with Mercury on account of his eloquence. Now Mercury in the ancient mythologies, the wing-footed messenger of the gods, was always conceived as young, tall and strikingly handsome. The Lycaonians would hardly have identified Paul with Mercury unless he at least measurably fulfilled their conception of the physical appear-

ance of their god. That was when Paul was a comparatively young man; it is more than likely that persecution, ill-treatment and poor health through the years took their toll so that "Paul the aged" may well have come nearer to fulfilling the traditional aspect.

So Saul of Tarsus, a Pharisee of the Pharisees, young, talented, ambitious, burning with zeal for the God of his fathers and intolerant of all who questioned the rigidity of the ancient traditions, a rosy future before him and well on the way to the highest office in the land, came in touch with the message of the Gospel and the power of God, all unconscious that this thing was about to overturn his whole scheme of things and

change his entire life. On the day he gave his vote for the death of the martyr Stephen he all unwittingly set in motion a chain of circumstances which was destined to make him, first, the greatest exponent of the Christian faith and the most noted missionary of all time, and then lead through persecution and prison and thirty years of indefatigable labour, to a martyr's death in his own turn. He died alone, at the hands of the Roman executioner, on the Appian Way outside the city of Rome, but the torch he lit and tended with such fiery zeal during his eventful life has never been put out, and will not dim until it is swallowed up in the greater light of the Kingdom for which he lived and died.

PILLARS OF THE TEMPLE

There is a wealth of natural illustration in the Scriptures, using objects familiar to the natural eye, to convey to the mind an understanding of spiritual things. Among these is the Temple, used in both the Old and the New Testaments to portray the dwelling place of God in the future, when He will dwell with men, when He himself shall be with them, and be their God.

In Rev. 3. 12 the promise is that the overcomers shall be pillars in that Temple, and in considering just this one detail of the larger picture we find much that is calculated to assist the overcomer in this day of preparation.

The first essential quality of a pillar is strength, for, although pillars are ornamental, their real purpose is to support some important part of the structure in which they are used. Before going on to consider this quality of strength we must first take note that the strongest pillar would be of little use unless erected on an even stronger foundation. There is no need to dwell upon the foundation upon which the overcomers are being founded, for in Matt. 16. 18 our Lord tells us. It is upon the great truth that Jesus is the Christ that we have any standing at all. Paul's statement in Eph. 2. 20 that we are being built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets is quite in harmony with our Lord's statement, as is his further declaration in 2 Tim. 2. 19: *"The foundation of God standeth, having this seal, 'The Lord hath acknowledged them who are his'"* (Roth.).

Moses, in his triumph song, proclaimed that the Lord was his strength and song, and this theme is echoed and re-echoed throughout both the Old and the New Testaments. The Lord is the source of all spiritual strength, but how does He impart this strength to his people? It is not conveyed through some mystic channel to those

who merely ask for it; rather is it developed as a living, vital force in all those, who, having heard the call to become sons of God, are being dealt with as spiritual children of a loving Father.

The means used to develop this quality of strength are the lessons and experiences which God permits to come to those whom He is preparing to be pillars in his holy habitation. In the natural world materials possess various kinds of strength, e.g., tensile strength, or the ability to sustain stretching or straining; compressive strength, or the ability to sustain pressure or crushing; shear strength, or the ability to resist a cutting action; and impact strength, or the ability to withstand a sudden blow. It requires but little thought to realise that we may need some or even all of these qualities if we are to be overcomers. The straining of earthly ties or relationships, crushing loads of anguish or distress, temptations to cut ourselves off from fellowships, so essential in these last days, (Heb. 10. 25), or sudden blows, shattering to our faith, may be our portion. Fiery trials, and the wearing influence of constant contact with the world, all combine to destroy faith, and must be resisted.

The illustration of the mason, at work with hammer and chisel upon the stones, is familiar, and applied to the pillars is well summed up in words well known:

*"The temple stones God now prepares, oft cry
you hurt me sore.*

*The Sculptor seeks their perfectness, and trims
them more and more—*

*Until by dint of strokes and blows the shapeless
mass appears,*

*Symmetric, polished, beautiful, to stand the
eternal years."*

In modern times this method of making pillars has been largely superseded by a different method, which more aptly illustrates the development of that strength so necessary in the pillars of the Temple. In this process, steel and concrete, two entirely dissimilar materials, are used to form the pillars, or piers, as they are more commonly known, which are used in the buildings of to-day. Without going into details it is pointed out that each material has quite a different form of strength, and they are so arranged that the particular strength of each material is used to the best advantage, eliminating weaknesses which would exist if either were used alone. Bearing this brief outline in mind, turn to Isa. 30. 15, where the Holy One of Israel says *"In quietness and in confidence shall be your strength."* Here are two qualities of character, each in themselves strong, and of an entirely different type, but which COMBINED give great strength of character to those in whom they are developed.

For instance, Peter was very confident when he said he would die rather than deny the Lord, and he had confidence of a sort when he walked upon the water to meet the Lord, but in each case confidence was born of impetuosity; in later years, after many hardly-learned lessons, Peter manifested a QUIET confidence vastly different from that which previously revealed his weakness. Quietness is defined as stillness, repose, silence. These all suggest immobility or stability, and remind us of Paul's exhortation in 1 Cor. 15. 54: *"Be ye steadfast, unmoveable."*

But conditions are not always conducive to stillness and repose. Sometimes the affairs of life are very tumultuous, even frightening. In spite of the many promises in the Word, one may sometimes feel as did David when he cried: *"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Why art thou so far from saving me, and from the words of my loud complaint? O my God, I call in the daytime, but thou answerest not, and in the night I find no rest"* (Psa. 22. 1 and 2 *Leeser*). But the very experience which wrings such a cry is sent that we might develop that quietness which gives strength; under such conditions one must wait before the Lord, and thus learn, BY EXPERIENCE, that they that wait upon the Lord shall "acquire new strength" (*Leeser*). Whilst thus waiting before the Lord, we may hear him, in the stillness, asking:—

*"When I to thy pleadings seem no heed to pay,
And thy foes grow bolder—claim thee as their prey;*

Tho' towards thee I'm silent, will thou stand the test?

On my word of promise lay thee down and REST?"

If the answer is "yes," we shall again say with David, "It is lovely to me that the Lord heareth my voice, my supplications. For he hath inclined his ear unto me; therefore throughout all my days will I call on him. . . . Return, O my soul, unto thy rest, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee" (Psa. 116. 1, 2 and 7 *Lesser*)

Even so, it is difficult, in affliction of body or of mind, to wait patiently before the Lord; if so, we should do well to consider Lamentations, Chapter 3. For the first 20 verses Jeremiah dwells upon all the calamities that may befall the faithful, but in verses 21 to 23 a complete change takes place. He continues: "This will I bring back to my heart, therefore will I hope. The lovingkindnesses of JAHWEH, verily, THEY ARE NOT EXHAUSTED. Verily; not at an end are his COMPASSIONS: New things for the mornings! Abundant is THY faithfulness" (*Rotherham*). Many, indeed, are the afflictions of the righteous, but, as Jeremiah continues (verse 33): "For He (God) doth not afflict his children willingly" (from his heart, of his own will). So, we may ask, why does God afflict us at all? The answer is found in Heb. 12. 10: *"For they, indeed, for a few days chastised us as seemed good to them; but He FOR OUR PROFIT, that we might be PARTAKERS OF HIS HOLINESS."*

Quietness is also defined as "peace of mind, seclusion, freedom from disturbance, or alarm." Only those who are hidden in the seclusion of the shadow of the Almighty can find complete peace of mind. And only those who are trusting in all the promises of the Word can be free from disturbance or alarm.

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!

If under all the varying circumstances of life we have that quietness which comes with such a perfect trust we are blessed indeed, but even as in the natural picture the concrete is not sufficient of itself, so this quietness needs to be coupled with and supported by confidence.

To be confident is to be positive—bold. How are we to attain this quality? Once again we look to the Lord, this time as the source of our confidence. The wise man says (Prov. 3. 26): "For the Lord will be thy confidence," and in Prov. 14. 26 he shows us how, for he says: "In the fear of the Lord is strong confidence." What is fear? Again the wise man says: "The fear of the Lord is to hate evil" (Prov. 8. 13). David

says (Psa. 5. 7): "In thy fear will I worship toward thy holy temple." So "fear" may be summed up as that attitude towards God which urges us to a life of sanctification and holiness (2 Cor. 7. 1). But how does reverence bring confidence? Reverence engenders faith, and faith brings confidence.

Many are the promises to those who reverence God; Psa. 25. 14: "*The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him.*" Psa. 33: 18: "*The eye of the Lord is upon them that fear him.*" Psa. 34. 7: "*The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him.*" These, and many others, do, if accepted by faith, become a real basis for confidence, and are well summed up in Eccl. 8. 12: "It shall be well with them that fear God."

The writer to the Hebrews says (3. 6 and 14, *Moffatt*): "Now are we this house of God (Temple) if we only keep confident and proud of our hope. For we only participate in Christ provided we keep firm to the very end the CONFIDENCE WITH WHICH WE STARTED". Looking back to the time when we started out on our pilgrimage, we may recall the enthusiasm and the confidence with which we started; but, is that confidence maintained? Even as in the natural picture each material needs the support of the other, so we, if we are going to maintain our confidence to the very end, shall need to combine with it that quietness which is developed by completely trusting in our Father in every experience. In these last days it is most essential that our confidence is rightly placed, for the Scriptures warn us that if it were possible even the very elect would be deceived.

The clouds of trouble over the earth to-day are indeed the very chariot in which our Lord is returning in triumph; He is indeed walking on the wings of the wind of adversity—that wind which is causing "the earth to be removed, and the mountains to be carried into the midst of the sea" (Psa. 46).

But, someone may say, I believed all this, and am quietly waiting before the Lord and have

confidence in him, yet I am still conscious of my own weakness. Heb. 11. 34 (*Moffatt*) speaks of those who "from weakness won strength." Likewise, Paul said: "When I am weak then am I strong," yet he asked the Lord to remove his weakness (thorn in the flesh), but God's reply was: "My grace suffices for you, for POWER MATURES IN WEAKNESS" (*Weymouth*). Power (strength) did mature in Paul, but not before he came to the full realisation of his own weakness, and learned, *from experience*, that he could put his whole confidence and trust in God. So with us, it is well that we feel our own weakness, providing always that we have learned that confidence in God, through Christ, and quiet waiting before him will enable us to become pillars of strength. We may have to wait long and patiently, but even as in the natural picture the pillar cannot take its load until it has matured, so we must, even after we have attained a high standard of strength, stand in this evil day, and, having done all, to continue to stand, so that in the final test we may prove worthy to take our place as a pillar in God's eternal habitation.

But strength is not the only quality to be found in the Temple pillars: beauty, too, will surely be seen in every saint who is elevated to this greatest of all honours.

Beauty and strength are not always combined. So often, in the natural world, strength goes hand in hand with tyranny and brutality, but in Jesus, our example, beauty and strength were combined to such a degree that as He stood before his accusers Pilate marvelled, and was constrained to exclaim: "Behold—the man." It was the power of the Holy Spirit, with which our Lord was filled, that was made manifest in the beauty of holiness which crowned his earthly ministry; so we, as we are filled with the same spirit, must develop the fruits thereof as we become stronger and stronger, so that, as power is matured in us, we may attain that growth in holiness without which no man shall see the Lord.

MATURITY

MATURITY is the ability to control anger and settle differences without violence or destruction. **MATURITY** is patience, the willingness to pass up immediate pleasure in favour of the long-term gain.

MATURITY is perseverance, the ability to sweat out a project or a situation in spite of opposition and discouraging setbacks.

MATURITY is unselfishness—responding to the needs of others, often at the expense of one's own desires or wishes.

MATURITY is capacity to face unpleasantness and frustration, discomfort and defeat without complaining or collapse.

MATURITY is humility. It is being big enough to say: "I was wrong". And when right, the mature person need not say: "I told you so". **MATURITY** is the ability to make a decision and stand by it. The immature spend their lives exploring endless possibilities, then do nothing. **MATURITY** means dependability, keeping one's word, coming through in the crisis. The immature are masters of the alibi—confused and disorganised. Their lives are a maze of broken promises, former friends, unfinished business and good intentions which never materialise. **MATURITY** is the art of living in peace with that which we cannot change.

THE BRIGHTNESS OF HIS GLORY

A doctrinal note

"Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the majesty on high" (Heb. 1.3).

This is one of the allusions in which Scripture casts some light on the relationship between the Father and the Son, a relationship which the creeds of Christendom have tried to define for centuries and, in the main, failed lamentably. To do the creeds justice, it is true that some of the words used have changed their meaning through the centuries, so that they create an impression in modern times which was not visualised by their originators. In this text the word rendered "person" in the A.V. (*hypostasis*) does not mean anything material at all. It denotes the essential substance, the essence, of the subject, its real nature (hence Heb. 11.1 "faith is the substance (*hypostasis*) of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen"). William Barclay defines it in this text as "*the Divine essence of God existent and expressed in the revelation of his Son*" (*The Gospel of John* Vol. 1.). Rotherham translates the sentence as "*the exact representation of his very being*". Thus the writer to the Hebrews is saying that our Lord Jesus Christ is, in effect, the reflection of the glory of God and a true representation of what He is. This is implied by our Lord's words to Philip "*He that hath seen me hath seen the Father*", and on another occasion "*I and my Father are one*". He is, to us, a true manifestation of the unseeable and incomprehensible God. In Jesus we see the Father, the only way in which we can see him.

He "*sat down on the right hand of the majesty on high*". It has always been an integral part of the Christian faith that the Son was with the Father before the world was, that He left that high estate to sojourn with men, himself become man, on the earth, for the "*suffering of death*", that He rose from the dead "*in the power of an endless life*", to resume his position with the Father, and that He will come again to earth to complete the work He commenced at his first Advent by reconciling all who will to himself. That Second Coming will not be in the flesh, as was the first, but in the glory of his Divine nature, a glory not perceptible by the human senses. At the end He will "*deliver up the kingdom to God, the Father . . . that God may be all in all*" (1 Cor. 15. 24-28). This brings

to attention another aspect of the relation between the Father and the Son, that of distinction of office and personality. That is demanded by the very fact of the death of Christ upon the Cross. "*I am he that liveth, AND WAS DEAD*" He says in the visions of John (Rev. 1. 18). Unless He truly did die, did lie in the grave, was resurrected from the dead on the third day, then the whole process was a sham and the Christian faith built upon a false premise, for the whole philosophy of the Atonement rests upon the fact that "*Christ died for our sins*" and was raised to life again by the "*mighty power*" of the Father, exerted to bring him back from the dead (Eph. 1. 19-20). It is impossible for the Father, the Creator and First Cause of all things, to die. And if it is suggested that at the moment of death our Lord, who came from the world of the spirit, passed immediately back into the spirit world, then there was no resurrection on the third day for He would already have re-entered that world. So there is a distinction and yet a oneness; and the nature of that distinction-cum-oneness is something that our human minds, limited in scope, cannot possibly understand, and we just have to accept that it is so. Dr. Joseph Seiss, the renowned 19th Cent. Lutheran minister of Philadelphia, once wrote of our Lord, "*God is a Spirit—an invisible, incorporeal, intangible, unapproachable Spirit. But that hidden and unsearchable Mind may be expressed, may let itself forth in comprehensible utterance. And that expression, that utterance of invisible Deity is Jesus Christ—the Divine Wisdom—the only communication from the absolute to the created, 'who is, and who was, and who is to come.*"

But this realisation must not be allowed to lead on to the conclusion that the Son was a created being. "*The beginning of the creation of God*" in Rev. 3. 14 refers to his primacy and headship over all creation, not to his being the first of such. "*All things were made by him*" says John "*and without him was not anything made that was made*" (Jno. 1.3). His relationship to the Father is not that of the created to the Creator, but the Son to the Father. Even that simile, used so extensively in the Scriptures, is probably inadequate although the closest analogy men can understand. Perhaps, after all, Rotherham got nearest to the truth: "*the exact representation of his very being*".

ELIMELECH: PORTRAIT OF A BACKSLIDER

The Book of Ruth holds many delights for the Bible student. In the early part of chapter 1, the scene is set by consideration of the household of Elimelech. Although the subject of only a few verses, the details recorded of his life are rich in typological reference to what God has accomplished in Jesus Christ. The story of Elimelech is one of exchanged loyalties; it illustrates the dangers of backsliding from the estate of a servant of God to a servant of self.

No man can choose the time, place, family or circumstances of his birth. The same is true of Elimelech. We knew only that he was an inhabitant of the land (Ruth 1. 1). This was not just any land, but *the* land. This is corroborated in later verses as being Canaan. Significantly, this was the land first promised and later covenanted to Abraham and his descendants by God. It was the land of God's provision, set aside for a chosen people; the Land of the Jews, the Land of the Hebrews, the Land of Israel. It was Messianic ground belonging to the Saviour, being called Immanuel's Land (Isa. 8. 8). It is a land belonging to God—the Lord's land (Hos. 9. 3), the Holy Land (Zech. 2. 12). It was a pleasant land (Dan. 8. 9); a land of blessing called "Beulah". (Heb. "*married*") signifying the intended closeness of relationship between the Lord and his people (Isa. 62. 4). In Deut. 8 (v. 7-10), it is described as a land flowing with milk and honey. This Canaan is a land of superabundance, the provenance of grapes so large that they needed to be carried on a pole between two men (Num. 13. 23).

Elimelech could not ask to be born into that land. He did not choose it or secure it by an act of his own will. It was a land in which God placed him. The same is true for the Christian. There was a time in each of our lives when we yielded ourselves to God, giving up all legal claims upon our lives. In a very restricted sense, we each chose God for ourselves by abandoning ourselves to his will and purposes. However, we could never enter his Kingdom and service by an effort of our own will. The important factor in our relationship with God is not that we chose him, but that He chose us. We could not choose to adorn ourselves in the robes of righteousness—they are a gift of grace. We could choose only to give our rags of sin over to the Lord Jesus. Likewise we could not choose for ourselves the transformed mind, the new name, the living spirit or any of the other corollaries of salvation, characteristic of our sonship.

These things were chosen for us by God. They were not secured by an act of our wills, but are found in the will of God.

When God brought us into his service, we chose not to serve other masters. He then, by the blood and resurrection of the Lord Jesus birthed each one of us into a new realm of existence. We were born again of the Spirit of God, and entered a new frame of reference, spiritual values rather than emotional or temporal ones. We could choose no single part of this. God chose by his will that we be born into the Kingdom of God—a land of covenanted promise, giant grapes, far more than the picture of Canaan can reveal.

Within this land, Elimelech was an inhabitant of Bethlehem (1.2), a township situated at the very centre of the Promised Land, as a glance at any Biblical map will show. Similarly, the roots of the Christian lie at the very centre of the Kingdom of God. The centre of any Kingdom is the seat of its authority. The Kingdom of God is throne-centred. The occupant of that throne is the risen, ascended and glorified Lord Jesus Christ. Every reference to our position in God's Kingdom lies in Jesus. We were born again into this spiritual domain by his Spirit. No Christian has ever entered God's land by crossing the peripheral fences or scaling the walls. Each entered the Kingdom at its very heart, by being born of the Spirit in Jesus.

Bethlehem means "house of bread" (1.2). Christ is at the very centre of God's Kingdom, and He himself is the Bread of Life (John 6. 32), the heavenly manna upon which man could feed and never again feel hungry. When cooked wholemeal bread offers a balanced diet: manna and quails were the complete diet for the wandering Israelites for forty years. Like Elimelech, we who are Christians were born into the House of Bread. We belong to the household of the Son of God who is the Bread of Life. We are possessed of Jesus. As Acts 17. 28 says, "*For in him we live, and move and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring*". We had no choice in the matter. Casting ourselves upon the will of God, He placed us in Jesus at the very centre and well spring of his Kingdom. We are found in Jesus, the source of all that Kingdom's fruitfulness.

There were several places in Canaan called Bethlehem. The home of Elimelech is qualified as Bethlehem-Judah. Judah means "praise".

Wherever Judah is mentioned in Scripture there is teaching on worship. Elimelech was not only a member of the household of bread, but also of the house of praise and worship. They are both Bethlehem. Whenever one refers to Bethlehem-Judah, the fruitfulness and praise are inseparable. As with the house of Bread, likewise the house of worship is located central to God's Kingdom. When Jesus was born at Bethlehem-Judah in fulfilment of the prophecies of Micah (5. 2), the town was transformed to a centre of worship. Shepherds and wise men came there to worship Jesus. Worship was the centre of Jesus' life, having been born in Bethlehem. Wherever we read of Jesus we read of a life of spiritual worship of the Father.

The same is also true of the Christian. Once we have acknowledged that we have been planted in the promised Kingdom of God, and are finding our sustenance there in Jesus, our immediate response is worship. This is a faculty of the redeemed, spiritual person. We had no choice in the matter, but were placed by God into the house of worship. If we live in God's Kingdom we are to abide by his rules. The first commandment instructs that we should worship God alone. Indeed, we are *"for the praise of his glory"* (Eph. 1. 12). Worship of the Father is our highest calling, the occupation of an eternity with Christ. We also read that Elimelech was an Ephrathite (1. 2). Ephrathah was the ancient name for Bethlehem (Gen. 35. 48). This identity of Elimelech indicates that he came from ancient stock, a long pedigree, perhaps of noble birth. The phrase is much like Paul stating that he was a Hebrew of Hebrews, or a Scotsman claiming descent from Bonnie Prince Charlie.

Like Elimelech, we have been born into an ancient and noble lineage, for we belong to the Family of God and the household of Jesus Christ. Indeed, according to Ephesians 1. 4, *"He hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world"*. God has given us a pedigree extending back to predate the beginning of time itself. Also, since we belong to Jesus we have a nobility as kings and princes in his Kingdom. At the Last Supper, Jesus spoke to the disciples concerning servitude and said, *"I am among you as one who serves. You are those who have stood by me in my trials. And I confer on you a kingdom, just as my father conferred one on me, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel"*. We could not will to change our earthly authority for nobility in the Kingdom of God. On the contrary, God chose it for us.

Ephrathah means *"fertility"*. This is in keeping with the notion of the superabundance of

God's kingdom. Salvation ground is fertile in the extreme. Those who are found sowing their lives and labours upon such soil cannot but expect fruitful harvest.

The final evidence concerning Elimelech's initial position of service lies in his name, which means *"my God is King"*. As with his birth, Elimelech could not choose his name; it was given to him by his parents. Similarly, as we enter God's family, just as every part of our new existence is chosen by God, He also chooses for us a new name. It is well known that in Scripture, and amongst Middle Eastern peoples in general, names were carefully chosen to reflect something of one's nature. Having been redeemed from sin and translated into a kingdom of light and life, it is fitting that God should give us a new name, written in the Lamb's Book of Life. *"I will give in mine house and within my walls a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters: I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off"*. An eternal name, commensurate with citizenship of an eternal Kingdom. Thus we can see that Elimelech began as a servant of God. Like us, he lived in the centre of the Land of Promise, was an inhabitant of the house of bread and a member of the household of praise, was a man of ancient and noble pedigree living on fertile soil, and crowned with the name of the Lord. This was the estate of Elimelech. Other details in the narrative record his yielding of this position of privilege and fruitfulness. Firstly, the account makes mention of the time; these were the days when *"the judges ruled"* (1.1). This small phrase speaks volumes to us. The times of the Judges are summed up for us in Judges 21. 25—*"In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes"*. It was a time of no settled government, of neglect of the Lord in preference for doing evil and following other gods. The Lord was provoked to anger (Jud. 2. 10-13). The pattern of these times involved the evil-doing of the Israelites leading to apostasy. Then the Lord would allow those nations whose gods the Israelites newly embraced to rise up and chastise them by oppression, leading the chosen nation into economic and social distress. This would cause them to repent in their plight and to turn anew to God. He would then raise them up a judge to deliver them. As soon as the judge died, the people would fall back to their old ways.

The name of Elimelech means *"my God is King"*, yet the diagnosis of the days of the Judges is that no king was to be found in Israel. This is the paradoxical position of the backslider. It is eminently possible for us, having cast ourselves

upon God's mercy and being transformed into his Kingdom, to behave in such a way of disobedience that it appears to those about us that we are without authority. While God was once King in our lives, our lifestyle testifies that He is so no longer. The authority behind our actions cannot be traced to the centre of God's Kingdom, into which we were born anew, but to the centre of self. When disobedient to God our lives do not shine forth his glory, but that of another. God has crowned us with his name, which is inseparable from his glory. While disobedient we are causing effrontery to God's glory. God has stated that He will not give his glory to another. While we wear the name of God we are to the praise of his glory, and become encapsulated in his magnitude. As soon as we step out of line, then the radiance of God's glory within us is clouded by our own. It is as if there were no King resident in our lives. That veil can only be torn by the sacrifice of Jesus, with our being brought to repentance that He might rise again in our lives as a Judge—a truly charismatic leader inside us to restore us to full communion with the Father. So far as Elimelech and Israel were concerned, it could no longer be truthfully said that "My God is King". The person now in authority was self. Every man did that which was right in his own eyes. There was an exchange of allegiance and authority from God to man.

There is a consequence to this disobedience which goes even beyond the loss of God's glory. For those who disobey God there is the promise of a curse (Deut. 11. 28; 1 Sam. 12. 15; Eph. 5. 6; Heb. 2. 2-3). Of course, God is a God of love. We are not trying to bring a condemnation to bear against the saints, for each of us has sinned and fallen short of the glory of God which crowns us. But if our Christian lives become as if it were the days when the Judges ruled, then God brings a curse against our sin. He does this from his loving kindness, that we might embrace Jesus and turn to him. For Elimelech and the Israelites, this consequence was in evidence in the fact that "*there was a famine in the land*" (1. 1). Here again is an apparently paradoxical and ridiculous situation. The Promised Land, flowing with milk and honey, source of giant grapes, ultimate fruitfulness and superabundant blessing, is in the grip of famine and yields nothing. There is nothing to eat in Bethlehem, the house of bread. Yet this should not surprise us. If we have been disobedient to the Lord, replacing his headship with a new authority of our own, then we have moved out of the realm of his will and grace, to an existence determined by our own will and resources. Being in his will

is superabundant and fruitful, but yielding to the authority of our name rather than his is famine. His words are sustenance to our flesh and meat to our bones, not ours! It is the fruit of the tree of life in God's garden that is health and vitality, not the fruit of our own ego. It is his understanding and knowledge delivered by pastors according to his heart that shall feed us, not the call of our own souls and the depth of our own wisdom and understanding.

For Elimelech and Israel, the occasion of famine was for chastisement and testing, designed to bring them back to acknowledgment of the Lord. If, as Christians, we so exercise our will in favour of God's to walk outside his authority in our own strength, then there can be no fruitfulness. That Christian walk will bear no eternal, spiritual fruit with which to sustain the individual and please the Father.

Elimelech could not choose his own name; it was conferred upon him at birth. He could only name his sons. The names which he gave them illustrate his state and reflect the famine in his spirit. He called his sons Mahlon (*sickly*) and Chilion (*pining*). With fruitfulness gone and famine reigning, the life ebbs away so that the Christian becomes spiritually weak and pining for the glory that was and what might have been. Mahlon and Chilion were the fruit of Elimelech's loins. The best fruits that could be grown from his new selfish authority were sickness and pining. Where life reigned before, death now has a foothold. The names that we speak reflect the authority to which we yield. In God's Kingdom and service we speak his precious name, Jesus and that of the Holy Spirit in worship and adoration. We speak words of love, truth, righteousness, victory and peace. In the service of ourselves, Satan and other gods, we speak names of sickness, death, ambition, defeat, dreams, unrest and unreality. We should take stock of the words which we use and assess whether they derive from the fruitfulness of inhabiting the promised land of God's inheritance, or the desert kingdom of Satan.

Elimelech's next response was to go to Moab (1. 1). He left the land of promise and the house of bread. The time of testing and chastisement was too difficult for him. One can easily imagine how he may have heard of the harvests in surrounding areas during the period over which Israel suffered famine. Elimelech determined in his heart to go there. It took a conscious effort of his own will to gather up his family and belongings and leave the land of his noble ancestry, birth, home and religion to venture forth into a strange and new land.

Entrance to God's land, as we have seen,

depends upon his divine will. Exit is secured through our wills. The centre of the will of God is all that there is in Jesus Christ, the desire to shower his blessings upon us. The centre of our will is our own self interest and gratification, the greed which takes us from beneath the shadow of God's wing in the land of promise, and out into the country of Moab where everything has the appearance of being more fruitful. Under the catalyst of God's testing, it is perfectly possible for our own wills to drive us from the presence of the Lord.

There is significance in that the land was Moab. It was named after the child of Lot's incestuous union with his eldest daughter (Gen. 19. 37)—a name that became synonymous with sin in everyday speech, and which was prophesied against time and again by the Lord through his prophets. The land of Moab represents sin to us—the kingdom whose authority is Satan. Elimelech left the land of promise and fruitfulness, the house of bread and worship and trust in the covering authority of God, to trust in his own abilities to fend for himself in a land of sin and darkness. Although looking tempting on the outside because of its apparent rich harvest, in Moab there was no presence of God or crowning glory of the Lord's name.

It would be easy to feel sympathy for Elimelech in these circumstances. It could be argued that he had his family interests at heart, and that he journeyed to where grain was abundant in order to secure a life for them. However, such sympathy issues from a knowledge of our own experiences in which we have placed our name above that of God in our lives, and situations in which we have chosen to walk the fields of Moab reaping harvest from a land of sin. Whatever the excuse being offered, it must always be insufficient reason for determining to remove ourselves from the covering of the Lord.

It appears that Elimelech intended to stay in Moab only temporarily; *"he went to sojourn in the country of Moab" . . . "and continued there"* (1. 1-2). When we go from the presence of the Lord and make our camp in the world to gain its riches, yielding ourselves to its authorities, we often deceive ourselves with the comfort that our removal is only temporary. As soon as things get better and the famine lifts, we will return to the place where we belong. As we sojourn in the land of sin, lending our energies

to its harvest, we excuse ourselves with manifold reasons. Jesus said that it is impossible to serve two masters. However good our intentions for the future, we cannot serve ourselves and then switch our allegiance back to God as a continually varying exercise. Elimelech went to live in the *"country of Moab"* (1. 2)—a Hebrew word which means "countryside" rather than referring to the nation of Moab. One version translates it as "fields". It is as if Elimelech tried to distance himself from the cities of Moab and so to lessen contact between his family and Moabite worship and custom. Perhaps in the back of his mind was the thought that he did not want to get too involved with Moabite life, and so preserve some integrity for his family. The backsliding Christian, having exchanged God's authority for one of his own design, often persists in manifesting certain moral and ethical standards in spite of living carnally. Perhaps in his mind he is inhabiting Satan's domain sufficiently long only to get the best out of it—enough to feed himself and his family—yet not enough to have them tainted by the values, standards and degradation of the land. Such a man is lying to himself. However much a good idea it seems to sojourn in the land of Satan and reap the harvest of sin to tide us through the period of testing, it is not applicable to the life of the Christian. Elimelech may have begun by feeling that he was in charge of the situation, but shortly it was to become obvious that the reverse was true. Leaving God's Kingdom to taste forbidden fruit is an act of personal will, but soon the dependence on the fruit of that land holds one in its grasp. Elimelech went to sojourn in the land of Moab, but remained there.

The culmination of Elimelech's story is that he died there, and so did the sons whom he named from the sickness in his spirit. Without trying to enter the discussion as to whether or not the redeemed can lose their salvation, it is obvious from the experience of Elimelech that to lean upon one's own understanding yields a harvest of death. Living under the authority of God will bring forth the life which Jesus came to give more abundantly. There is a verse in Proverbs (21. 16) that sums up the Elimelech experience quite starkly; *"The man that wandereth out of the way of understanding shall remain in the congregation of the dead"*.

We need not be afraid of heartiness in our songs of praise. There is a dignity about the Truth but it is not the dignity of a cold, lifeless statue. It is the dignity of a warm, vibrant, living

thing, animating all with which it comes in contact and ennobling all that it touches. So when the situation calls for praise to be loud, then let the praise be loud.

PARADISE ON EARTH

Earth's coming glory

7. Teachers of all Nations

"Out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among the nations, and they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks. Nation shall not lift up sword against nation; neither shall they learn war any more" (Isa. 2. 3-4).

This is only one of the foreviews of the Millennium to be found in the Bible. A time of universal peace, ensured by the administration of the Kingdom of God upon earth. The laws of that Kingdom will not be oppressive; they will be beneficent, just, considerate, devised for the well-being of all men, conducive to a contented and prosperous life. In this same passage Isaiah speaks of the people coming willingly to God, *"saying, he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths"*, an indication of the readiness with which the majority of mankind will align themselves with the principles of righteousness and set themselves to know the way of the Lord more perfectly.

In several Scriptures (Psa. 2. 9; Rev. 2. 27; Ezek. 20. 37) there is a statement, referring to the rulership of the Millennial Age, to the effect that *"he shall rule them with a rod of iron"*, from which the impression has arisen that the rulership of Christ will be hard, ruthless and oppressive. Nothing can be farther from the truth. The true nature of his rule is best expressed in Isa. 40.11 *"He shall feed his flock like a shepherd; he shall gather the lambs with his arm and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young"*. The allusion is taken from the everyday life of the shepherd. The "rod of iron" (Heb. *"shebet"*) is the club which the shepherd used both to defend his flock from the attacks of marauding wild beasts and to beat down the undergrowth or force a way through the jungle in the process of finding fresh pasture for the sheep. Thus the expression is indicative of the shepherd's care for his flock. In the New Testament the word "rule" in Rev. 2. 27 (*poimaino*) has the significance of shepherding in the sense of feeding and the expression is perhaps better understood "he shall shepherd them with the shepherding rod". Where Jesus said "Feed my sheep" (Jno. 21. 16) and Paul "feed the flock of God" (1 Peter 5. 2) and in other instances, this same word "*poimaino*" is used. Again in Micah 7. 14 the expression "feed thy people with thy rod" is this same iron club, the shebet.

The new administration, then, will be a benevolent autocracy, in which the King is sovereign and all men his loyal followers. Overt acts of evil, violence, injustice, will be restrained. "Nothing shall hurt nor destroy." Men may or may not accept Christ as King and Saviour in their minds but they will be unable actively to rebel against him. The time for democracy and self-government is not yet; that will come at the end of the Millennium when men will have had personal experience of the practical out-working of a righteous world with universal observance of Divine law, and have liberty to make their own choice, for right or wrong, for good or evil, for Christ or Satan—and for life or death accordingly. For, because sin is inherently destructive of life, it must always be true that *"the wages of sin is death"* (Rom. 6. 23).

So then, right at the start of the Millennium, the rule of Christ is imposed on the world, which at that time will comprise only the living nations, for the dead have yet to be raised. The question naturally arises, who are the King's agents, his ambassadors, his executive staff, so to speak, through whom his laws and his Gospel will be promulgated and who will be entrusted with the task of teaching all nations. Whether or not the Lord will be visibly manifest leaves unaffected the fact that He will need many missionaries active in the work of teaching his ways to men who know him not and leading them to conversion and acceptance of him as Saviour. Such workers will have had their training for this arduous task in this present life and will be ready at the inception of the Kingdom to take up their ordained task. There are three such distinct groups.

First, those disciples of Christ during this present Age whose lives have been wholly devoted to his service and have eschewed all earthly interests and pursuits in their utter consecration to him and his service. Not all Christians have gone to this length and that is not necessarily to their discredit. The true church, the Bride of Christ, is composed of those whose earnest desire is to be associated with him in the after-life in all that that He undertakes and accomplishes. The immediate and at the present time the most important of such activities is the superintending of the work of the Millennial Age, the evangelical appeal to all men, the assisting of those who respond to that appeal to come to a true and complete knowledge of the prin-

ciples of righteousness. Such will be well qualified for their mission because they themselves will have in the past learned aright the lessons of life. They will be able to say to the man or woman struggling against the effects of sin in the past life "I understand, for I have trodden this path myself. See, this is the way out". Only those who have learned such things in consequence of a close and unremitting adherence to the teaching of Christ will have attained the standard which will enable them to say this, and that is why Jesus said of such "*Strait is the gate, and narrow the way, that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it*".

These, at the time of the Advent, will have been translated into the heavens, raised from the dead in what the Scriptures term the "First Resurrection" to be with their Lord in his celestial glory, citizens therefore of the celestial world. As such they will be normally not capable of discernment by the human senses, which are adapted only to this terrestrial, material, world. Their communication with men must be, as was the case with heavenly visitants in Old Testament days, by the expedient of assuming human form and speech—almost, it might be said, a case of changing the wave-length. It can be expected that such communication between members of the Church of Christ from heaven and the rest of mankind upon earth will be a frequent and familiar occurrence in that day.

The second agency the Lord will use to convey his message of salvation to men will be through the medium of those who in Old Testament days manifested the same spirit of dedication and loyalty to God as has been the characteristic of the Church in New Testament days. These are to be found among God's ancient people Israel. At Mount Sinai, in the days of the Exodus fourteen centuries before Christ, Israel was constituted a "royal priesthood and a holy nation", with a commission to preserve the oracles of God until such time as Christ should come and thereafter, in the days of the Millennial Kingdom, to declare his salvation to the ends of the earth. In other words, a missionary nation to act as priests and ministers in disseminating the Divine word and taking an important part in the evangelical work of that Age. It is to be feared that many of Israel through the centuries proved themselves unworthy of that calling, but as with the Christian community of this Age, a proportion did remain faithful and will be found ready to play their part in turning men from sin to serve the living God. These will be headed by men of themselves, heroes of faith some of whom, like Abraham, have had Divine approval recorded in Holy Writ; under their leadership the faithful of Israel will go out into the world to be

what their prophets of old declared they should be but never in olden times fully realised, a "light to the nations".

Thirdly, and finally, there are those Christian believers in Christ whose faith is full and sincere, and works to match their faith, whose hearts and minds have never been touched with the realisation of, and desire for, the celestial salvation which is the destiny of the true Church. They love the Lord devotedly and would fain do him service, but here upon earth as terrestrial creatures rather than in heaven as celestial. And the Lord honours their faith and desire, for in his Father's house there are many mansions, a great variety of life forms and environments, and when it comes to this Millennial work which has as its object the conversion and reconciliation of "whosoever will", there are many corners in his vineyard and a place for every worker. So these too will be busily employed as missionaries at home and abroad, seeking those who heretofore had known of Christ but only in a distorted and misleading form, and those who had never known of him at all. There will be those of the living nations carried over into the next Age at the very inception of Christ's reign who might well be in this category when the last members of the celestial Church have left this earth to be joined with Christ. These will take up the witness and proclaim with no uncertain voice the meaning of the events which are happening and that the new world order has commenced. For these, already instructed in the Christian faith and the significance of the change in world affairs which has taken place, there will be missionary outreach beyond their wildest dreams, for there will now be peoples of all faiths, Moslem, Buddhist, Naturist and those of no faith at all, potential converts in the greatest evangelistic enterprise of all time.

This leads to consideration of the other side of the coin. How will all this be received by those same potential converts? What will be the attitude of the non-believing world at large to this greatly increased appeal of the Gospel?

One has to realise that there will be distinct areas of contact when it comes to dealing with the entire human race. There have been for more than a thousand years past Christians, Jews, Moslems, Buddhists, Hindus, beside the semi-superstitious faiths of what are euphemistically termed the "backward races". Each of these have their own religious background and conception of God, largely mutually contradictory. Prior to that there were Christians and, earlier, Jews, two monotheistic faiths in a world of pagan gods and goddesses. The question might well be asked, how is the Christian evangel going to be presented effectively to people influenced by such a welter

of differing theologies and outlooks, and the answer has to be that, as it has been since the dawn of history, God has to speak to each community or people in a language they can understand, and to a great extent inside the framework of their individual intellectual limitations. Christian missionaries who have spent many years in remote regions teaching primitive tribes will well understand what this means.

Probably the first impact will be in the so-called "Christian" world, the assemblage of nations which at least profess one or another of the various forms of the faith which exist. Even this is debatable for a far smaller proportion of people have any belief in or even any knowledge of Christ and his teachings than was the case only a century ago. The Lord's query "*When the Son of Man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?*" (Luke 18.8), comes home with impressive emphasis in these latter days and constitutes one evidence that these are indeed the latter days of this Age. Nevertheless it will be difficult for the atheists and the agnostics and the frankly indifferent to deny the existence and the power of God in face of the manifest evidences accumulating before their eyes. The Divine restraint of outward evil and, above all, the resurrection of the dead to stand, alive, upon earth again will need a lot of explaining away; probably some "die-hards" will be busy looking for a rational explanation which leaves God out of it but they are not likely to get very far. Even atheists must have dead parents and relatives whom they will eventually meet again, face to face, alive, and without God that will take a lot of explaining.

It can be expected then that the initial harvest of this new Pentecost will be among the professedly Christian nations, those who are the most easily capable of understanding the nature of the power which has taken control of the world and initiated this world-wide reformation. In this new world in which the true gospel of God is preached and there is no longer room for ambiguity and misunderstanding, the old denominational differences must needs vanish and so, too, will those theologies which present the Deity as a vengeful autocrat intent only on saving a few favourites and consigning the rest to an eternity of penal separation from him. The keynote of the new faith will be that God is Love, that He has created mankind for a purpose, and the achievement of that purpose will mean eternal life and happiness for all his creatures, if they will. Even though the Christian nations constitute but a relatively small proportion of the total population of this planet, the conversion and entry into this understanding of the Truth on the part of so many of these will

enormously increase the number of available missionaries eager to go out and take the knowledge of Christ to the larger number who have never even heard of him.

As a kind of side issue, the scientists and evolutionists and others who for so long have held the field of explaining how the universe came into existence and how man came to evolve upon it from amino acids and inorganic chemicals with the aid of a little ultra-violet light from outer space will be doing a little hard thinking and probably come out with the sentiment expressed by the ruler of the wedding-feast of Cana at Galilee, "*thou hast kept the good wine until now*" (Jno. 2. 10). There will, of course, be a rapid re-writing of text-books.

Parallel with this process will be the complete return of the House of Israel to God and their acceptance of Christ as their promised Messiah. All the old Hebrew prophets were sure that this would come and they depicted in glowing terms the glories of that day when the Lord would receive Israel's loyalty and never again be separated from them. To a great extent this conversion will have been already effected as the closing event of this present Age, when Israel, confident of Divine protection within her own borders, the bounds of the Holy Land, but menaced by the powers of evil in the world, are miraculously delivered by the Lord Jesus Christ, their Messiah from heaven, accompanied by his own, his Church. That event marks the full end of this present Age and the beginning of the Millennium and reveals the existence upon earth of a compact body of people who straightaway understand the significance of the times and their place in those times. It is probable that the first earthly missionaries of the Millennium will be those children of Jacob who experience that marvellous deliverance at the end of this Age. Speaking of this event, Isaiah records the words of the Lord "*and I will send those that escape of them unto the nations . . . to the coastlands afar off, that have not heard my name, neither have seen my glory; and they shall declare my glory among the peoples*" (Isa. 66. 19). As the resurrection proceeds, and their fellows of preceding generations are awakened to join them, it is tolerably certain that, as Zechariah says "*I will sow them among the people, and they shall remember me in far countries, and they shall live with their children, and turn again*" (Zech. 10.9). Jerusalem, the Holy City, will speedily become the focus toward which all men will turn their eyes.

Perhaps the next sphere in which the evangelistic fervour of the times will find expression will be the Moslem world, millions of them, nearly as many as the professed Christians. It is

not always realised that the God of Islam is the God of Jew and Christian. When Mahomet in the seventh century set out to convert his fellow Arabians from their idol worship it was the God of the Jews and of the Old Testament that he preached. Himself a stern monotheist, he misunderstood the New Testament presentation of Christ as the Son of God and as having come from the Father to take the nature of man upon himself, and allowed Christ only the status of a prophet like the Hebrew prophets whom he venerated. Since the Moslems venerate Abraham as much as do the Jews, and look upon him as their ancestor and they the children of Abraham, it could be quite on the cards that the undisputed appearance upon earth of Abraham and others of the ancients will initiate a revolution of thought in the Moslem world leading to an effective work of conversion among them. They may not, initially, be so near the Kingdom of God as the Jews and the Christians, but nevertheless not so very far away either. Esau, Ishmael, Abraham, Nahor, Peleg, Joktan, Shem; these are all ancients of old time prominent in both Jewish and Moslem lore; their counsel and leadership will doubtless exert a great influence in the Moslem world and so lead them to Christ.

These are the three theistic religions, that is, forms of worship of a supreme God who has a relationship with man. There are other quasi-religious faiths such as Buddhism which are not theistic in that sense. Buddhism springs from the teachings of Gautama Buddha, an Indian prince who lived six hundred years before Christ although Buddhism as a faith only came into existence a thousand years later. It is a religion of high moral tone and ethical values but there is no personal Saviour and no God in the Christian sense. The two Chinese philosophers, Confucius and Lao Tse, lived at about the same time as Buddha and founded similar systems which found their adherents chiefly in the Far East. It could well be that the sincere follower of one or other of these faiths will have little to learn in the field of ethics and just dealing and right living; they are at the present time an example to the rest of the world in that direction. What they do lack, and will lack in that day, is the realisation that as children of Adam they are alien from God, standing in need of the saving power of Jesus Christ, and reconciliation with God. These are farther away from God than are Christians and Jews and Moslems and it is in this province that the efforts of the missionaries must next be directed. One can expect this to be fertile ground; these are likely to be in much the same position as the rich young ruler who felt he had

observed the principles of God's laws in their entirety; *"all these things have I kept from my youth up. What lack I yet?"*. Like him, they will need to understand that despite all their good deeds and upright living, they need the Saviour. There is not much doubt that they will find him.

By far the most intense phase of the missionary work of the Millennium will be amongst the so-called "backward people", the races who for generations have lived in primitive simplicity and who only in part have had the Christian gospel preached to them. These represent the greater part of the human race and have the most to learn. In most cases there is some idea of a God in heaven but usually confounded with numerous minor deities, evil spirits, and again with no idea of a Saviour who redeems from sin. As the generations return from the grave there will be more and more of these, minds dark with the fear of evil spirits and demons, vengeful gods and hostile powers innumerable, and the work of disabusing their minds of such things and replacing them with the conception of a God of love, who is planning good things for his creatures, will without doubt be an arduous work. It may well be that the reason the Millennium is to endure for a thousand years—which some have queried as seemingly an unnecessarily long time for the conversion of the world when one realises that evil is suppressed and the Gospel has unfettered freedom of expression—is that in his wisdom the Most High foresees that such time is necessary to reach all these millions who have got to start at the very beginning and be freed from so many elements of Satan's power before they can begin to make progress in the things of God. In still earlier times there were men who had degenerated so far from the nobility of the first men that they had become little more than animals, living in caves and trees, almost bereft of intelligence; yet they are all God's handiwork and destined in the Age of Christ's reign to be lifted up out of their degradation into the "glorious liberty of the children of God".

So, at the last, there will return to earth the oldest of the ancients, those who lived in the earliest days before idolatry had come upon earth and men had begun to make themselves many gods. These from that old-time Golden Age had known and worshipped the God of heaven; even so they knew nothing of Christ, and his evangel will come strange to them. The Millennium may conceivably be well advanced by the time they stand again upon the earth but their ancient faith will stand them in good stead and their progress in the knowledge and faith of Jesus Christ be that more rapid.

To be continued



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hardness as a good
soldier of Jesus Christ

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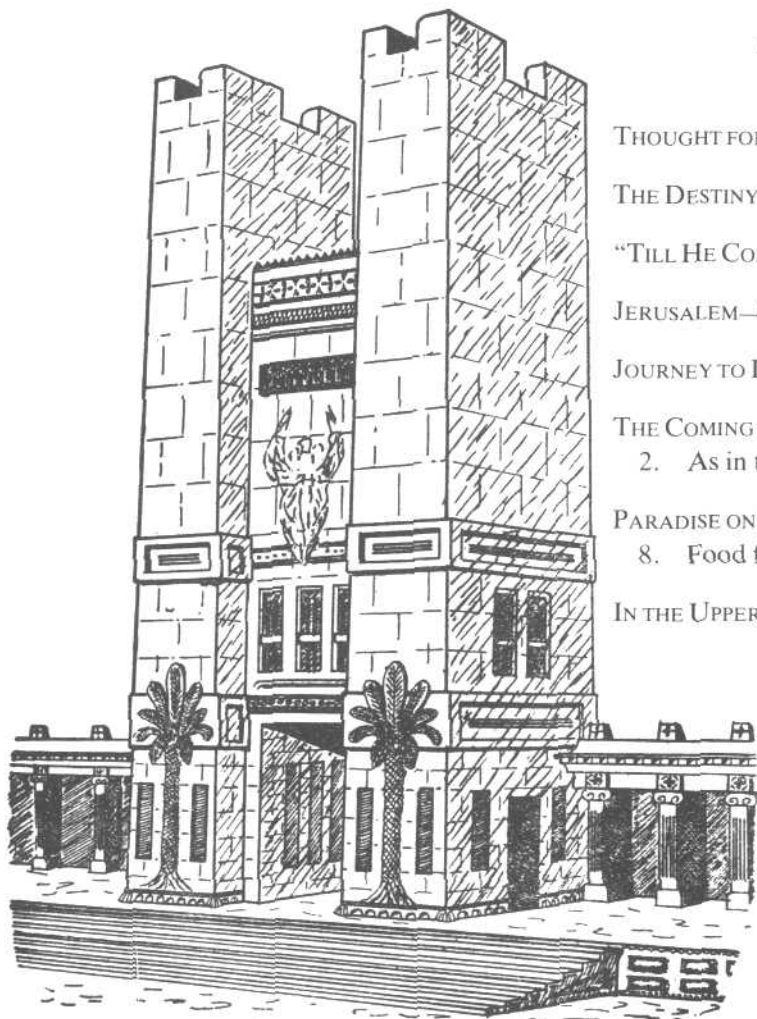
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*Lift up your heads, O ye gates
And be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors,
And the King of glory shall come in.*

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THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH

A speaker at an educational conference in the north of England stressed the importance of guarding against the creation in children's minds of *"the neurotic image of a watchful, vengeful and punishing God"*. Whether the same stricture should apply to the inculcation of respect for the criminal law of the land, which would seem to justify the same description with the substitution of "State" for "God", the speaker did not go on to say; his principal object appeared to be the discrediting of the historical accuracy of the Bible and its relegation to the realm of fairy-tale and folk-lore under the erroneous impression that it upholds the neurotic image of which he speaks. But his primary point is important. All too often God is preached as prone to favour one and condemn another, unduly severe on what might appear to be very human failings, and above all things bent on making entrance into heaven the attainment only of a select few. It cannot be repeated too often that what is often called Divine punishment for sin is not the arbitrary infliction of penal vengeance by a kind of super High Court judge but the natural and inevitable consequence of man's own actions. The Divine law is *"what a man soweth, that shall he reap"*; the reaping is not always realised in this life but it must be at some time in the individual's onward experience. And when men realise the truth of Jesus' word that every idle word that men shall speak they shall give account for in the Day of Judgment they will realise that the Bible is not fairy-tale and folk-lore after all.

But having said that, it must also be well borne in mind that the original purpose of God in giving existence to the human race at all was not that He

might lose most of them again in some kind of eternal place for failures, but that He might perfect forms of intelligent life to fill and use aright his creation. The vastness of even this material system which our senses can perceive is beyond the range of man's observational achievements to date; the more our astronomers pierce into the depths of the Universe the more they find lies beyond their reach. The idea that God is only interested in creating a few beings on this planet and in preserving for ever only a small percentage of these few is going fast and the sooner it is quite gone the better. Mankind has a destiny. A very famous and much-loved minister of fifty years ago, Dr. F. B. Meyer, hinted at the role that may be filled by some of the sons of men in the Divine creative plans of the future, and the number of Christian people who share that view of the future life is growing apace.

There is nothing neurotic or vengeful in the Bible presentation of judgment for sin. It is part of man's education, for his maturity, for his eternal life in creation and his usefulness in God's further creative plans involving fresh life. And the earlier the age at which children are taught that fact the better it will be for them in this life and later. Which is where we came in.

NOTICES

The Memorial. The anniversary of the Last Supper falls this year on the evening of Sunday April 12.

Cost of the Monthly. It is known that we rely on voluntary contributions to keep the Monthly in publication and we are always pleased to send to the genuinely interested whether or not a contribution can be sent, but we do get asked at times for guide as to the cost. For the information of all such enquirers it is now advised that the present cost of producing and despatching the Monthly, per reader, is £4.50 in the UK, \$7.50 in U.S.A. and Canada, and \$10 in Australia.

THE DESTINY OF MAN

If it were not for the demerits of life—its disappointments, its failures, its dangers; disease, calamity, fear and violence, there is not much doubt that most men and women would wish to live for ever. There is so much in life to give satisfaction and pleasure. There is the thrill of experiment and exploration, the joy of achievement, the endless variety of interesting things to see and to do. Given good health, pleasant companionship, freedom from fear, the world becomes a most desirable place in which to live. There are so many good things in creation; this earth on which we find ourselves is so admirably fitted to our needs and pleasures, capable of meeting all our requirements for daily living. If it were not for the demerits, life could indeed be good.

It was like that at the start. When in the course of God's creative activity the first human beings walked this earth the unpleasant things of life had not made their appearance. Not only the Bible narrative but also the oldest traditions of the most ancient nations tell of the primal Golden Age when man lived in communion with God and there was peace on earth. The modern view that the earliest humans lived in a condition of unintelligent savagery and depravity from which they slowly emerged as they became less like the beast and more like man has no support in ancient lore. All the old legends picture the first men and women as perfect and upright, fair of form and sound of mind, serving and loyal to a Higher Power. The first society was one based on equity and benevolence; the first human era one in which men lived in happiness and security, into which the dark shadow of evil had not as yet entered. One Sumerian epic, (*"Sumerian Epic of Paradise"* Pinches 1932) written some twenty-two centuries before Christ, describes that primal world as a glorious and holy land in which the wild beasts were tame and gentle, living in peace with the cattle; men kindly and just to one another; no violence, neither sorrow nor grief. The sun shone warmly and rivers of living water fertilised the land producing rich crops. It is easy to dismiss these traditions as folk-lore having no basis in fact, but it is true that the most ancient peoples did have this fixed impression of an original Golden Age and there must have been some reason for that impression; the fact that the Bible with its story of the Garden of Eden adopts the same position should be accepted as strong presumptive evidence that there was such a time of peace and equity in the days of the first man and that the after history of mankind as well as Divine intentions regarding the race must be viewed in this light.

All this highlights a principle, the acceptance of which is essential to a reasonable understanding of the riddle of life. God makes all things good! It is inconceivable that God is incompetent or impotent, as though He has to experiment a little and perhaps register a failure or two before achieving his purpose. In creating at all He does so for a good purpose and the elements of his creation are in themselves good and fitted for their intended function. This is true of man; as he left the hand of his Creator, he was perfectly fitted for continuing physical life and free from inherent evil. That characteristic entered later. *"God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good"* (Gen. 1.31). *"What is man"* asked David *"thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet"* (Psa. 8.4-6). And all this that man should enjoy the gift of conscious existence thus given, find happiness in life and discharge a useful function in this creation of which he is a part. God created man for happiness and usefulness, as well expressed by the Wise Man in Eccl. 3. 10-13 (RSV) *"I have seen the business that God has given to the sons of men to be busy with. He has made everything beautiful in its time, also he has put eternity into man's mind, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end. I know that there is nothing better for them than to be happy and enjoy themselves as long as they live; also that it is God's gift to man that every one should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil"*. The extent to which men in general do not measure up to this ideal is a measure of the extent to which they have departed from the state of goodness in which they were created.

But what is goodness? What is the yardstick by which must be measured such qualities as morality, rightness, benevolence? Can these things be defined as evidences of an orderly harmony with creation? The life's actions of every man has an effect upon the conduct of creation and what a man is and does either advances or retards the orderly progress of creation, either facilitates or obstructs the Creator's purpose. That is why the individual life ought to be conducted in accord with the standards laid down by the Most High, why man owes a duty of loyalty to God, of co-operation and collaboration with him. God is the source of the life that is in man and He is responsible for man's sentient existence but He has made men in the form of creatures who are measurably independent of him and of each other. Men depend for continued life upon their interaction with their environment,

which affords them the necessities of life, but that same environment allows them to express the life that is in them and to make use of it in exploration, experiment, achievement, enjoyment. But to experience all these things in their fulness, to gain the greatest satisfaction from them, it is essential for man to live the good life. Physically, he must play his part as a biological creature in preserving the balance of Nature, a duty he shares with all terrestrial living creatures; morally, he must live as a member of a community, a community which embraces all humanity, seeking the welfare of all other members, playing his due part in all the labours and activities necessary to the continuance of the community. *"Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself"* is not only a theological precept but a fundamental maxim for daily life.

Now in order intelligently to discharge this responsibility man must be a free-will being, capable of willingly, without constraint, accepting the position and taking action accordingly, or rejecting it. He must either be so, or a robot, incapable of independent thought and action, *"mere puppets which would dance only at the call of the master"* as Gatland puts it (*"The Inhabited Universe"*—Gatland 1957). It is the glory of God that the intelligent creatures to whom He has given life do possess this quality of free-will and free choice. Everlasting life under any other condition would become an unendurable agony. And men are intended to become companions of God, to develop so intense an awareness of the tie that binds them to him that they can enter into communion with him and realise that they are integral parts of that which He has brought into being, *"Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord"* (Isa. 1:18). That such an invitation can be given and recorded is a striking testimony to the exalted position men may occupy in the sight of God, if they choose. "Choose" is the operative word; it is unthinkable that creation can be effectively administered by responsible beings unless those beings have accepted their duties willingly and voluntarily and are heart and soul in sympathy with the principles and objects of creation.

It is obvious though that the reverse of goodness is possible in free-will creatures. There is a story told by Jesus in which a nobleman was called to the supreme Court of the Empire to receive appointment as king over his own little territory, and his citizens, hating him, sent a message to the Court saying *"We will not have this man to reign over us"* (Luke 19:14). In like manner it is a necessary corollary of free-will that the man may eschew goodness and the good life and opt for the opposite; so we come face to face with evil and sin.

What is evil? What is sin? To say that sin is disobedience to God's commands and evil is anything which is of the Devil may be popular theology but

is altogether too much of a simplification of the problem. If in fact it is the will of God that certain things should not be done then there is a valid reason; the prohibition must be for the good of mankind. If in fact certain things are credited to the power or activity or influence of the Devil as the arch-enemy of God then it is that those things, whatever they may be, have no rightful place in the progress of God's creation and are inimical to it and therefore must be opposed and eliminated. So it emerges that what is called evil, and what is called sin, are forces exerting a disruptive effect on creation. Whatever it is, in the physical sphere, that opposes or hinders the creative work of God, that is evil. Whatever it is, in the moral sphere, that opposes or hinders the progress of the individual towards the ideal that God has set, or limits or destroys the God-given life that is in him, that is sin. Sin cannot be defined by an arbitrary code of rules such as the Ten Commandments; that code listed certain prohibitions and admonitions which were applicable to a certain people in a certain stage of culture, and ceased to be applicable to its letter when the people and the culture which called it forth had passed away. Jesus made that plain when He said that love for God and love for neighbour included the whole of the Law. So whatever tends to destroy the link which ought to exist between God and man, or between man and man, or whatever threatens or destroys the orderly relationship which ought to exist between man and his environment, the interaction and interdependence between life and energy which sustains sentient beings, this is sin and this is evil. If God defines a thing as evil, it is because it is harmful to man. If God says *"Thou shalt not"* it is for man's own benefit and ultimate happiness, even although in his present state of development man may well be ignorant of the fact. The pollution of rivers with chemical waste and refuse is sin just as heinous in God's sight—perhaps more so—than the violation of the seventh commandment; the training of children in the principle of self first and the practice of the law of selfishness may merit greater retribution in the eyes of the Most High than a breach of the eighth. A proper appraisal of what constitutes evil, and of what constitutes sin, which latter can perhaps be defined as the deliberate practice of evil by an intelligent being—animals cannot sin—demands an understanding of the Divine purpose in creation and man's intended place in that creation.

All of this exemplified in the first story of the Bible—the story of the Garden of Eden. These principles are included in that simple narrative. A man and a woman—the first man and woman—brought into being by God, compounded out of the elements of the earth—so much carbon, nitrogen, oxygen, sulphur, potassium and so on—infused

with the power of life by the Holy Spirit of God, becoming living, sentient beings. *"The Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul"* (Gen. 2.7). A garden, cultivated and prepared parkland set amid the surrounding wild and untamed countryside, in which were *"made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food"*. . . . and a river, *"to water the garden"* a perfect environment therefore, affording all that human creatures would need to sustain continuing life. A mandate, a commission expressed in the words *"Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the face of the earth"*; the earth to be man's domain, to be brought under control by his labours and become as much a Paradise as the garden in which God had placed him for a start. And then the admonition; refusal or failure to preserve his loyalty to God or transgression against the laws of his being would involve the loss of all that God had given him, the loss of life itself. *"In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die"*.

The doctrine of the Fall is vital to true Christian theology. There has been a strong tendency in modern times to decry the story of the temptation in Eden as quite irrelevant to modern thinking, outworn in the face of modern knowledge. In point of fact the truth behind the story is much more logical and reasonable than the alternative claim that man is slowly lifting himself out of near-beastliness by his own efforts, that there never was a time of pristine perfection followed by a fall into sin. In any case a long, cool look at the present state of human society provides the evidence that man has fallen into sin and is sinking steadily deeper. The Genesis story, stripped of its embellishments, indicates that the root cause of the Fall was disloyalty to God. This constituted the entry of sin into what was previously a sinless world. An old Sumerian legend—probably derived from a dim memory of the events narrated in Genesis—depicts the first man as placed in a garden which he was bidden to cultivate, just as in the Eden story, but variant to that story, a garden in which there were two temples, one to the god who had created the man, and one to another god. But when the creator-god came down to talk to the man he found him worshipping in the other temple; he had betrayed his creator and forsworn his loyalty. So the sentence was pronounced upon the faithless man. *"The face of life until he dieth he shall not see"*. Something like this must lie behind the more familiar story of the forbidden fruit as though the partaking of that fruit was a ceremonial act in which the participant formally rejected the good and accepted the evil, and in so doing automatically incurred the penalty. Having once embarked on the pathway of alienation from God, successive generations continued

therein and sin in the world became increasingly obvious and increasingly influential. *"God made man right"* said the Wise Man *"but they have sought out many villainies"* (Eccl. 7.29 Fenton). One of the most scathing passages in the Old Testament is that describing how God on the eve of the Flood looked down from heaven upon the degenerating race *"and God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually"* (Gen. 6.5). Therefore, as St. Paul wrote to the Romans, *"sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned"* (Rom. 5.12). Logically, death is the antithesis of life; if life only continues when the individual is in a state of harmony with God, of loyalty to him, then the entry of sin must connote the extinction of that life, the dissolution of the *"living soul"* which subsists when life and organism are joined together and are tuned in as it were to the environment. Canon R. H. Charles in his *"Critical History of the Doctrine of a Future Life"* (1912) puts this well when he says *"the soul is a function of the material body when quickened by the spirit. So long as the spirit is present, so long is the soul a 'living soul', but when the spirit is withdrawn the vitality of the soul is destroyed and it becomes the soul of a dead man, i.e. a corpse . . . the annihilation of the soul ensures inevitably at death"*. It has to be said here, though, that the re-creation of the deceased individual by the impression of the identity upon a new bodily organism suited to its intended environment, in consequence of a fresh operation of Divine power, restores living, sentient existence, and this is the Christian doctrine of the resurrection.

Thus did evil come into the world, and increase its power and influence while age succeeds age. As men moved steadily away from God the intimate knowledge of him, and the power of communion with him, possessed by early man, first became blunted, then obscured and finally almost forgotten except by a few whose minds retained more of the original grasp than those of the majority. Concurrently with the progressive alienation of men's minds from God and the good standards of his creation came the physical consequences—decreasing bodily vitality and increasing power of disease; the arising of evil traits of character leading to selfishness, greed, malice, hatred, resulting in strife and warfare; the mal-use of the environment becoming so apparent today in widespread pollution of land, sea and air; the entire fabric of human society disintegrating and heading for a catastrophic end unless God intervenes. *"The whole world lieth in the wicked one"* said John (I Jno. 3.9), and that remark is very apt. The forces of evil are rampant in the world, and God seems very far away.

It may be a natural reaction to enquire whether this state of things is by Divine ordering, or an evidence that God has lost control of his creation. The

answer to both questions is an unqualified "No". It is inherently impossible that the Creator of all good can be the instigator of evil, or that at any time He does not retain full control over all that He has created. The practice of evil is by Divine permission, and is at all times subject to Divine control and could be limited or brought to an end at any moment by Divine command. The logical deduction is that evil is permitted for a wise purpose, a purpose that is connected with man's own development. The disastrous harvest which this Twentieth century is reaping is the end result of man's attempt to live without God.

Perhaps this experience would be of great value should man find himself freed from the burden and given a fresh start in a world where evil does not occupy the influential position that it does here and now. Is it conceivable that God plans for man to experience the contrast between a world dominated by evil and one dominated by righteousness before he is called upon to make the irrevocable choice, for good or evil, for life or death? If the power of evil is a phenomenon of time only and not of eternity, if, having entered the world, it becomes a means of teaching man the reason that right and good must stand as the governing laws of creation, if by its means men pass through experiences which at the end do bring them to God, then at least one can begin to understand why it is permitted and not lose faith in the power of God to control its course and its effects, and so anticipate a time when evil will be no more.

Such a time must come. Evil being inherently destructive, it has no place in God's permanent creation. The revealed word of God is definite that evil is permitted only temporarily and that for a wise purpose, that the time comes in the history of human development when evil is to be eliminated. It is true that in the meantime the innocent suffer with the guilty and sometimes more than the guilty, but this is inevitable because in the Divine wisdom and order all men are interdependent. Each man is a member of that unity which is the human race, and the entire race is one component part of that greater physical entity which is this earth with all its variety of sentient life, plant life, and basic substance, all of which are inter-related and must function together to maintain their continued joint existence. And one is compelled to reflect that the eternal continuance of evil is incompatible with the Biblical assurance that eventually every knee will bow to Jesus and every tongue confess him Lord (Phil. 2.10-11), that God will be all in all. Theologians of the past and present have pondered this fact and drawn the obvious conclusions "*the question we have to face is how God could be all in all, and how all things could be summed up in Christ, if evil were to exist eternally . . . would not his victory be imperfect, and above all would not his kingdom be incomplete? His conquered enemies would be his enemies still,*

with wills and desires in opposition to him, however unable to make that opposition effective. How then could his kingdom be truly universal, and He himself "all in all?". Thus Archdeacon Guillebaud in "*The Righteous Judge*" (1964). A couple of generations earlier Dr. C. A. Row, Prebendary of St. Paul's Cathedral, had said in "*Future Retribution*", "*Will spiritual and moral evil continue to exist for ever? Will rebellious wills be capable of resisting for ever the power of his Divine attractiveness? Will He not succeed in destroying the works of the Devil, but after all that He has done and suffered, will He leave those countless multitudes, in numbers numberless, who will constitute the overwhelming majority of mankind, to exist for ever in a state of rebellion against God, and in a state of misery which, through the endless succession of aions of the future, will never know even the hope of a termination? To these questions, ignorant though we are as to the mode in which God will solve them, I think that everyone who dwells in love, thereby dwelling in God, and God in him, will answer, God forbid*".

Dr. Row has not been the only one to perceive that there can be no elimination of evil from the earth without having dealt with the question of sin in the hearts of men. Mediæval theology thought to solve this problem by consigning the sinners to hell and leaving them there but as suggested above this is no solution, for immortal sinners living an eternal life of evil must forever frustrate the avowed purpose of God in creation. The elimination of evil implies and involves a process by which all men everywhere and all generations may, consistent with their prerogative of free-will choice, renounce sin and affirm their loyalty to God and acceptance of his purpose for them. In theological language that process is called repentance, conversion, acceptance of Christ as Lord, and dedication of life to God. And it involves the question of what happens if, after full opportunity and every possible form of persuasion, the individual steadfastly refuses to turn from evil and accept the ways of God. There can be only one answer. Just as the laws of Nature decree that the wastage of natural processes returns to its native earth and is absorbed, so must the conscious being who will not accept the place in creation for which he has been created, who remains wedded to unrighteousness for its own sake despite the element of disruption he introduces into creation, be found no more. It may be, it could be, that there will be none such, that the persuasive power of the Most High will have reclaimed even the most obdurate. But if such there are at the end, it can be only because they have, in full knowledge and understanding of the position, preferred to renounce life rather than accept the obligations of communal living and respect for fellow-men. It must be, it will be, that when the Divine purpose for man has been accomplished, "*all that hath breath shall praise the Lord*".

"TILL HE COME"

"For as oft as ye eat this bread and drink this cup ye do shew forth the Lord's death till he come" (1 Cor. 11.26).

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

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

We turn then to the general purport of St. Paul's teaching in this chapter and decide what he is talking about, place the text in its proper setting and seek to understand its purpose in his argument. The first thing worthy of notice is that this eleventh chapter of First Corinthians is one of several chapters in which the Apostle is giving counsel and correcting errors in respect to the public Church life of the Corinthian believers. There were many abuses existing among them extending to various kinds of immorality which were definitely unchristian and would inevitably give the Church a bad name among its pagan neighbours. In the chapter under consideration the matters particularly discussed are the behaviour of the sisters in the Church wor-

ship meetings, and the behaviour of all the believers in the Church "love-feasts". We know that it was the custom in those early days for the brethren, rich and poor alike, to assemble together for a communal meal to which all brought contributions, the food and drink thus offered being placed on the table and shared in common. This "*agape*" or "love-feast" was originally a spontaneous expression of the spirit of equality and brotherliness in the Church, but these Corinthians had degraded it into a function where class distinctions prevailed. The rich, instead of sharing their bounty with their poorer brethren, kept their own good things for themselves and feasted riotously, even to the extent of becoming drunken; the poorer ones, having little to bring, were hungry by comparison.

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

Consider that for a moment. In what way is the memory of great historic events or of great men of past times perpetuated through subsequent generations? Always by means of anniversaries! Once every year some celebration or ceremonial reminiscent of the event or individual concerned is enacted, handed down from generation to generation, keeping alive the story that otherwise might easily perish. Take an illustration that might seem a little incongruous but is nevertheless apt and well on the point. In the year 1605, a plot was hatched to blow up the British Houses of Parliament. A dozen well-known men were implicated; their names are now very generally forgotten but the man selected to accomplish the purpose is immor-

tal on the pages of British history, and to the children of every British generation better known than any of the monarchs of England from William the Conqueror to Queen Victoria. Very few people have ever heard of Robert Catesby, Thomas Winter, Sir Everard Digby and Ambrose Rookwood, the chief conspirators. Everybody knows the name of the unfortunate Guido Fawkes—corrupted in the vocabulary of youth to Guy Fawkes—and how he was discovered sitting in the cellar waiting for the moment to apply the match. *To this day the fifth of November is marked by the smoke of bonfires ascending all over Britain to the accompaniment of the crackle of many fireworks, the shouting of many children, and the barking of many dogs.* The strongest evidence that a man called Guy Fawkes did live as the history books say he did, and that he did try to blow up the Houses of Parliament and was captured, is the fact of that annual celebration which nothing—not even two world wars with their nightly blackouts—has succeeded in abolishing.

That is Paul's point in this text. You Corinthians, he says in effect, are striking at the very basis of our evidence that Christ did live and die for man. Our Church life is a witness and you have corrupted it with your immoralities. Our love-feasts are witnesses and you have debased them with your greed. Our Memorial is a witness and you have nullified it by your repudiation of your common-union in Christ—"for" he says *"as oft as ye eat this bread and drink this cup"* and that is every year, *"ye do shew"*—witness to the world—"the Lord's death till He come". A powerful evidence, to the man who will not accept the Gospels as they stand, that Christ did die and rise again as the Gospels say He died and rose again lies in the obvious fact that ever since that time there has been an annual commemoration of the event. Such ceremonies do not arise from nothing. This simple ritual, performed all over the world, year by year continually, for nearly two thousand years, commemorating the death of One Who promised to come again, is a continual witness to two great truths. He died for the world, and He promised to come again to the world.

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

There would appear to be no good reason for concluding that St. Paul was thinking of the Advent as other than a single event in this connection. He already knew that it was a long way in the future and his prime purpose was to stress that this observance was to continue as long as the Age

should endure "in remembrance of Me" as said our Lord. It is hardly likely that the Apostle would be taking into consideration at that moment anything he may have known respecting the time-scale of the Second Advent; he was here concerned with it only as an event, the event which was to terminate the age. It follows then that the expression "till he come" is not limited to the coming "for his saints", which is a factor in the initial stage of the Advent, but should be understood in a more comprehensive fashion as including the later stages until at last He is manifested to all men. In the meantime, those of his Church still on earth are bidden to keep this Memorial as a witness to all men of the truth of his eventual coming to all men, until He has thus come. That clearly means that the Memorial must and will be observed until the last members of the Church have been gathered to their Lord, for only after that will He "come" to the world and be revealed to the world in whatever fashion the Son of Man is going to be revealed, with his glorified Church, "in that day".

Just one more illustration to demonstrate that point—another one from English annals. There is somewhere in London a statue to King Charles II, and there are in England just a very few people who regard his descendants as rightful heirs to the British throne. Once every year their representatives lay a tribute of flowers at the base of the statue in symbol of their faith that one day the throne will be restored to the surviving claimant. The world—and the police—look on, quite indifferent, faintly amused; but there is the witness to the faith of these few upholders of a lost cause. Now suppose one day—by some of course quite impossible turn of politics—the unlikely should happen and the restoration of the dynasty of Charles becomes an imminent possibility but as yet unknown to the citizens of England, and suppose the true descendant of the King should arrive unobtrusively and "incognito" from across the seas and summon his few faithful supporters for some private conference and instruction preparatory to their taking power. Suppose that time of preparation, while their king was present with them unknown to others, should occupy four or five years. Would they cease from the annual ceremony at the statue at the very time when it was approaching fulfilment, on the ground that their king had in fact come to them although he had not yet manifested himself in public or taken his power? And if they did so cease, would not the bystanders conclude that the faithful few had lost faith at last and that after all there was nothing in this talk of a new king—just at the time the event was at hand?

So with us. Even if our King has come—to us; even if our personal conviction is that he is present, we are still under the obligation to "shew forth his

death" to all who observe our witness "till he come" in whatever sense humanity in general will understand his coming. Then, and only then, when He has been proclaimed and manifested King in the glory of his Kingdom, will the momentous

ceremony first observed in the Upper Room outside Jerusalem on that fateful night so many years ago pass away and be lost in the glorious light of the Millennial Kingdom.

The Pharisees

The Pharisees had their rise in the days of Ezra, about five hundred years before Christ, and were at first a body of high-principled men devoted to preserving the purity of Israel's worship and the knowledge of the Law. The name itself means "the separated ones". It was in the time of the persecutor Antiochus Epiphanes, who endeavoured about 168 B.C. to make Israel pagan, that the movement had its greatest impetus and all who had reverence for the God of Israel either joined it or at least supported its aims. During the time of Israel's temporary freedom from foreign oppression about 130 B.C. the Pharisees resolutely opposed the national tendency to join up with foreign nations on the ground of the corrupting influence such alliances would involve. In this manner the Pharisees, by the time of the Roman annexation,

about 60 years before Christ, had become the dominant party in the country's political life, essentially the party of the common people, who looked to them for guidance. The Pharisees believed intensely in the coming of a Messiah who would deliver them from the pagan yoke, hence their early interest in the mission of Jesus and their later rejection of him when it became apparent that He was not going to lead an armed insurrection against Rome. By his time the movement had become formal and corrupt and many Pharisees were hypocrites. A few retained the high principles of the early founders of the sect—Nicodemus, Gamaliel and Saul of Tarsus were all Pharisees and it is recorded that many Pharisees did believe in Jesus even although in John 7. 48 there were some who doubted the fact.

A NOTE ON JAS 4. 5

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

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

the carnal life, and, by his grace, attain to the loftiness of a life lived in the things of God.

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

JERUSALEM—SALEM

Jerusalem is referred to by name for the first time in the Book of Joshua at Israel's entry into the Promised Land. For a long time it was thought that it had not existed very long before that, but during the last hundred years discoveries of written records on clay tablets,—Tel-el-Amarna, deciphered in 1915, Thebes and Saqqarah in 1920, Ras Shamra in 1930, and most notable of all, the lost city-state of Ebla in 1974, have carried the known existence of Jerusalem back to the 23rd Century before Christ, more than two centuries before Abraham. How long it existed before that can only be surmised.

It has always been known to the Bible student that the Salem of Gen. 14, where Abraham met Melchi-zedek, the priest-king of the Most High God, was Jerusalem. Some 19th century commentators tried to establish that it was the Salim of John 3.23, on the west bank of the Jordan, but there is no likelihood of that. John's Salim was a village and no evidence that it even existed in archaic times. Other considerations, such as statements in the Tel-el-Amarna tablets, indicated that Melchi-zedek ruled a sizeable territory with Salem as its capital. *Psa 76.2, "in Salem is his tabernacle"*, refers undoubtedly to Jerusalem in the days of David.

This leads to consideration of the name. As given on the ancient tablets mentioned above it is *Uru-Salim*, evidently the name given at its founding. *Uru* is the Sumerian word for "city" and *Salim* for "peace", (hence the modern Hebrew *Shalom*). At the time concerned, prior to the 23rd cent. B.C., Canaan and Syria were in the sphere of Sumerian influence; language and writing was either Sumerian (of Ham) or Akkadian (of Shem). The celebrated Sargon of Agade, the first military conqueror of history, had extended his empire from the Persian Gulf to Syria and Canaan and it was by him and his successors that the city-state of Ebla was overthrown, so that Jerusalem must have been founded well before the 24th century, possibly four centuries or more before Abraham left Ur of the Chaldees.

Who built it? The line of Priest-kings claiming to hold office by decree of the Most High God spanned at least seven hundred years, from Melch-zedek (king of Righteousness) in Abraham's time to Adoni-zedek (Lord of Righteousness) and his successor Abdi-Khiba (Father gives life) in that of Joshua. Abdi-Khiba in his letters to Pharaoh Amen-Hotep III insists that he was king of Jerusalem not by permission of the Pharaoh, like the other rulers around him, but by decree of the "Mighty King" (i.e., God. Same expression in *Psa. 48.2*). What rulers were these, and what people they ruled, who at a time when all the nations

around, from Egypt through Canaan and Syria to Babylon and Sumer and Elam, all except Abraham, had embraced idolatry and renounced their original worship of the Most High God? Is it possible that Jerusalem was founded by some descendants of Noah other than of the line through Abraham who had never renounced their worship of the God of Heaven. If such was indeed the case, then the date could be as far back as the 26th century when Canaan was being settled by Canaanites and Aramites.

So they could have come into the land, barely inhabited. To the south lay Egypt, to the north the commercialised lands of the Canaanites, (Syria today), to the east the highly civilised and busy lands of Sumer and Akkad, all idolators. Here was a quiet, relatively empty land as yet undefiled by idolatry; here the elevated mountain mass—afterwards Mount Zion and Mount Moriah—where they could build their capital city and worship God after the dictates of their own hearts. How appropriate to call their new abode the city of peace!

What people were they, if in fact it was like this? When Abraham entered the land he found Jerusalem and the surrounding territory peopled by Jebusites, a Canaanitish people descended from Ham. An alternative name for the city at that time was Jebus, that of the ancestor of the tribe; this name was still in use six hundred years later when Joshua invaded the land. Since Gen. 10.15 gives Sidon and Heth as the two sons of Canaan, Jebus and his eight fellow tribal leaders must have been in the third or fourth generation from Ham and might well have been involved in the dispersion from Babel. During later centuries the tribes of Canaanites and those sprung from Aram, a son of Shem, lived side by side in Canaan and must have intermarried so that the Jebusites of Abraham's day could well have been a mixed Hamitic-Semitic people. That would explain why they were ruled by priest-kings having Semitic names and lend colour to the supposition that, like their rulers, they still worshipped the Most High God, unlike the rest of the tribes of Canaan. A point which tends to confirm this is that the Jebusites were great fighters, a definite Semitic trait but not Hamitic. Israel never succeeded in driving them out of the city, even in the days of David, and they were ultimately absorbed into the Jewish people.

So it could have been that Abraham, departing from the idolatry of his native land, found himself in one where God was still worshipped, and lived the rest of his life in the vicinity of a city which, although he knew it not, was destined to become "the joy of the whole earth, the city of the Great King" (*Psa. 48.2*).

JOURNEY TO DAMASCUS

*A story of
St. Paul*

The conversion of Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus is one of the inexplicable events in New Testament history—inexplicable, that is, to all save those who attribute it to the miraculous intervention of Heaven. Many an agnostic or philosopher, historian or “rational” theologian, has wrestled with the problem in the endeavour to explain the whole incident away in terms of auto-hypnotism or psychological obsession, but most retire defeated in face of the unassailable fact that a brilliant and talented Pharisee, high in worldly position and honour, destined for a notable future, whole-heartedly convinced of the falsity and menace of Christianity and determined to do all in his power to suppress it, should in one moment of time experience a conversion to the faith he was sworn to destroy, a conversion so thorough and complete that never in after life did he waver in either conviction or steadfastness—and died a martyr for the cause he embraced.

It must have been very shortly after the death of Stephen that Saul sought and received his commission to go to Damascus and apprehend any Christians he might find there. The persecution in Jerusalem, the first organised persecution of the Church of Christ, was initiated and conducted by Saul. Immediately following Stephen's martyrdom, Saul “made havoc of the church”, combing Jerusalem for believers in Jesus and consigning them to prison for trial before the Sanhedrin. His power to do this stemmed from the Roman principle of allowing the undisturbed practice of native religion in each of the countries under Roman government. The arrest of the Christians would have been on the pretext that they were blaspheming against the accepted official religion of Judea and although the Roman governor—at this time Marullus, successor to Pontius Pilate—was probably quite indifferent to the merits or demerits of the accusation he was unlikely to do, or refuse to do, anything that could be construed in official quarters as hostility to the religious faith of Judea. Pilate had been faced with the same position at the arrest of Jesus, and reacted similarly.

The effect of Saul's campaign was an immediate contribution to the spread of the Gospel. Many of the believers left Jerusalem to avoid the persecution and became missionaries of the new Faith. *“They that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word”* The rapidity with which the faith of Jesus Christ spread through the Roman empire within a few years of the Crucifixion has always been a matter of wonder to scholars and historians. It reached and took root in the British Isles within twenty years of Pentecost, and Britain to

the Judeans was at that time more remote and unknown than Patagonia is to us now. Damascus was the capital of Syria and the most notable city of the seaboard lands; it is probable that many believers fled there and established a healthy Christian community. Such a consequence of Saul's Jerusalem campaign did nothing to improve his temper. If the birds were flown he would go after them. In the certainty of his conviction that these men were dangerous heretics he intended to leave no stone unturned to seek them out and bring them to justice. He approached the High Priest Jonathan for the necessary letters of recommendation and authority with which he could establish himself with the ecclesiastical authorities in Damascus and carry out his intentions there with their full approval and backing.

So it came about that a little procession left Jerusalem by the Damascus Gate and took the road heading north through Samaria and past the Sea of Galilee. The bystanders would conclude that the travellers included some person of note for they were mounted on asses or mules, whereas the ordinary traveller or the peasantry would normally go on foot. The man in the centre, mounted on the best mule, was clearly a Pharisee, and a forbidding-looking one at that. His companions were Levites of the Temple guard, strong burly men with a few servants and attendants. The convoy disappeared in the distance and the bystanders shrugged their shoulders and returned to their own interests.

Something like a hundred and fifty miles separates Jerusalem and Damascus. Saul and his companions could not expect to complete their journey in less than a week. At night-fall they would put up at a convenient wayside inn and resume their way in the morning. The muledrivers and the Levites would get on together well enough; there was plenty of variety in the minor incidents of the journey to interest them and at night they would gather round the fire in the yard of the inn and entertain themselves and each other. With Saul the position was different. He had none of his own kind with him; as a Pharisee he felt it necessary to maintain a position of remoteness from his subordinates, and whether he was riding on his mule during the day, or seated by himself in a corner of the inn through the long evening, he had only his own thoughts for company.

That might well have been the Divine provision for Saul of Tarsus, leading his thoughts into a position where the revelation so soon to be made to him should strike in the most effective fashion. It was inevitable that his active mind during the long

hours of the journey should be occupied with the object of his mission and all that had led up to it. Sincere and zealous for the God of Israel and the Laws of Moses the man of God as we know Saul to have been, the sterling candour and honesty of his mind *must continually have been exercising itself* with the contrast between the requirements of that Law and the hypocrisy and dishonesty of his fellow-Pharisees and Sadducees. He could not but be conscious that there was a tremendous gap between his own understanding of how the righteous son of Israel should serve God and the miserable exhibition of greed, hate, injustice and every evil trait manifested by the rulers he had left behind him at Jerusalem. He must have known, and admitted to himself his knowledge, that these men, professed keepers of the Law though they were, themselves stood far from the portals of the Kingdom of God. If anyone had ever told him of the words of Jesus *"The Kingdom of God shall be taken from you and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof"* he would most certainly have admitted to himself that the condemnation was just. And from that point he must have reflected on the contrast presented by these simple Christians whom he had vowed to destroy—their purity and uprightness of life, their steadfast loyalty to all those righteous deeds which were incumbent on every Jew, their insistence that there must one day be due retribution for every good and evil act, their fervent conviction that the kingdom which was to exalt the people of God and bring to pass all God's purposes and proclaim his salvation to the ends of the earth was certainly shortly to appear. Had it not been for their espousal of a crucified felon as their Messiah, their proclamation that the Son of God must suffer and die for man before He could redeem and restore man, that sacrifice must precede glory, *he could almost have thrown in his lot with them.* So he might well have mused as the little party passed through Shiloh where once the Tabernacle of God had stood, and Samuel the lad who became the greatest of Israel's Judges spent his boyhood. With disdain he looked upon the Samaritans as he journeyed through Samaria and his eyes lighted upon Mount Gerizim with its ruined Temple; never, thought he impetuously, would he tolerate any challenge to the traditions of Moses and the Law which God gave the leader on Mount Sinai, Samaritans,—Christians,—all were the same to him. He came within sight of the Sea of Galilee but the glimmer of its blue waters only reminded him of the Prophet who came from Galilee and like some of his brother Pharisees in earlier years he might have muttered to himself "search, and look, for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet" and then perhaps, Bible student that he was, remember that Elijah the Tishbite, the prophet who converted Israel, came from Galilee,

and that Jonah the prophet, who converted the Assyrians, came from Galilee, and angrily turn his thoughts into another channel; but every time he came back to the same maddening conundrum. Why, if he and his were the true worshippers of God, did their work and actions so deny the principles which he knew to be inherent in the Mosaic Law? Why, if the Christians were so deluded and blasphemous, did their lives exhibit such evident manifestations of the spirit of the Law? Why, if Jesus of Nazareth was the blasphemer and the seducer Saul verily believed him to be, could he have inspired his followers with a zeal and devotion and tenacity which Saul would fain have seen amongst his own people? He lay, sleepless through the long Syrian nights, his mind racing over the dark sayings of the Law and the prophets, words he knew so well and understood so little. *"Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O most mighty, with thy glory and thy majesty, and in thy majesty ride prosperously."* *"He is despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief."* *"All kings shall fall down before him, all nations shall serve him."* *"He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth."* *"Unto us a child is born, and his name shall be called the Everlasting Father. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end,"* *"He was cut off out of the land of the living; for the transgression of my people was he stricken; and he made his grave with the wicked."* Over and over again the words repeated themselves, tantalising him almost beyond endurance with their contradictions. The Messiah when He came must live forever; how could he die? The Sent of God comes to exalt Israel over the nations and put down evil with firm hand. How could He suffer death at the hands of men? So the burning questions tormented his fevered brain and all the time he saw before him the face of one who, radiant as an angel, looked up into the heavens and claimed to behold the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God and in the horror of that blasphemy he gave his vote for the condemnation of the offender and watched him put to death pleading Divine forgiveness upon his murderers—Saul turned over wearily and rose from his hard couch to prepare for yet another day's journeying under the blazing Syrian sun.

So he went on, leaving the gleaming waters of the Lake of Galilee behind, up into the Syrian mountains and at last, one day at noon, topped the last eminence and beheld, spread before him in the plain below, the beautiful city whose loveliness was renowned throughout the East. There, he may have thought, as the little convoy stopped to rest and he looked down upon the view, were the Christians he had come to hunt out and take back with him bound to Jerusalem. In the excitement and fervour of his work he would forget the ques-

tions and thoughts which had tantalised his mind; he would stop trying to reconcile those contradictory scriptures that had burned themselves into his brain by day and flickered across the screen of his consciousness at night. He would

A flash of light, vivid, searing light which rose up and outshone the hard, brassy glare of the Syrian noonday sun; a white hot, gleaming screen which blotted out earth and sky and burned itself into the eyes of Saul even to the extent of causing physical pain. He was dimly conscious of the asses and mules standing stock still, of his companions prostrating themselves on the ground in terror; then, his gaze drawn irresistibly upwards to the almost unendurable glare above him, he beheld, with a shock that pierced through his very being, a Form whose own glory exceeded by far that of the shimmering light around him—and at that Saul himself veiled his eyes and fell to the ground and there lay, fearing to look again upon that Majestic Presence, still, silent, his mind racing, waiting.

A sound, as of a distant wind, coming nearer; the rush of many waters, a swelling crescendo of rolling thunder, taking the form of a voice, a heavenly voice, shaping itself into words, awe-inspiring words that yet seemed to have in them a tinge of gentleness, almost as if they breathed assurance with their enquiry.

"Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?"

Persecuting God? He, Saul, the zealous upholder of the Law and of the true faith? Persecuting the One to whom he had devoted his whole life and all his energies, for whom he was willing to do all and dare all and lay down life itself if need be? Persecuting the Rock of Israel whose enemies he was even now engaged in hunting down and punishing? How could such things be? It was unthinkable. Then who was this One whose solemn Voice had reached his stricken mind, whose awful Presence had appeared before his amazed sight? Had he indeed beheld God, and lived? Had the Most High verily appeared to mortal man? And if not, then who?

"Who art thou, Lord?"

"I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest."

The shock with which Saul of Tarsus must have heard those words might well have unhinged the mind of a lesser man. Jesus of Nazareth, the crucified felon, the imposter who had claimed to be the Son of God and the Messiah that should come, and who had been executed for his blasphemy? Taken down from the cross, his dead body certified by the authorities, and interred in a tomb, his delusions and claims silenced for ever—there, in that glory, at the right hand of God? Only a little while ago he had watched Stephen lift his face to heaven and declare that he saw heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God

and he had judged him guilty of blasphemy and condemned him to death; now he himself had undergone the same experience and he himself had with his own eyes seen heaven opened and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God. *"Jesus of Nazareth"*! Had the answer been *"The Word of God"* he could have understood it. Had it been *"Your Messiah, the Coming One"* he would have rejoiced and looked for his speedy descent to take the glory of his Kingdom. Had it been *"the Arm of the Lord"* *"the Hope of Israel"* *"the Son of God"* he would have understood those terms and bowed himself in submission. Had the Presence even announced himself as Michael the Archangel, the Captain of the Lord's Host, he would have rendered humble adoration and awaited the heavenly message. But no; *"I am Jesus of Nazareth"*—there, with God

When they picked him up from the ground he was blind. The intensity of that scorching glare had destroyed his sight. The men with him had dropped to the ground when first the light flashed—they saw the radiance but they did not see what Saul saw. As they lay they heard a noise but they distinguished no words. Now the light was gone and the solemn rumblings died away. The sun shone brilliantly down upon the familiar landscape and everything was as it had been before—except that little group of wondering Levites leading in their midst a broken and sightless man.

So Saul entered Damascus, walking on foot, holding the guiding hands of his erstwhile despised subordinates. One might ask how it was they did not set the blind man upon his mule for the remainder of the journey—surely that would have been the most convenient way to get him to a place where he could be cared for. It is difficult to resist the conclusion that Saul himself, under the effect of his experience, insisted on completing the journey on foot, in token of his humiliation and submission. He left Jerusalem an arrogant, self-assured Pharisee. He entered Damascus a bond-slave of the Lord Jesus Christ.

There are three accounts of this incident in the Book of Acts—one, the narrative of the happening in chapter 9, another, as recounted by Paul in his defence before the Jerusalem Sanhedrin years later, (chapter 23) and a third, in his speech before King Agrippa just prior to his voyage to Rome (chapter 26). In none of these does Paul say that he actually saw the Lord, only that an overpowering light shone around him and his companions. The evidence that he did in fact behold a form enshrined in that supernatural radiance lies in his statements elsewhere in the New Testament that he had actually seen the person of Christ and that he saw him *"as one born out of due time"*, as though his eyes had been enabled to witness an Appearance which in the ordinary manner no man would

expect to do until in his own time he was born into the heavenly world "beyond the Veil". The Apostle John tells us (1 John 3. 1-3) that "*it doth not yet appear what we shall be but . . . we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is*". This celestial glory of our Lord Jesus Christ is of necessity something no human mind can visualise for we have no basis of comparison. The mediæval idea that Jesus preserves the fleshly body of his humanity to eternity, even though in a "glorified" condition, has only to be mentioned to be dismissed, for the conditions of life in the celestial world and in the Divine Presence are such that, as Paul himself told the Corinthians, "*flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God*". (1 Cor. 15. 50). Our Lord's celestial glory at the right hand of God the Father is one that cannot be discerned by the human faculty of sight. It remains then either that the risen Lord manifested himself in some such fashion as God revealed himself to Moses on Sinai or the angel Gabriel to Daniel, in which some kind of physical manifestation perceptible to the human optic nerves represented the reality of the Being behind it, or in some wonderful fashion Paul was literally translated for the moment into the world of the spirit and received a sense impression which in the ordinary way he would have been quite incapable of accepting. His reference in 2 Cor. 12 to his having been translated into the "third heaven" and hearing "unutterable things which it was not possible for a man to relate" goes to show that such an experience did befall the great Apostle on at least one other occasion. If this is so, and if of all men Saul of Tarsus is the one who alone has seen into the mysteries that lie beyond the barrier

of human sense and retained a recollection of what he saw, then how apt his expression, referring to this event in his life "*last of all, he was seen of me also, as one born out of due time*" i.e. prematurely (1 Cor. 15. 8).

One thing is certain. The sight which Saul witnessed on the Damascus road was one which convinced him utterly and irrevocably that the man Jesus of Nazareth who had been put to death in Jerusalem was indeed the Christ, the Son of God. For the rest of his life he never wavered in that belief. Nothing of the evidence against the claims of Jesus, satisfactory as it had been to him previously, now weighed the slightest against that fixed conviction. He had all to lose and nothing to gain by accepting Christ. The whole of his career and prospects, his power and honour, was thrown away in this whole-hearted acceptance of the crucified one. He lived with the events; he had access to all the evidence for both sides of the question; he could question and obtain information from living men who had been the principal actors in the drama. His own personal zeal for the principles of Phariseism and the Law of Moses and the traditions of Judaism strongly predisposed him against the claims of Christianity. But despite all this, that thing which happened to him on the road outside Damascus convinced him so completely that his whole future life and work was devoted to the preaching of that Gospel which previously he had condemned. One of the strongest evidences for the truth of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead lies in the conversion and conviction of Saul of Tarsus, the persecutor of the Church.

Samson's bees

An old issue of the "*Expository Times*" reports an incident occurring in Australia in the year 1927. The correspondent had been walking in the bush and came across the carcase of a horse which had died some months previously. The flesh had decayed away and the carcase was now a sun-dried

hide stretched over a skeleton. Looking through a gap in the hide the narrator found that a swarm of bees had established a colony inside and he was able to put his hand in and break off a piece of the honeycomb. An interesting modern equivalent of the story of Samson and the lion.

"With all our striving and watchfulness, we shall not be able, in our present condition, to reach our ideal. Perfection is something which can only be approximated in the present life. The measure of our effort to attain it will prove the measure of our faithfulness and earnest desire to do so, and that effort will not be unfruitful. If no fruit appears, we may be sure that little or no effort is made at cultivating or pruning, the fruit will not only appear in the development of the Christian graces of character, but also in increasing activities. We must not wait for our spiritual and immortal

bodies, promised us in our resurrection, before our activity in God's service begins. If we possess the spirit (the will, the disposition) of that new nature our mortal bodies will be active in the service of God's truth now. Our feet will be swift to run his errands, our hands prompt to do his bidding, our tongues ready to bear testimony to the truth, our minds active in devising ways and means to do so more and more abundantly and effectively, and thus we shall be living epistles known and read of all about us." (*selected*)

THE COMING OF THE KING

2. As in the days of Noah

A series of studies
concerning the
Second Advent

Students are well aware that there exist apparently conflicting Scripture statements respecting the manner of the Second Advent. Upon the one hand there are passages which depict the coming of the Lord as quiet, unobtrusive, like a thief breaking into a house at dead of night so that only those who are awake and watching know of his arrival. On the other hand there are vivid descriptions of a spectacular descent from Heaven in the full view of all mankind, accompanied by the heavenly hosts to the sound of trumpets and shouting so that no one can be ignorant of the event. It is said in some places that his Church will be waiting on earth to be gathered to him as He arrives, and in others that they will already be with him as He journeys to earth and participate in the glory of his coming. Some pictures shew him coming for judgment and destruction, men crawling into the caves and holes of the rocks to escape his accusing eye; others present a coming for blessing and reconstruction, whilst men and all Nature rejoice at the prospect. A rational and accurate view of the Second Advent has to take into account and give proper weight to all these varying descriptions and weave them into a harmonious whole.

The short answer to these apparent paradoxes is that the Second Advent spans a period of time within which a number of widely dissimilar events find place. When this fact is accepted it becomes possible to build an understanding of the subject in which each plain statement, each vivid metaphor, each Old Testament allusion, can make its contribution to the complete picture.

Within such a framework it is obvious that the aspect of the Advent which is described as sensed only by the few, the "Watchers", and not realised by the many, must come first before any kind of spectacular revelation to all men. Likewise the statements that He comes to gather his saints to himself and close the career of the "Church in the flesh" must have their fulfilment before there can be any possibility of those same saints returning with him to be openly revealed to all. This unobtrusive and generally unheeded aspect of the Advent is therefore logically the first to be considered.

The commencement of the Second Advent is marked by a condition in which the Lord comes "as a thief", recognised only by his own. The basis of this is to be found in the twenty-fourth chapter of Matthew's Gospel, the most complete exposition of the Advent in the New Testament. "Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come, but know this, that if the goodman of the

house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. Therefore be ye ready, for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of Man cometh". (Matt. 24. 42-44). Referring back to this warning in his letter to the Thessalonians, the Apostle Paul said "yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night . . . but ye are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief . . . therefore let us not sleep, as do others, but let us watch" (1Thess. 5. 4-6). Rev 16. 15 associates this thief-like coming with the gathering of the nations to Armageddon, the period which leads up to the end of this present Age. This exhortation to watchfulness for an expected event, the time of which is not known, has its basis in the Old Testament where the city watchmen are pictured as straining their eyes for evidences of the near approach of the expected King. "I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace day nor night; ye that are the Lord's remembrancers, keep not silence . . . till he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth" (Isa. 62. 6-7) and its ecstatic climax "Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice; . . . for they shall see, eye meeting eye, the Lord returning to Zion . . . and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God" (Isa. 52. 8-10).

That this watchfulness of the faithful, rewarded by realisation of the Coming One's presence in the earth to execute the Divine purpose, is accompanied by ignorance and indifference on the part of the world in general at this early stage of the Advent is shewn by means of two striking parallels in history to which our Lord drew attention. "Of that day and hour" He said "knoweth no man . . . but as the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be . . . they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage . . . and knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be". "Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; but the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of Man shall be revealed". (Matt. 24. 36-39. Luke 17. 28-30). The truth behind these allusions is a very important one. It enshrines the Divine principle that before judgment descends there is proclamation of the coming crisis, and an opportunity to repent and be delivered. The stories of Noah and Lot have one thing in common. A man of God is made cognisant of the coming

event; he accepts the fact and proclaims it. His contemporaries in general are indifferent and unbelieving until after the prophet and those who share his faith are delivered into a place of safety. Then the indifferent multitude is overtaken by the event and their world comes to an end. It is not only the unexpectedness of the catastrophe to which our Lord alluded but the fact that a few knew about it in advance and were thereby delivered.

The natural forces which were to bring to an end the antediluvian world were present in the earth whilst Noah was building his Ark, but only he and the few with him knew and believed. "By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet . . . prepared an ark to the saving of his house" (Heb. 11. 7). The time came when God called him into the Ark "and" says the old historian "the Lord shut him in" (Gen. 7. 16). Seven days elapsed during which there appeared no physical evidence to substantiate his belief and prediction; nevertheless those forces were working silently behind the scenes. On the eighth day the heavens opened and the deeps heaved up their waters and that world came to an end.

So with the case of Lot. According to St. Peter (2 Pet. 2. 7-8) Lot was a just and righteous man continually distressed in spirit by the lawlessness with which he was surrounded. Like Noah, he was apprised in advance of the fate overshadowing Sodom; in just the same manner the subterranean powers which were shortly to blow the Cities of the Plain sky high were gathering strength. Lot and his daughters, the only ones who believed, were led out of the doomed city by the celestial messenger to a place of safety. As with Noah, there was a short lull, this time a space of six or seven hours apparent inactivity, and then Sodom blew up.

There is one apparently casual word in the story of Sodom's destruction which establishes that six or seven hours and provides a parallel to the most famous of our Lord's allusions to his Second Coming, the one in which He likened it to the "astrape", the emergence of dawn from the East rapidly growing into full meridian day. The account says that the Divine messengers gave the word to leave the doomed city "when the morning arose", "shachar alah"—"when the dawn came up", denoting the moment of dawn when, in that latitude, the first shafts of light appear on the eastern horizon, always within an hour of 6 a.m. (The same word for the same phenomenon appears variously in the Old Testament as "dayspring" (Job 38. 12) "wings of the morning" (Psa. 139. 9) "eyelids of the morning" (Job 41. 28) etc. The messengers bade Lot "flee to the mountain" for refuge; he obtained permission to take refuge instead in the "little city" of Zoar because it was nearer and more convenient. He was to make haste; the threatened destruction could not be

initiated until he and his daughters were safely within Zoar. The narrative continues "the sun was risen upon the earth when Lot entered into Zoar" (ch. 14. 25). Here the words are "shemesh yatsa", "the sun had gone forth over the land"; this refers to the full blaze of the solar orb at the meridian—noonday. The implication is that Lot's flight from Sodom to Zoar extended from dawn to noon—six or seven hours. Comparison of the topography of the district with details given in the narrative favours the conclusion that the cities lay some twelve to sixteen miles apart so that several hours journey on foot is indicated.

Jesus may well have used this illustration in relation to his Advent in knowledge of this fact. The Divine messenger, come for deliverance and also for judgment, was present in person and in plenitude of power, when the dawn—the "astrape" of the New Testament—rose over the mountains of Moab to the east of Sodom, but his first work was to deliver the faithful; the rest were ignorant and unbelieving. That deliverance effected, the messenger returned to the city for judgment; "then the Lord rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven". The analogy with the order of events of the Second Advent is perfect.

Some such picture, then, may have been in our Lord's mind when He made his historic reply to the disciples' question put to him shortly before his death: "when shall these things be, and what shall be the sign of thy presence, and of the end of the Age?" (Matt. 24. 3). After a fairly extensive preamble covering the period between the First and Second Advents, with allusion to the tribulations which were to come upon the Jewish people (vss. 5-22) and a brief intimation that only after the Gospel had been preached in all the world "for a witness" would the end come, He sketched briefly the evidences of the successive phases of his Advent. The first of these is contained in vss. 23-28 and the gist of this is that claims would be made for the appearance of Christ in this spot or that spot, as though He could be located within earthly limitations as in the days of his First Advent, and that such claims were not to be believed. "If they shall say to you, behold, he is in the desert; go not forth; behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not" (vs. 26). The word for "desert" here means a solitary or uninhabited place, but not necessarily arid; it could equally well be green and pleasant and in fact refers mainly to the wilderness east of Jordan where John the Baptist and some of the old Hebrew prophets lived and conducted their work, and into which the people went in order to hear them. The initial coming of Christ is not to be in the style of those men, as the visible centre of a multitude, plainly to be viewed before them and known of all, as were John, Elijah, Moses and others. Neither is

He to be manifested in the "secret chambers". The A. V. rendering gives a misleading impression. The word is "*tameion*" which is used in the New Testament, the Apocrypha and the Septuagint for the family private or inner apartment of the house (Matt. 6. 6, Luke 12. 3)—particularly of the bride chamber (Tobit 7. 16); sometimes of the storeroom or barn (Luke 12. 24, Deut. 28. 8). This was the room in which honoured guests were received to meet the invited company as in the feasts which Jesus attended in the houses of Matthew, Zaccheus and Simon of Bethany. Just as on the one hand this initial phase of his Coming is not a general public spectacle, equally so it is not a private physical appearance to a selected circle of intimate followers reminiscent of the days when they sat at a feast and listened to his words. And in one eloquent metaphor Jesus lifted the whole conception of his Coming to the plane of celestial values by likening the first phase of his Advent to the oncoming dawn, which in the latitude of Jerusalem is seen at first only by those watching for its onset, and by the sleeping masses in general only after it has already measurably flooded the skies with light.

"As the brightness" ("lightning" A. V.) "*cometh out of the east and shineth even unto the west, so shall also the presence*" ("coming" A. V.) "*of the Son of Man be*" (vs. 27). This refers without any doubt to the dawn; "*astrape*", here rendered "lightning", refers to any brilliant or blinding radiance, whether lightning or not, as in Luke 9. 29 (*glistening raiment*) Luke 11. 36 (*bright shining candle*) Luke 24. 4 (*shining garments*) Acts 9. 3 (*shined a light from heaven*) Acts 22. 6 (*there shone a great light*) Deut. 32. 41 (*glittering sword*) Hab. 3. 11 (*glittering spear*) 4 Macc. 4. 10 (*angels all radiant in armour*) but the sun's light is the only such radiance that originates in the east and passes to the west. In thus comparing his Coming with this light of dawn in the east Jesus associated the idea with watchfulness. Only those who watched would be aware that his Coming had become a fact, just as only the watchmen in Israel ever actually witnessed the rising light of the "*astrape*" in the east indicating that the night was past and day had come. "*Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of Man cometh*" (Matt. 25. 13).

The full force of our Lord's meaning can only be grasped when the nature of sunrise in Middle Eastern latitudes is appreciated. Dawn is a fairly leisurely process in this country but the nearer to the tropics, the more rapid is the transition from total darkness to full daylight. A few quotations from travellers who have actually witnessed sunrise in and near the latitude of the Holy Land illuminate the words of Jesus in Matthew 24.

H. V. Morton, in his book "*In the steps of the Master*" says: "As I sat on the stone thinking of

these things, a light began to fill the sky. The sun rises over Jerusalem from behind the Mount of Olives. I turned my back on the city and, looking up over the Mount, saw a great fan of light pulsing up from the east. The fire filled the sky and turned the little clouds in its path to pink and gold, but the high ridge of the Mount, almost black against the palpitating light, hid the sun from view . . . The sun topped the crest of the Mount of Olives, and, looking again towards Jerusalem, I saw the highest buildings gilded with light though the wall was yet unlit. In a few seconds a flood of light fell over the city, ran down the wall and into the valley of the Kedron. It swept up the stony flanks of the opposite valley, and I felt my face and my hands warm in its light.

"How often must Jesus and the disciples have watched this splendid sight from the Mount of Olives. They must have seen the city ramparts light up with the first rays of the sun. They must have seen, just above the Garden of Gethsemane, the towering white and gold mass of the Temple. They must have seen a priest come out on a pinnacle, as he came every morning, to look towards the east and report, before the first sacrifice of the day, 'The sun shineth already!' They might even have heard in the still air of dawn the daily cry from the assembled priests: 'Is the sky lit up as far as Hebron?', and the daily response of the watcher from the pinnacle: 'It is lit up as far as Hebron!'"

The same writer describes sunrise at Gaza, a little to the south of Jerusalem.

"And now, as we went onward, I saw a gathering tumult in the east. A white, palpitating light was filling the sky. It was like something approaching at great speed, a mighty army with its chariots and its horsemen. Swords of light thrust their way upwards, catching stray clouds and turning them to banners of pink and gold. Then, like an orange flung into the air, the sun leapt up, fully armed, into the sky: it was warm, and the dead earth was instantly, vividly, and rather violently, alive."

Lord James Bryce, describing his ascent of Mount Ararat in 1876, thus describes sunrise as seen from his position halfway up the mountain (*Transcaucasia and Ararat*):

"About 3 a.m. there suddenly sprang up, from behind the Median mountains, the morning star, shedding a light such as no star ever gives in these northern climes of ours, a light that almost outshone the moon. An hour later it began to pale in the first faint flush of yellowish light that spread over the eastern heaven, and first the rocky masses above us, then Little Ararat, throwing behind him a gigantic shadow, then the long lines of mountains beyond the Araxes, became revealed, while the wide Araxes plains still lay dim and shadowy below. One by one the stars died out as the yellow turned to a deeper glow that shot forth in long streamers, rosy fingers hovering above the snows

on the mighty cone; till at last there came upon the topmost slope, six thousand feet above us, a sudden blush of pink. Swiftly it floated down the eastern face, and touched and kindled the rocks just above us. Then the sun flamed out, and in a moment the Araxes valley and all the hollows of the savage ridges we were crossing were flooded with overpowering light."

Helen McLeod, recording her life in New Guinea (*"Cannibals are Human"*, 1962) describes dawn at Port Moresby. "The eastern quadrant of the sky flushed rosily, shafts of sunlight burst through and the clouds were alight with flame. Then the tropical sun blazed forth, flooding the bay with colour and light."

In everyday life few of the people in Jesus' day actually witnessed this wonderful phenomenon, for their sleep was broken only by the full blaze of the sun as its light swept over the sky. Hence the Scriptural association of the coming of day with the "watchers" and that somewhat cryptic message in Isa. 21. 11-12 "*Watchman, how far gone is the night*" and the watchman's reply "*The morning is at hand*". Only the watchers saw this glorious effulgence of golden light rising fan-wise in the east and moving visibly across the sky towards the west, turning the clouds in its path to pink and white and bathing the whole land in its glow. The watching priest, stationed on a pinnacle of the Temple, cried out in a loud voice that the light was come and his colleagues below immediately commenced the ritual of the morning sacrifice. Presently the full blaze of day would be shining upon the people as they awoke from sleep and betook themselves to their accustomed tasks. This emergence of light from the east, followed quickly by the sun itself, is referred to in Mal. 4.2 "*the Sun of righteousness shall arise with healing in his wings*"—the great fan of light spreading over the sky being likened to the

wings of some great celestial creature. It must be remembered that Mal. 4 is a prophecy of the Second Advent and that it is only to "*you that fear my name*" that the Sun of righteousness thus arises, and not to all, thus confirming the implication of Matt. 24 that not humanity in general, but only the watching Church, perceives this first phase of the Advent. It is here that every reference to the need for watchfulness and to his Coming as a thief in the night, silently and unobtrusively, finds full application without doing any violence to those other Scriptures which picture the later phases of the Advent as outwardly spectacular and universally known.

The fact of the Advent is discerned, not by the natural senses but the spiritual, not by the eyes and ears of flesh but by those of faith, faith which is soundly based upon an understanding of the essential differences between the natural and spiritual worlds, and knows that his celestial being and glory is one that "*no man hath seen nor can see*" (1 Tim. 1. 16). But although unseen by man, that glory and that world is none the less a real glory and a real world. In some manner, we know not how, the powers of the celestial realm approach and make contact with this terrestrial order as the purpose of God progresses towards the elimination of evil and the supremacy of good. It may be that what we call the beginning of the Second Advent is the initial contact which that world makes with this; the Power directing that contact, and thereby setting in motion the forces which are eventually to result in the kingdoms of this world giving place to the power of the Kingdom of God, is in Person the One who promised his disciples so long ago "*If I go away, I will come again*". So, like the dawn flaming over the mountains in the sight of his watchmen while the world is still asleep, He comes.

To be continued

A Note on John 3. 13

Q. How could Jesus Christ be "in heaven" whilst He was talking to Nicodemus on earth, as stated in John 3.13?

* * * *

A. The passage concerned reads "*No man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of Man which is in heaven*". The final four words "*which is in heaven*" are of somewhat doubtful authority. Two of the most reliable sources, the Sinaitic and the Vatican Mss, omit them and many modern authorities uphold their omission. The N.E.B. puts it "*whose home is in heaven*" and since some ancient manuscripts present a modified phrase "*the Son of Man who is*

of heaven" it may well be that the original form of the expression as actually spoken by Jesus was to the effect that the only one who had ever been in heaven was the Son of Man who belonged there by right but had left it temporarily to come to earth. It is of course also possible that the four words represent a "gloss", a comment by some late copyist, added to the text to ensure understanding on the part of readers that this same Jesus, then on earth, was now in heaven, i.e., that He had ascended and returned whence He came when his life on earth was over. Such glosses, added in the margin or between the lines of text, were often incorporated in the text itself by later copyists not discerning between true text and comment, and thus become unidentifiable in our printed versions.

PARADISE ON EARTH

Earth's coming glory

8. Food for the Nations

The subject of food supply has become a burning question in recent years. The present commercial system, based on greed and selfishness, has produced a condition of things in which those who cannot pay cannot eat; some nations produce more than they can consume and so they destroy the excess while others cannot produce enough to avoid starvation. Man seems unable to solve the problem, but God can, and God will. And the first step towards this end will be taken when He does away with the world monetary system and the use of money, and substitutes a condition of society in which all men will willingly play their parts in the production of the food that is required and each take from the common store that which he needs. In a world where there is mutual trust and universal unselfishness there will be no need for money.

The prophet Isaiah foresaw this happy state of affairs when he declaimed (55.1) "*Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money, come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price*". This is the spirit that will pervade the world; men happily playing their part in the world's work, and sharing with their fellows the results of their labours. The abundance of those days and the luxuriance of earth's productivity was foreseen by some of the other keen-sighted men of old, such as Amos (9.13) "*The days come, saith the Lord, that the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed; and the mountains shall drop sweet wine, and all the hills shall melt*" (this latter an allusion to the rippling effect of wind sweeping over luxuriant close-packed corn covering the hillsides). And again, Joel 3.18 "*It shall come to pass in that day that the mountains shall drop down new wine and the hills shall flow with milk, and all the rivers of Judah shall flow with waters*". The picture is that of earth bringing forth abundantly for the sustenance of all creatures that dwell therein.

That is all very well, says someone, but the experts tell us that with the expected increase of world population during the next half-century there is not going to be enough land to grow the food they will need. There will be fratricidal wars to secure what can be produced just for the victors. If you are going to resurrect all the past dead where on earth—literally as well as metaphorically—are you going to grow their food?

The experts, as is often the case with experts, are somewhat behind the times. Recent years have seen some startling discoveries in the power of earth's natural forces to produce food-stuffs at a

rate and in quantities so far superior to what has in the past been regarded as normal that there is no longer need for uncertainty as to the power and intention of the Lord, through the medium of Nature, adequately to feed all the living creatures He has brought or will bring into being on this planet. Of that more anon. Now we have another questioner.

All right, he says. You will grow more wheat than you ever have before. You will breed more cattle and keep more sheep, and catch more fish, that you ever have before. And your Millennium will have more slaughter-houses, and more battery hen establishments, and bigger fishing fleets, than ever this world has had before. So your eternal life for mankind is going to depend on the continuity of violent death for many of the lower creatures, and when God said that in that coming day "*nothing shall hurt nor destroy*" (Isa. 11.9), He meant us to understand that the animal creation would have to be excluded—even although He had arranged for the wolf to dwell with the lamb, the leopard to lie down with the kid, and the calf and the young lion, the cow and the bear to feed together, and the lion eat straw like the ox (Isa. 6-7). The animals are to be safe from each other, but not from man. What have you to say to that?

This one is admittedly a poser. There are, of course, a minor proportion of vegetarians in every community but in the main practically everyone relies on flesh products for daily sustenance and known history does not seem to yield any evidence that the position has been different in the historic past. But the fact that men today only know a world in which animal flesh is the staple diet does not necessarily require that it was always so in the unknown past nor that it will be so in the unknown future. A little consideration of basic facts is indicated. And the best place to start is where the Bible starts, at the appearance of man upon earth.

The story of Eden and the first man recounted in Genesis enshrines the basic principles of human life upon earth, and this is true whether the story is literal fact or as an elaborate metaphor. And when it touches upon the question of food there is one rather surprising factor. When the Lord told the first human pair of the conditions of life upon earth He said that He had provided the grasses of the earth for animal subsistence and the seed-bearing plants and fruit bearing trees for human subsistence. Said He "*I will give you all plants that bear seed everywhere on earth, and every tree bearing fruit which yields seed; they shall be yours for food. All green plants I give for food to the wild animals,*

to all the birds of heaven, and to all reptiles on earth, to every living creature" (Gen. 1. 29-30 NEB). The distinction between food for man and animals here is between plants fully ripe and in seed, "*eseb zara zara*", and fresh young herbage suitable for animals, "*yerek eseb*"; and there is no mention of a meat diet.

Two thousand years later there is a difference. Immediately after the Flood the Lord told the survivors "*every living creature that lives and moves shall be food for you; I give you them all, as once I gave you all green plants*" (Gen. 9.3 NEB). In no plainer terms could the change from vegetarian diet to flesh diet be expressed. The question obviously comes up for answer, why?

There is a possibility that the Lord regularised a custom that had grown up before the Flood. The two apocryphal books that deal with events before the Flood, the book of Enoch and the Book of Jubilees, both declare that there was general lawlessness, men and animals devouring each other's flesh. This rests only on Jewish legend but there is usually a sub-stratum of truth underlying legend. More significant perhaps is the statement in Gen. 4.20 that Jabal, last descendant of the line of Cain and close up to the time of the Flood, was the first man to breed cattle. It could be argued that Abel at the beginning kept his sheep for the sake of their wool, but Jabal could hardly have kept cattle for purposes other than food. Remembering that Lamech in Gen. 5.29 at about the same time bemoaned the unproductivity of the cultivated land it might well be that men began to turn to a flesh diet on account of inability to obtain the food they needed from the ground—they experienced a severe shortage of protein.

If this reasoning be logical, it can be reasonably expected that in the future Millennial world, when the "curse" on the ground is lifted and the earth yields its increase, the fruits of the earth will recover the elements needed for human sustenance and animal food become unnecessary. If it can be conceded that such was the case at the beginning, that the failure to maintain that position during the rule of man, this world of sin and death, rendered the alternative necessary, it might be reasonable to expect a resumption of primitive conditions in the restored and perfected earth. One might be led then to enquire if possibilities inherent in current human achievement could lend substance to such expectation.

First of all, how much land is there available for food-growing? The total land surface of the earth amounts to some sixty million square miles of which only five million is at present used for growing food and another eight million for pasturing cattle which ultimately become food. But since a bullock must eat 10lb of grass to produce 1lb of protein, and soya beans can produce protein

twelve times as fast as a bullock, it would seem that some of the eight million square miles of pasture-land could be better used for growing soya beans. Then there are the vast deserts occupying more than ten per cent of the land surface which under Millennial conditions will be irrigated and made fertile. "*The wilderness and the uninhabited place shall be glad, and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose . . . in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert*" (Isa. 35.1-7). If only twenty million square miles, one-third of the land surface, were used for food production on this scale there would be enough to feed so many more than the highest possible estimate of the number of human beings who have lived that the calculation becomes farcical. But it is possible to be a little more precise. In 1960 a careful investigation by competent authorities produced the conclusion that the maximum practical amount of edible plant food that the earth can produce is 14,000 million tons per annum and the maximum animal food 7,000 million tons, whereas the amount of dry organic matter at the present consumed by the human race is 700 million tons per annum. If with present known methods the earth, properly cultivated, could produce thirty times as much as at present used there would seem to be little risk of starvation when the resurrection takes place, even if, as has been calculated, earth's population is as much as five or six times as much as now.

This, of course, ignores what new discoveries appear in the field of intensive food production. A good deal of progress is already being made in this direction and in spheres not normally expected. For instance, in 1966 a method of making cattle food from natural gas was discovered and is now in wide production. Certain micro-organisms (bacteria) placed in water into which air and natural gas (methane) is injected, thrive and multiply exceedingly, separating the carbon and hydrogen of which natural gas is composed, in the process producing masses of protein and amino acids in the form of pure tasteless white flakes which cattle eat with relish and which, suitably flavoured, could conceivably be eaten by humans. Where a cow eating grass adds to its bulk about one lb. of protein a day a weight of bacteria equal to the weight of a cow could produce about a ton.

But let no one think that the Age to come is going to require its citizens to exist on a diet derived from natural gas—especially since the supply of that commodity is bound to run out eventually. When Genesis recorded the Lord's words regarding the diet He had ordained for the use and benefit of man He said nothing about natural gas. Even more startling discoveries in the field of orthodox agriculture are pointing the way of the future. Twenty years ago Russian researchers began to investigate the properties of a widely dif-

fused and easily grown plant called chlorella. This plant has the property of making use of 15% of the solar energy falling upon it where the next highest, sugar-cane, can make use of only 2%. In consequence chlorella yields 50% of its weight in protein and all the ten amino acids necessary to human life, considerably higher than soya bean which previously held the record. Intensive cultivation has made this plant yield such quantities that an area of little over two thousand square miles could supply all the protein needs of the present entire world population. Japan already uses it, mixed with wheat flour, as a staple foodstuff for man.

The most promising results are with the studied use of light, sunlight and artificial light. It has been found that most food-producing plants grow best when full sunlight is allowed to fall on them for a specific number of hours per day and then shade is applied, as though after taking in a certain amount of solar energy they need time to make use of it in building tissue and substance before taking in more. In these and other ways some remarkable results have been achieved. By using a combination of sunlight and strong artificial light Leningrad University were able to sow and mature vegetables in twenty days, to take twenty crops per year from the same piece of soil, and in consequence obtain a yield of 250lb of vegetables from each square yard of soil per annum. On the same basis 50lb of strawberries per square yard were obtained. These were laboratory results obtained under ideal conditions with constant supervision but they do serve to show what hitherto undreamed-of-potentialities do exist in Mother Earth. There need be no fear that she will ever fail to support her destined population, however large.

And since the lower animals must not be left out, a system of rapid growing grass has been devised by British and American workers whereby there is now in production grass grown in trays of water, plentifully supplied with nutrients, reaching seven inches long from seed in six days, then harvested and new seed sown. An installation the size of an

ordinary living room is claimed to provide enough grass to feed seventy-five cows continuously.

But it need not be thought that the sustenance of mankind will necessitate resort to such highly intensive methods of food production. The earth is fully able to bring forth a sufficiency of food in a perfectly orderly and leisurely manner in the way ordained by the Lord at the first. The source of all life and growth is the sun and if in his wisdom the Lord saw that the first men could produce sufficient for their needs by a reasonable amount of daily labour, it follows that the same procedure in the future Age will produce the same results. The declaration in Gen. 2.15 is that God put the first man into the garden He had already prepared "*to dress it and to keep it*" where "*dress*" is *abad*, to till, serve, work, and "*keep*" is *shamar*, to watch, observe, take heed. Man was to till the ground and supervise the growth of the plant creation; God would do the rest. In real life the growing plant absorbs carbon dioxide and water vapour into its leaves from the surrounding air. Energy from the sun—sunlight—falls upon the leaves, combines with those elements to form carbo-hydrates, fats, oils and proteins, by the addition of mineral elements synthesised from the sunlight itself; this is called photo-synthesis. The plant then exhales water vapour and oxygen (this latter for man to breathe, the only source from which man obtains it) and in the outcome the plant with its fruit or seed has acquired 75% of its weight from the air and water, and 25% from the sunlight transmuted into solid matter. Man exhales carbon dioxide to go back into the plants and the sunlight does the rest. Truly did the Psalmist sing "*He causeth the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man, that he may bring forth food out of the earth, and wine that maketh glad the heart of man, and bread which strengtheneth man's heart*" (Psa. 104.14-15). Most certainly the earth will yield its increase, and there will be plenty for all.

To be continued

The Nestorians

In these days when the Christian Church in certain lands is cut off from international contacts and compelled to limit its activities in accordance with the wishes of the ruling regime, not itself favourable to the promulgation of Christian teaching, it is worthy of remembrance that this kind of thing has happened before. The Nestorian (Syrian) Christian Church of the 8th century has long been recognised and honoured for its faith and missionary enterprise. Nestorian missionaries at that time evangelised India and China. Yet the Nestorian

Christians were in subjection to Moslem rulers, for during the 8th century the Arab followers of Mahomet exercised rule over all Syria and Iraq. Even under that regime they maintained their Church life and sent out their missionaries, proclaimed their faith and perpetuated their communion—for the Syrian Church exists and is influential to-day in those Far Eastern countries where under such difficulties their spiritual forbears planted the Gospel.

IN THE UPPER ROOM

*A glimpse of the
Last Supper*

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

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

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

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

Who among them but did not feel the solemnity of this night? Accustomed as they were to the Passover ceremonial, observing it year by year continually, they could not but be conscious that after to-night things would never be the same. Not so, on those two previous occasions when they had partaken of the Passover with their Master, had this consciousness of impending crisis filled their minds. Something was going to happen; they realised that instinctively, without knowing its nature. But mingled with that apprehension there was a strange triumphant joy as though at last all

the perplexities and misunderstandings of the past three years were to be resolved into a clear knowledge of the life which lay before them. That trouble and distress might yet lie beyond the bounds of this Passover evening they knew, but that God was with them in all their ways they were confident. Now the Master's voice broke the silence; tender tones, vibrant with rich feeling, searching their inmost souls and drawing their very hearts to an ecstasy of devotion and surrender.

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

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

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

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

"Hear, ye children of Abraham. This is the sacrifice of the Lord's Passover, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt, when He smote the Egyptians and delivered our houses. He sent Moses his servant, and Aaron whom He had chosen. He brought them forth also with silver and gold, and there was not one feeble person among their tribes. Therefore are we constrained to confess, to praise, to glorify, to extol, to magnify and to ascribe victory unto him who did unto us and to our fathers all these signs, and who brought us forth from servitude to freedom, from sorrow to joy, from darkness to marvellous light; and we say before him, HALLELUJAH!"

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

"Let the name of the Lord be blessed from this present time and for ever. From the rising of the sun

to his setting the name of the Lord is to be praised . . ."

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

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

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

And yet . . .

* * * *

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

They took of the bread, sharing each with other, wondering. The lamp flame flickered low in its vessel and the shadow of the cross grew longer and seemed to come nearer, bending ever towards them.

* * * *

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

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

* * * *

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

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

dread portent lay behind those unexpected words?

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

How could it be?

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

It was true then; He did not intend to act until the last minute. He meant to wait until his enemies had actually arrested him, and hauled him before Pilate for judgment, and then—and then—at last, He would throw off the mask and defy the power of Imperial Rome. There could be no doubt about it; He could dally no longer then, could not possibly postpone his revelation as the long promised Messiah when standing in the very shadow of the Cross. One scornful word from his lips and that great Temple, centre of idolatry and evil, would collapse in irretrievable ruin, its treasures scattered to the winds, its inner sanctuary opened to the profane gaze. One arm upraised to Heaven and God's artillery, fire and thunderbolt, would pour down upon the proud legions of Rome and annihilate them in an instant. The armies of the angels would descend as in the days of old and crash the stately walls of Jerusalem headlong down the hillside to the valleys below. The earthquake of Uzziah, the hailstones of Joshua, the celestial fire of Elijah, all would bring turmoil and destruction upon the sinful, rebellious generation which had rejected his Leader. Another flood—not of water as in the days of Noah, but of fire, an avalanche of fire to devour God's adversaries, would sweep Judea and Galilee and all the world with a besom of destruction. Jesus had the power—he knew that. He had seen enough of his miracles to be sure of that; and He would use it. He could not help it when forced into the position Judas had engineered. And then, at last, would come the moment for which he had waited these many years, the moment for which his whole being craved. Enthroned in regal splendour, a friend of the Messiah, an executor of God's vengeance, he would crush to the earth those proud Pharisees and priests. Men would come to Judas and beg favours, and whom he would he would favour and enrich, and whom he would, he would cast down, despoil, reduce to beggary. Roman procurator, Greek merchant, the honourable and the rich of this world, would come into the presence of Judas of

Kerioth with respect and awe. Jesus would do all this for him . . . But would He? . . . *Would He?*

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

"*Is it I?*" . . .

* * * * *

"Thou hast said."

* * * * *

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

* * * * *

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

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

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

"Lord . . . whither goest thou?"

* * * * *

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

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

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

"*I shall not die, but live*

*And declare the works of the Lord,
Open to me the gates of righteousness
Into which the righteous shall enter.*

*The stone which the builders refused
Is become the head of the corner.*

This is the work of our God

It is marvellous in our eyes.

This is the day which the Lord hath made

We will rejoice and be glad in it."

hearts were a little lightened and eyes a little brighter. Somewhere in all this was enshrined the ways of God. Israel had waited long for deliverance, but God is faithful; one day they would understand. The solemn chant rose upon the night air and listening angels wondered at its note of triumph. The lamp burned brightly in its last expiring flicker in the upper room—but the forces of evil were speeding fast away.

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

The Giving of God

The story of Divine grace is the record of One who has been disposed to "give," and "give," and "give" again, because it pleases him to dispense of his fulness to helpless needy men. He created man with a great "need" so that He might play the part of a great giver. Man has but to open his hand to take of that bountiful fulness which God opens his hand to give (Psa. 104. 27-28). If God withheld not his well-beloved Son "*shall He not also with him freely give us all things?*" (Rom. 8. 32). Christian

experience of this and other days shows without fail that they who are most developed in grace are the ones most conscious of their need. The more one has grown in the things of the Lord, and the more tender and sensitive the heart has become, the more such saints become persuaded of their need for God. The ultimate end of every quest of the maturer heart, is not merely to accept the gifts of God, but to receive with open heart the Giver too." (selected).



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

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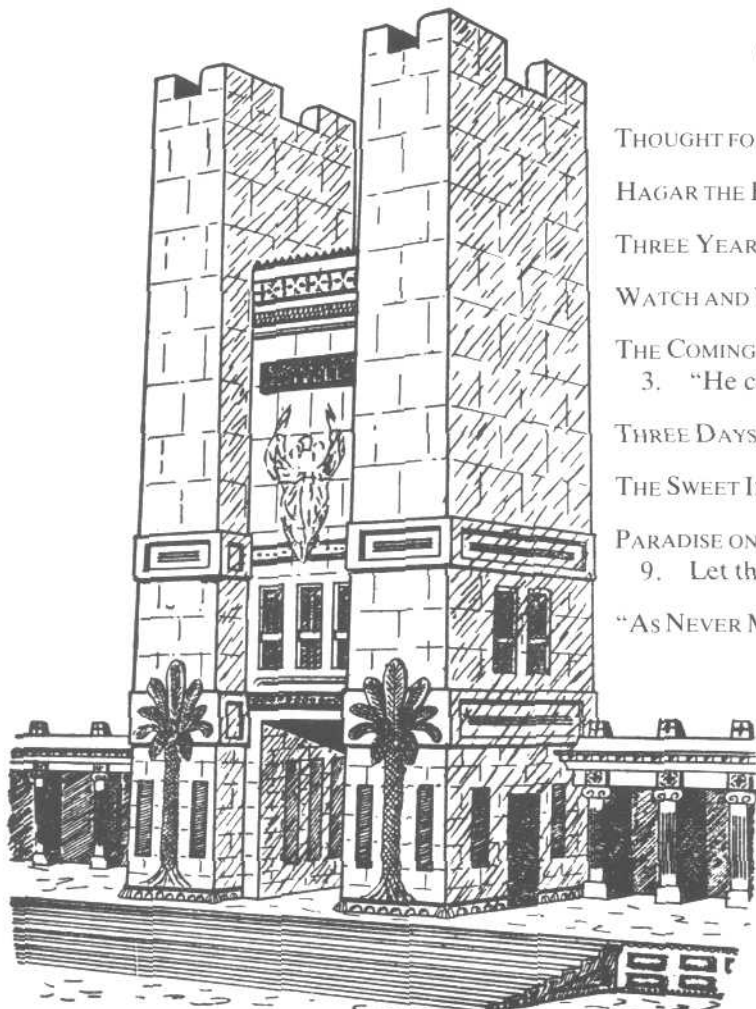
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*Lift up your heads, O ye gates
And be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors,
And the King of glory shall come in.*

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THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH

"I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I. Send me." (Isa. 6.8).

There is something fresh and enthusiastic in the youthful Isaiah's response to the Lord's appeal. Consideration of the chronology of this period—his ministry extended into the reigns of four successive kings of Judah—makes it evident that he must have been quite young at this time, probably in his late teens. The impulse which led him to offer himself for service in response to the Divine invitation never left him; he was a faithful minister to God and the king, outstanding before the people as a champion for God's righteousness and a stern reprover of their shortcomings, and before the king as a straightforward and fearless adviser, in later life an "elder statesman" whose advice was always sought in times of national crisis. A man of deep spiritual insight and flowing pen; the literary masterpiece he left behind him which is the Book of Isaiah has earned him the title of "Isaiah of the golden tongue".

There comes a time in the life of every young Christian when the same call is laid upon the heart; "Who will go for us?". The Lord has no use for conscripts. He wants only volunteers, men and women upon whose consciousness comes the realisation that the Lord has a work for them to do. Not the same kind of work to each; He has no use for uniformity. "God hath set the members in the body as it hath pleased him" and to each his own particular brand of service. Evangelists, preachers; pastors, teachers; students, theologians; all for the work of the ministry, the spiritual growth of the saints, the edifying of the body of Christ, as said Paul to the Ephesians. Whether it be the ministry of oratory in the presence of a large audience or the ministry of prayer in the solitude of one's own room, it is all the same to God, part of the great work He is doing in this world and in this present

Age preparing those who will be his "ministers of reconciliation" in the next. All the youthful enthusiasm, all the active service of maturity, all the quiet endeavour of old age, all has its place in the outworking of the Divine Plan. Happy we if we can hold fast to the impulse which first possessed us, perhaps a few years, perhaps a lifetime, ago, to say to the Lord "Here am I, send me", steadfast to the end of our days. We shall find that our labours have not been in vain; there will have been a harvest now, in this day and Age, and another, by far more abundant, in the coming Age when our Lord is manifest in the power of his Millennial kingdom.

NOTICES

Yeovil Convention. May 22-26, Hillgrove Ave. and Moose Hall. Details F. Binns, 102 Broad Street, Chesham, Bucks.

Chesham Convention. Sunday, 14 June, Elgiva Hall. Details F. Binns as above.

Blaby Convention. Blaby Social Centre, Blaby. Details P. Couling, 5 Styles Place, Yelvertoft, Northants.

Gone from us

Sis. I. Jones (Liverpool)
Bro. H. J. Pace (St. Leonards)
Bro. M. Pougher (Cosby)
Sis. A. Rugman (Cheltenham)
Sis. C. Shephard (Cardiff)
Sis. P. Stracy (Yeovil)

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

HAGAR THE BONDMAID

One of the most human stories of the Old Testament is that of the Egyptian slave-girl presented to Abraham by his childless wife Sarai for the purpose of providing an heir to his estate. Infamiliarity with the laws and social customs of the time has led many to condemn the proceeding, whilst St. Paul's use of the episode in the Epistle to the Galatians has tended to divert attention from the human aspect.

The story is related in the 16th and 21st chapters of Genesis. Abraham and Sarai, married for many years, had no children, and from the natural point of view it seemed their hopes would never be realised, Sarai was past normal child-bearing age. God had promised Abraham that from him would spring a great nation, and that in his seed all families of the earth would one day be blessed. How could the promise be fulfilled?

Abraham and Sarai came from the Sumerian city of Ur, on the lower Euphrates. From there they had migrated to Haran, on the upper Euphrates. Both these lands maintained marriage laws aimed at dealing with this problem, laws the records of which are extant to-day in legal tablets of those times which have been discovered. It was provided that in such a situation the wife was permitted to give one of her own slave-girls to her husband as a second wife, standing in an inferior position to the first, but, if a child was born, automatically becoming a freewoman. Her status as a wife could not then be repudiated.

This was the law which Sarai invoked; perfectly proper, and quite customary at the time. No kind of moral stricture ought to be passed on this couple; they did what every right-thinking individual of the day would endorse. To risk the passing of Abraham's estates into alien hands by failing to take this step would have been considered most reprehensible.

Sarai's choice fell upon Hagar, a slave-girl whom she had brought back with her from Egypt at the time of the household's sojourn there some few years previously. She is called an Egyptian but that may only mean that she was born in Egypt; Hagar is a Hebrew and not an Egyptian name and there were many Semitic Hebrews infiltrating into Lower Egypt at that time and nothing is more natural than when Pharaoh gave Abraham man-servants and maid-servants, as related in Gen. 12, he should thus dispose of a few unwanted Semitic immigrants.

It is not likely that Hagar had any choice in the matter. She was a slave-girl; slavery was an established part of the social order and she had to do as

she was told. At the same time it can be borne in mind that in patriarchal times the entire establishment of a man like Abraham would be conducted more or less like a large family and the bond-servants enjoyed as full and contented a life as sons and daughters of the house, subject to the performance of their assigned duties. The prospect of becoming the mother of the heir to the estate and a freewoman into the bargain was probably attractive and Hagar might well have considered herself fortunate. When, a little later on, she found that she was indeed to become a mother, the exultation of the moment seems to have overcome her discretion and she demonstrated her feelings in the presence of Sarai, and that was a sad mistake. The account says "*her mistress was despised in her eyes*". That might mean merely that Hagar was guilty of "showing off", by look or word taunting Sarai, or, more seriously, that she made an endeavour to usurp Sarai's position as first wife on the strength of the expected heir. This latter action was condemned by the law and could result in the offender being relegated to the former position of a slave, at least until a son was born.

Sarai, not unnaturally, complained to her husband, and he, obviously with the provision of the law in mind, responded "*thy maid is in thy hands; do to her as it pleaseth thee*". So Sarai "*dealt hardly*" with her. The expression does not mean that she used physical violence, only that she took away her privileges and reduced her to her former condition of bond-service.

The indignity was too much for Hagar; she ran away. She seems to have been a high-spirited girl who could not brook humiliation; it may be also that she did not fully understand the position and believed, erroneously, that she had now forfeited the right to bear an heir to Abraham. She seems to have been possessed of pluck, too, for, though alone, she headed for her native Egypt. Abraham must have sent out men to find and bring her back but if so, they were unsuccessful. It was the angel of the Lord who found her, sitting by a spring of water "*in the wilderness, in the way to Shur*". The wilderness of Shur was the district of Western Sinai adjacent to Egypt. Hagar must have covered at least a hundred miles through sparsely inhabited territory, subject to all the dangers liable to befall a solitary woman travelling alone, before the angel found her.

At this point there is revealed Hagar's simple but sterling faith in God. To the angel's question, from which she discerned at once that he knew all about her, "*Hagar, Sarai's maid, whence camest thou? and whither wilt thou go?*" she answered

simply and without excuse *"I flee from the face of my mistress Sarai"*. Whatever of pride or arrogance there might have been in her former attitude back at Hebron, *there was none now*. When the angel told her to return to her mistress and submit herself to whatever might befall she was quite ready to obey.

The angel appeared in the form of a man, but Hagar knew him for a messenger of God. How she knew, she would have been at a loss to explain. His authoritative bearing, his knowledge of her past, and perhaps an inward illumination of mind bestowed upon her at that moment by the Holy Spirit, all together made her certain of the fact. So when he began to tell her what the future held she listened and accepted it in child-like faith. She would bear a son, and she was to call his name Ishmael. He would be a "wild-ass" man—not "wild man" as in the A.V.—a term which likened him to the noblest animal of the desert, the wild ass, free and untamed, loving the wide open spaces and beholden to no man. To this day the true sons of Ishmael, the Bedouin of the deserts, have been like that. God had looked upon Hagar and her affliction, had himself named her son as yet unborn, and had a place for him in his world.

Here the reverential spirit of Hagar comes to the top. *"She called the name of the God who spoke to her 'Thou art a God of seeing' for she said 'Have I really seen God and remained alive after seeing him?'"* (Gen. 16, 13 RSV). Like all of her times, Hagar believed that no one could see God, and live; He is too great to be comprehended by mortal eyes. Yet now He had manifested himself to her in the guise of a man, and she had looked upon him, and lived! *"Thou art a God of seeing"* or as the A.V. has it *"Thou God seest me"*. Many a distressed or despairing heart since the Egyptian bondmaid's day has been comforted and strengthened by that same realisation. *"The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good."* *"Your Father in Heaven knoweth what things ye have need of."*

In after days that spring which marked the turning-point of Hagar's life was called Lahairoi, meaning *"The spring of the Living One who sees me"*. It eventually became the headquarters of Isaac when he had acquired a household of his own. At this present time, with, perhaps, a sense of peace in her heart and some hope for the future, Hagar retraced her steps that hundred miles to Hebron and quietly took her assigned place in the household, trustfully waiting on the Lord to reveal his further will. And in due time Abraham looked upon his first-born son. Who can doubt that Hagar had told him every detail of the encounter at the spring in the wilderness and Abraham realised that the hand of God was in this thing? At this time, of course, he fully believed that in Ishmael he had

received the promised "seed" through whom his line would be perpetuated and the Divine promise which guaranteed blessing to all families of the earth be fulfilled.

But God had planned otherwise.

* * *

Something like sixteen or seventeen years had passed. Quiet years, in the main, for Abraham's settlement at Hebron, marked towards their close by two noteworthy events. The cities of the Plain, Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboiim, were destroyed by fire from heaven on account of their wickedness, and Abraham's wife Sarai, at last, presented him with a son. For a short time after the destruction of the cities Abraham, with Sarai, and Hagar and Ishmael, and the household, had migrated to Gerar, not far from the spring where Hagar had talked with the angel, but now they were all back at Hebron again and Isaac was being weaned and there was to be a great feast.

The birth of Isaac had of course changed the situation as regards Ishmael. The son of the first wife automatically took precedence as the heir and Ishmael now lost all his rights of primogeniture. At his father's death he would be entitled only to such provision as his father made for him. Whether the sixteen-year-old lad was unduly concerned about this is not related and in all probability he was not. At any rate his mother had automatically become a freewoman at his birth and could not be enslaved again, so that for sixteen years past Hagar had enjoyed an acknowledged position as Abraham's second wife and there was nothing Sarai could do about that. Whether or not any animosity existed between the two women is not recorded but in all circumstances it is hardly to be expected that relations were of the best. Sarai must have found it galling to reflect that the position existed in consequence of her own act, and need never have been instituted since she had after all given birth to a son of her own. Perhaps there was a nagging feeling that Ishmael, when grown to man's estate, might try to trick her son Isaac out of his rightful inheritance. Sarai does not seem to have possessed the calm faith in Divine oversight that characterised Abraham. He appears to have been content to leave it all with God; in the meantime he probably had to step in to keep the peace at times.

All this is suggested by Sarai's evident vindictiveness at the time of the feast. Despite her fame as the wife of Abraham, the "father of the faithful", a dispassionate view of the record does not show her up in a very good light. The account says that she saw the son of Hagar *"mocking"*. It does not say who was being mocked or what was the nature of the act but it is usually assumed that Ishmael was mocking or deriding Isaac, or the feast of which he was the centre. The word has a wide range of meaning, from the act of derisive or scorn-

ful laughter to that of making nonsensical sport, or "playing about" as we would say nowadays. It is used in this latter sense of Isaac with his wife Rebekah in Gen. 26. 8 and of Samson "making sport" for the Philistines in Jud. 16. 25. It might well be that this is the sense of the word here, and that Ishmael was merely "larking about" with his young half-brother. Whatever it was, Sarai's ire was aroused and she went straight to her husband and demanded that Hagar and her son be expelled from the family circle and sent away. "*Cast out this bondwoman and her son*" she said contemptuously "*for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son*". Sarai must have known that God had already told Abraham that Isaac was to be his heir; the established laws under which they lived guaranteed the same, but still she feared Ishmael as a possible supplanter.

Abraham was reluctant to agree. He loved his son Ishmael; he himself was the legal husband of Hagar as well as of Sarai—under the laws then ruling she was a wife and not a concubine—and his innate sense of justice and uprightness told him that whatever this lad of sixteen had done could not justify the action demanded by Sarai. In any case, under Sumerian law, Ishmael could not be disowned or deprived of his home. But Sarai was adamant and Abraham evidently in great perplexity—until the Lord spoke to him.

This is where God comes back into the story. Abraham was to rest this matter, as he had learned to rest so many other matters before, in the providences of the Most High. He was to assent to his wife's wish and send Hagar and her son away. God would look after them and in due time Ishmael would become the father of a great nation without affecting the destiny planned for the sons of Isaac. "*Twelve princes shall he beget*" the Lord told Abraham, "*and I will make him a great nation*" (Gen. 17. 20). History is witness to the striking fulfilment of those words. Ishmaelite tribes extended over all Sinai and down the Red Sea coast into all Western Arabia; some of the great nations of Roman and mediæval times such as the Nabatheans were Ishmaelites, and the prophet Mahomet, founder of the Mohammedan faith, was himself a descendant of Ishmael. Ethnologically, a large proportion of the Arab world owes its descent to the son of Hagar.

There is something missing in the story telling how Abraham gave Hagar "*a piece of bread and a bottle of water*" and sent her away into the desert. No civilised man would treat any woman like that; certainly not a man like Abraham. The family encampment was at Hebron. To the south lay the dry and treeless desert, sun-baked by day and bitterly cold at night, which is to-day called the Negev and cultivated by colonies of Israelis under arduous conditions. There were inhabitants, roving

Bedouins of the desert, and nearer the sea-coast, Abimelech king of Gerar and his tribes. But to send a woman out into that waterless waste, alone and unprotected, was about as good as sending her to certain death. One might ask why, if Hagar had to go, Abraham with all his wealth and abundance of servants did not provide an escort with sufficient provisions to take her back to her native Egypt where she might expect to find friends. Nothing of this is suggested. The logical conclusion is that the Genesis story confines itself to the bare essentials and that if the full circumstances were known the proceeding would not seem so heartless. A closer scrutiny of the background appears to be desirable.

Abraham was a wealthy and influential stock-breeder. His household was located at Hebron but various allusions in Genesis make it clear that his flocks and herds roamed over an extensive territory covering the Judean highlands between Hebron and Beer-Sheba, and westward to what is known to-day as the Gaza Strip. The area measured some thirty miles by forty. There were other inhabitants, Canaanites and Hittites—Abraham's friendship with Ephron the Hittite, another powerful stock-breeder, is well known—and these all grazed their flocks and herds in the same land and got on fairly well together. Abraham, with his home and headquarters at Hebron, had shepherds and other workers scattered all over this country and there were probably settlements of these men and their families at strategic points. Almost certainly Beer-Sheba, in the far south, was one such point, for later on he transferred his headquarters to that place (Gen. 21). What more natural than that Abraham should have sent Hagar to one of his settlements, where she would have been provided for and their son grow to manhood, but out of the way of Sarai? According to the story Hagar departed from Hebron, and "*wandered in the wilderness of Beer-Sheba*", where she uttered her despairing cry to God and was heard. It might well be, then, that Abraham had instructed Hagar to make her way to Beer-Sheba and there settle with his herdsmen of that vicinity. According to the account he sent her away "*early in the morning*" which means at first light, about 5.0 a.m. The distance is twenty-six miles, through country where Abraham was known and respected and his employees to be found every few miles or so going about their business. Allowing for a rest in some shady place for the midday hours when the sun was fiercest, they could have been at Beer-Sheba before sunset. The piece of bread and bottle of water would then have been abundant provision for the day and all would have been well. Unfortunately Hagar missed her way. She may not have been far from the settlement at Beer-Sheba but she was in "the wilderness" and this would indicate

that she had strayed from the haunts of men and was perhaps headed for the Negev desert beyond Beer-Sheba. The water was spent; perhaps in some panic she pressed on despite the heat of the sun, meeting no man and recognising no landmark. The lad's strength began to fail first and he could not go on. In despair she laid him in the shade of "*one of the shrubs*"—the low-growing desert scrub—went away and dropped on the ground "*a good way off*" in a paroxysm of grief, "*for she said, Let me not see the death of the lad. And she lifted up her voice, and wept*".

It is significant that no word of reproach on her part is recorded. There seems to be unquestioning acceptance of the fate that appeared to be facing them both, and she gave way to grief without rancour.

There, alone in the desert and in her extremity, the angel of the Lord came to her the second time. "*The angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven . . . And God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water, and she went, and filled the bottle, and gave the lad drink*". All unknowingly, she must have wandered near a spring and in her distress not perceived it. So the promise was reiterated; Ishmael would live and inherit that which God had ordained for him.

It is a remarkable fact that of these two women, Hagar and Sarai, it was Hagar the bondmaid who on two occasions came in contact with the powers of Heaven for blessing; she saw God as it were in the angel in man's form and said reverently "*I have seen God*". Sarai the freewoman, with all her advantages, only saw the angel of God once, laughed disbelievingly at his words, lied about it afterwards, and earned the angel's reproach. (Gen. 18. 12-15). It would almost seem that the faith of Hagar, more simple perhaps, was at the same time more sincere and trusting. The Lord certainly spoke more tenderly to Hagar than He ever did to Sarai.

What happened next? The story leaves a gap. The succeeding verses in Gen. 21 tell of Ishmael's progress to manhood and a home in another part of the country. It is possible that Hagar did eventually find Beer-Sheba or whatever place to which she had been sent, and settled there with Abraham's workers. Abraham may well have visited his son there. But later on, perhaps as Ishmael grew to manhood, the question of setting up his own household must have occupied his mother's mind, and this may be the truth behind ch. 21 vs. 20-21. "*God was with the lad, and he grew, and dwelt in the wilderness, and became an archer and he dwelt in the wilderness of Paran; and his mother took him a wife out of the land of Egypt*". Paran was a hundred miles or more to the south-west of Beer-Sheba, on the way to Egypt and in the Sinai desert. This looks as though Ishmael determined to make his own career in a land as yet not closely peopled and well out of the way of Abraham's far-flung interests. There, in the desert, Ishmael settled, and married, and begat twelve sons, and earned himself a name which in the Arab world at least has achieved immortality.

It must not be thought that Ishmael was cut off from Abraham in later years. There must have been communication, perhaps some coming and going, between the two, and between Ishmael and Isaac, with whom friendly relations must always have existed. Gen. 25. 9 reveals this. Upon the death of Abraham seventy years later "*his sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah*". Isaac must have known exactly where to find Ishmael so that the latter could be present at the old home in time for the last respects. Sarai, of course, was long since dead.

Of Hagar we hear nothing more. Whether she ever saw her husband Abraham again we do not know. We leave her, the matriarchal head of a rapidly growing tribe of desert Bedouin, quiet and serene in her faith, perhaps always conscious of the goodness of God who had been to her all that He had promised.

Alabaster boxes

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

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

THREE YEARS IN ARABIA

It was not that Ananias doubted the Lord, or questioned his wisdom, or wondered if he had interpreted the mind of the Spirit aright. It was just that the message and the commission was so unexpected and incredible that he was surprised into faint expostulation, almost as though all the ethics of the case were suspect. As a servant of the Lord he was prepared to go anywhere and do anything that he was bidden, but normally he was able to see the end to which his efforts were tending. As a Christian his work was to convert men to Christ and then act as pastor to lead them in the way of Christ. Ananias had been long enough in the Way himself to know that the essential prerequisite of all to whom he thus ministered must be repentance, and the full, wholehearted acceptance of the Lord Jesus Christ and of his power in the life; after that a fixed conviction that all salvation is through Christ and that one day Christ would return to earth in the glory of his Kingdom and reconcile to himself everyone of earth's multitudes who could possibly be persuaded to turn from their evil ways, and live. But for the present the call was restricted, confined to those relative few who would give themselves wholly and unreservedly to the service of the Master, that they might live and reign with him in the administration of his Kingdom when the blessed day should come. So it was with astonishment and perhaps dismay that his Lord in the familiar vision gave him a totally unfamiliar and unexpected instruction. *"Go into the street which is called Straight, and enquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus; for behold, he prayeth and hath seen in a vision a man called Ananias coming in and putting his hands upon him, that he might receive his sight."* (Acts 9. 11-12).

Saul of Tarsus! Ananias was thunderstruck. This was the man who had come into Damascus with the avowed intent of harrying and persecuting the disciples of Jesus and taking them prisoner to Jerusalem. In his own congregation Ananias had some who had fled from Jerusalem to escape the terrible evils that were being inflicted upon the Christians there by this same Saul. Whether Ananias had heard anything of the circumstances of Saul's arrival and of his blindness does not appear, but that he knew of his reputation and of his mission is plain, *"Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem; and here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name."* (vs. 13-14). Ananias was a man of faith and of trust; he knew and served his Lord in implicit confidence, but this mission cut across all that he knew or could imagine of the Master's actions and interests. The

less any of them had to do with this arch-persecutor of the saints the better. To go and seek him out was only asking for trouble. Surely the Master knew how inveterate an enemy to his cause was this man!

Jesus' words cut across his thoughts—and words which must have enshrined a great deal more information than is recorded in the short account of Acts 9, for when Ananias did at last go to Saul he knew what he evidently did not know at this moment, that Jesus had appeared to Saul in the way. *"Go thy way"* was the calm rejoinder *"for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel, for I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake"*. And at that Ananias hesitated no longer. If Saul was indeed a chosen vessel then, despite all outward appearances, he was the Lord's, and Ananias must haste to receive him into the community of the faithful. Explanations could wait; the Master knew what He was about, and the servant could do naught but obey.

So it came about that the blind Pharisee, sitting quietly in the house of Judas as he had sat, silent and fasting, for three days past, heard an unfamiliar voice, a voice of calmness and sweetness, uttering words that he had never heard applied to himself before. *"Brother Saul"* they said *"Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, that appeared to thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Spirit."* How did this man know—how did any man know—that Jesus had appeared to him in the way? That must have been the first thought which flashed across the keen, perceptive mind of Saul. That he had been led into Damascus a blind man might well have become generally known, an item of gossip. Something of the vivid light and thunderous noise out there on the hills above the city might have been recounted by the men of his party; but none of them knew of his sight of the risen Lord or of the words he heard. How then did this stranger know anything about it? *"That appeared to thee in the way as thou camest"*! If, during those three day's meditation, Saul had wondered whether after all the whole thing was a chimera of his imagination, Ananias's words must have settled the question for him. Only the Lord himself, the One who had appeared to and spoken to Saul, could have imparted the information to this Ananias. There was no alternative; he could only accept the fact, and believe.

What went on in Saul's mind during those three days can only be surmised. His creature comforts would be well looked after by Judas, who was evidently his pre-arranged host in Damascus and sure

to be, like himself, a Pharisee and in sympathy with his mission. What Judas thought of receiving a Nazarene into his house and watching him receive his fellow-Pharisee as a convert to the hated faith can only be imagined; it may be that Saul did not continue in the hospitality of Judas beyond that point. But during the three days his mind must have been exclusively concerned with the amazing thing which had happened to him and all that it implied. The Old Testament prophecies must have come to him in a new light. The baffling questions which had tormented his mind during the journey were baffling no longer; the answers were all falling neatly into place. He began now to see what was meant by the sufferings of Christ which he must undergo, and only afterward enter his glory. The fifty-third chapter of Isaiah became luminous and full of meaning, the blindness and hardness of heart of those who had rejected the Lord's Messiah stood plainly revealed to him and he realised how he himself had been one such blind and hard of heart. Those three days were by no means the end of Saul's soul-searching and he was not yet ready for the work of his life, but he was prepared to accept induction into the Church of Christ at the hands of the saintly Ananias and that was a momentous thing.

So he listened to the quietly spoken words "*Brother Saul . . . be filled with the Holy Spirit*" and as he listened, a peace came over his soul such as he had never known and something like scales fell from his eyes and his sight returned and he looked up into the face of the man above him and he knew that his past was over and done with and he was now Christ's bondsman for ever and he rejoiced, with a humility that was new and strange to him. Saul the leader became Saul the led. He came into Damascus to take Ananias and bring him to the Sanhedrin but Ananias had taken him captive and was bringing him to Jesus. He had lost Moses and the Law, but he had received Christ and the Spirit. His thoughts were still in a chaotic jumble, but even as he began outwardly to behold his surroundings, so inwardly he began to glimpse something of the things of the Spirit.

A certain amount of quasi-medical speculation has centred upon the "scales" which fell from Saul's eyes. The Greek word indicates something which stripped or peeled off, like a skin. Something of a similar nature is recorded in the Apocryphal Book of Tobit in Nineveh who likewise was blind and received his sight. It is said that records of the same affection were left by Hippocrates, the reputed founder of medical knowledge, who lived in Greece about 400 B.C. Suggestions have been made that the physical effect of the blinding light shining upon Saul's upturned eyes out there on the Damascus road was to cause some disease of the eyes which resulted in the formation of the scales

which afterward fell away. Some have connected this possibility with Saul's "thorn in the flesh" and hazarded the suggestion that he afterward suffered from glaucoma or other affliction affecting his sight; several allusions in his epistles do support the likelihood of such being indeed the case. On the other hand one might well question whether the Lord would see fit to strike with near blindness the one He had chosen for a demanding and exhausting life of service as the price of the revelation he was to behold; Saul's weak eyesight might well be attributable to more normal origins and although his eyes might quite possibly have been inflamed and temporarily injured by the experience, as would those of any man exposed to intense and searing light, the three days' blindness could conceivably have been, in part at least, of a psychological nature, and the emotional effect of the coming of Ananias, his words and his actions all that was needed to complete the cure and give Saul his sight again.

For a short time, "certain days", Saul remained with the disciples at Damascus. Of Judas, his erstwhile host, we hear no more. He had evidently washed his hands of the renegade. But Saul had found new friends, and was rapidly assimilating himself to their fellowship. He was baptised at once; his strength of character and firmness of decision is shown in his insistence upon that act before he so much as broke his three days' fast. The same resolute pushing forward which had made him so dangerous an enemy to the Christian faith was now being turned to good account and was very shortly to make him an even more dangerous enemy to the opponents of Christianity, first in Damascus itself, and then in the outer world.

There is a certain amount of uncertainty about Saul's next move. According to vs. 20 of chapter 9 he "*straightway preached Christ in the synagogues*" that is, to the orthodox Jewish community, and to such good effect that the Jews took counsel to kill him and he was let down by night over the city wall in a basket and escaped to Jerusalem. After a short time at Jerusalem he aroused the enmity of the Jews there and had once again to escape, this time going to his native city of Tarsus, where he drops out of the New Testament story for a time. On the other hand he himself, writing to the Galatians many years later (Gal. 1. 17) says that immediately after his vision of the risen Lord he went into Arabia for three years and returned to Damascus, then going to Jerusalem to see Peter and James. It seems evident that this three years in Arabia must have come immediately after his reception into the fellowship of the Damascus disciples but before he started preaching in the Damascus synagogues, and therefore should be placed between verses 19 and 20 of Acts 9.

Where was the "Arabia" into which Paul went and why did he go there? Perhaps the second question is easier to answer than the first, and certainly of greater importance. Almost certainly Saul, after his conversion, impressed with the magnitude and majesty of the Divine commission he had received and conscious how much he had yet to learn, felt the need for a prolonged period of meditation and study. "*I conferred not with flesh and blood,*" he says to the Galatians "*but I went into Arabia, and returned after three years*". Those must have been three years of quiet but intense study and thought, going over the whole of the Old Testament prophecies, already so familiar to his mind, but now in a new light and against a different background. Formerly he could only see Moses, now he could see Christ in all the Scriptures. There is not much doubt that the outlines of all those brilliant arguments and expositions of the Pauline books in the New Testament—Romans, Ephesians, Colos-

sians and so on—were drawn during those three years in Arabia. The term was a vague one at the time, and it covered a long stretch of territory from the wilderness east of Damascus right down through Edom into Sinai, and Paul may, as has been so often suggested, have spent the time on the slopes of Mount Sinai itself or he might merely have lived a secluded life, unnoticed and unknown, in one of the country villages or Bedouin encampments on the east side of the Jordan not a hundred miles from Damascus itself. It matters little; there, in the place of his choice, he came to know the leading and the illumination of the Holy Spirit, and there he was transformed from the efficient organiser and bigoted zealot he had been in former days, to the most indefatigable missionary and profound theologian the Christian Church has ever known.

And so, when he was ready, and the Holy Spirit so directed, Saul came back to Damascus.

WATCH AND PRAY

"What I say unto you I say unto all, Watch." (Mark 13. 37).

Our Lord placed much stress on watchfulness. He taught it by direct exhortation, illustrated it by several parables and practised it in his life to such an extent that if the question were put to us, when shall we watch? we must reply, Always, every moment of consciousness. The standard set up by a review of our Lord's example and teaching on this matter is exceedingly high; indeed it seems there is nothing more difficult for a Christian to practice.

Regarding watchfulness from a general aspect, it is usual to associate it with ourselves alone, but the Bible assures us that God, the angels, and Satan, all watch. There is also the special prerogative to be exercised by those whose privilege it is to serve the Church, besides the general watchfulness of the whole Church in respect of the Lord's return, which in practice is an individual matter for each one of us.

God Watches. This is the all important thing. Is He watching over and for us? The Psalmist says in Psalm 127. 1. "*Except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain*" and the principle holds good whether it be a city or an individual. Is He our Father? Can we go to him and claim a Father's protecting care? If so, we need not fear. Psalm 121 is full of God's loving care for Israel, "He watching over Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps." If He took such an interest in them, how

much more does He watch over us who are recognised as being in Christ, personally represented before him by his own beloved Son? This psalm alone will furnish material for much thought and comfort. God is represented there as our protector, the preserver of our soul, and as keeping us in the way of life, never for one moment relaxing his vigilance. We may stumble, but He knows and seeks to restore us. We may forget him, but He remains faithful. We may go astray but He will never leave us or forsake us unless we wilfully reject him. In 1. Cor. 10. 13 we are assured of God's watchfulness in the matter of our temptation. He is watchful to see that we are not tried beyond our capacity; there is always a way of escape.

Jesus time and again bade his disciples to watch, and not only so, but He left minute instructions regarding watchfulness. It is his counsel for the whole of our spiritual life. Why did He lay so much stress upon it? Undoubtedly it was the fruit of his own experience; He had realised it all through his earthly career. He examined everything that was presented to him, having the Father's will pre-eminently before his mind. On the eve of his death He urged his disciples repeatedly to watch and pray; even in the dreadful ordeal of the garden of Gethsemane it was upon his mind. It seems as though in spite of all his personal suffering one great object was before him, if by any means He might give them the full benefit of his experience

and teach them the necessity of meeting trial and temptation by watchfulness and prayer. When He was face to face with the crisis of his life, when it might reasonably be expected that He would be concerned only with his own need, we find him rising from his knees, going to his disciples and finding them asleep and waking them, saying, "*Could ye not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation.*" He forgot himself, desiring only to help them to meet their comparatively light temptations with the same weapon as had brought him success. No human sympathy could be found for him, but for them the love and sympathy of the Son of God was expressed in the most practical manner at the very time He was longing for theirs. With what regard then we should seek to watch and carefully consider what it cost him to help us. In season and out of season to himself, He ceased not to warn us. Watchfulness was not given as a command, or as a piece of advice such as a parent might give his son when starting out in the world, but as the last word of love to those for whom He was about to give his life, his dying wish. Does not this enthrall us and make us wish to examine his words again and respond to them to the very best of our ability? We cannot watch continually without a living motive to sustain us; it would be too arduous, too wearying, but when love demands it what is there too hard? If we really loved him as much as we love some of those around us we should delight in him more than we do, and we should find his yoke easy and his burden light. If we desire to love him better, our prayers will continually express that desire, and He will reveal himself to us. Then we shall see things in a new light; place fresh values on everything, and in Christ become overcomers. *Watchfulness is love in action.*

Watchfulness pre-supposes vigilance, wakefulness, to take heed, to observe. It implies keenness, placing duty to the Lord above every other. It is always coupled with prayer. We have already seen that God must watch for us, otherwise it is useless for us to watch. Jesus said, "*Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation.*" Paul in Col. 4. 2 speaks in the same strain, and, like Jesus, his last words to Timothy included an exhortation to be watchful in

all things. (2. Tim. 4. 5). How can we be delivered from entering into temptation, seeing that we are surrounded by it, and even more, seeing that it comes from within also? Here lies the reason for prayer; watchfulness alone would not save us, or we should attribute overcoming to our own strength. As we are fallen by nature how can we watch against evil in our own strength? So He bids us pray, taking our joys, temptations, trials, victories and failures to him that we might remember that all our ways are ordered of the Lord. What room is there for the selfish counsel our hearts would dictate? What opportunity is there for the Adversary's suggestions to take root if we watch our thoughts, words and conduct by applying the principles of the Word to them and seek his blessing and guidance continually? Why should we not lift up our hearts to God in mental prayer at any time, wherever we are, whatever we are doing? There is a tremendous power latent in that.

The Scriptures show also that Satan watches, and the Apostle in 1. Pet. 5. 8. tells us that we are to be sober, vigilant and watchful that we may resist him, steadfast in the faith. James tells us that if we resist him he will flee from us, and our Lord said, "*Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation*". The watchfulness of Satan may be defeated by being vigilant ourselves. If we do not watch there is the possibility of being devoured.

In Rev. 3. 1-5 the Church at Sardis was exhorted to watch and strengthen the things that remain, and some were specially commended because they had kept their garments pure. This is to be the aim and object of watchfulness. If we fail to watch to keep ourselves pure we shall be judged and found wanting in an hour when we think not. Have we set our hearts on being with him and being accounted worthy? Then let us watch and not let our garments be defiled by anything impure either from within or without. Let us set ourselves this daily task for love of him who will not be ashamed to confess our names before God and his holy angels.

*Teach us in watchfulness and prayer
To wait for thine appointed hour;
And fit us by thy grace to share
The triumphs of thy conquering power.*

There is no preaching of the truth more forcible than the silent influence of a consistent Christian character, bearing in richness and luxuriousness the fruits of the Spirit, which are love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, fidelity, meekness, and self-control.

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

THE COMING OF THE KING

3. "He cometh with clouds"

A series of studies
concerning the
Second Advent

Several times is it said of our Lord's Second Advent that He comes in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. This imagery is taken from the seventh chapter of Daniel where "one like the Son of Man" comes thus and is brought near before the "Ancient of Days" to receive the dominion of earth and an everlasting kingdom that shall never pass away. Behind this lay the memory, deeply engraved on Israel's national consciousness, of the cloud and fire of Mount Sinai where God first revealed himself to them and fixed for ever in their minds the idea that his presence and power, his judgments and his blessings, were concealed in and revealed by the dark storm clouds and the fiery radiance that crowned the Mount.

It is probable that the early Christians, familiar as they were with the symbolism of Old Testament prophecy (technically called "apocalyptic") understood these allusions in a metaphorical sense, but it was perhaps inevitable in later centuries, as the interpretation of Old and New Testament passed increasingly into the hands of Western theologians unfamiliar with ancient Hebrew thought-forms and influenced greatly by the limited knowledge of the physical universe characteristic of the Middle Ages, that men should tend to understand them in a purely literal manner. Examples of mediæval art abound in which the Lord is depicted descending towards the earth seated or standing upon a cloud, or cleaving the skies with an attendant train of angels surrounded by a mass of stormclouds interspersed with strokes of lightning. It becomes necessary in this our day to re-examine this conception with great care if the true purport of these statements is to be understood. The Old Testament is full of allusions to the power and presence of God as manifested in cloud and fire. The majesty and solemnity of massive storm-cloud formations with their attendant crashing thunder and brilliant lightning—so much more intense in tropical latitudes—must have suggested to men at a very early date the idea of God coming upon them for judgment. The spectacular scenes at Mount Sinai during the Exodus, where for some three months the Israelites, encamped in the plain below, saw the summit of the mountain shrouded by masses of clouds from which appeared lightning and fire accompanied by thunder, and knew that within that fearsome place Moses was as it were face to face with God, was sufficient to fix this conception of the Deity in the minds of all Israel for ever. So the "pillar of cloud by day and the flaming fire by night" which was with them through all the forty years' wanderings, and led them at last to the

Promised Land, was in truth a manifestation of God to them. The same visible Divine glory which gave them blessings of confidence and leadership in the wilderness was the executor of judgment upon the rebellious, as in the case of Korah and his followers, when the same glory blazed out from the Sanctuary and destroyed the enemies of the Lord. So the cloud and fire very soon became both symbol and manifestation of the invisible God moving into action for blessing and judgment.

The same idea is exemplified in the recorded visions of God seen by some of the Hebrew prophets. Ezekiel, beholding in the open desert the glory of the Lord, saw it against a background of cloud and dazzling light—so intense that he could see little else but the shining cherubim, attendant upon the chariot of God. (Ezek. 10). Isaiah, seeing a parallel vision in the Temple at Jerusalem, experienced the same combination of radiant glory and obscuring cloud—the Temple was filled with smoke, he says, remembering how in earlier times the Divine Presence was a "cloud and smoke by day and the shining of a flaming fire by night" (Isa. 4. 5). But the most eloquent exposition of this poetic representation of God arising to action is surely that in Psalm 18, especially impressive as rendered by the R.S.V. "*the earth reeled and rocked; the foundations of the mountains trembled . . . smoke went up from his nostrils and devouring fire from his mouth; glowing coals flamed forth from him. He bowed the heavens, and came down; thick darkness was under his feet . . . He made darkness his covering around him, his canopy thick clouds dark with water. Out of the brightness before him there broke through his clouds hailstones and coals of fire.*" This is what the prophet Joel had in mind when he described the coming of the Day of the Lord. "*I will show wonders in the heavens, and in the earth, blood and fire and pillars of smoke*" (Joel 3. 30), the piled up masses of dark cumulus thunder-cloud being the "pillars of smoke" to which he referred.

This is the foundation upon which is built Daniel's vision of the coming of the Son of Man as described in the seventh chapter of the Book of Daniel. The same background of storm-cloud and fire surrounding the majesty of God Most High, the fire darting out from before him to consume the powers of evil represented by the mystic "beasts" of the vision, and the clouds providing a setting for the resplendent figure of the triumphant Son of Man coming before the Most High to be formally invested with the Kingdom of earth and to receive the allegiance of all its inhabitants. The

same combination of judgment and blessing, in fire and cloud; the same basic idea that the majesty and the Person of Deity, not to be perceived directly by mortal man, is both concealed by, and manifested in, the cloud and the fire. And this same conception is carried into the New Testament, for the prophetic words of Jesus, and the ecstatic outburst of John the Revelator, both take their inspiration from this vision of Daniel. "I say unto you" declared Jesus to the High Priest at his arraignment "*hereafter shall ye see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven*" (Matt. 26. 64) and at that the High Priest rent his clothes, and cried out "*He hath spoken blasphemy*". Caiaphas knew full well what the words implied, that Jesus laid claim to being in his own person the fulfilment of Daniel 7, that He himself was the "Son of Man" seen in vision by the ancient prophet. And because Caiaphas knew that the prophetic vision was of the Messiah and he would not admit that the prisoner before him could possibly be Israel's Messiah, he charged him, logically enough from his own standpoint, with blasphemy. A few days earlier Jesus had said a very similar thing to his own disciples. Describing to them the order of events of his Advent, and following that aspect of the Advent which concerns his revelation of himself "as a thief" to his own watchful adherents prior to the general revelation to all, He said "*and then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven, and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory*" (Matt. 24. 30). John's outburst in the Book of Revelation is very similar, "*Behold he cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him; and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen.*" (Rev. 1. 7). Now both of these statements combine the symbolism of Daniel 7 with that of Zech. 12, in which at the Last Day the people look upon the One whom they rejected and break down in an agony of mourning and repentance for their blindness and folly. The prophetic visions of Daniel 7 and Zech. 12-14 are thus linked together as having joint reference to this outwardly spectacular aspect of the Second Advent and it is because of this that a clear understanding of these "clouds of heaven" is so important.

It will not fail to be noticed that in these references to the coming of the Son of Man in the clouds of heaven the picture is that of something that is universally seen or discerned. Whereas the returning Lord comes first to his own followers, the Church, "as a thief", in such fashion that only the "watchers" are appraised of his coming and the world in general see and hear nothing untoward and know not what is going on, when He comes "in the clouds of heaven" the whole world will know

about it. There will be no doubt as to the fact of his Advent; moreover, there will be obvious signs of repentance and acceptance of him as Lord, and that denotes what may be termed an advanced stage in the succession of events which comprise the full range of the Advent. It is very important to note here that the "mourning" of Matt. 24. 30 and the "wailing" of Rev. 1. 7 is not, as is sometimes thought, a sign of terror or consternation but one of repentance and acceptance. Both these texts derive from Zech. 12 and must therefore bear the same meaning as the "mourning" of that chapter, and that quite clearly is a mourning of repentance. The coming in the clouds of heaven therefore must refer to a point in the end of the Age when resistance to the incoming Messianic Kingdom has measurably subsided and the time has come for *earth's new King openly to take his power and commence his beneficent administration*. There is a factor in Jesus' words to Caiaphas which highlights this point. Caiaphas himself, and presumably the members of the Sanhedrin sitting with him, are "*hereafter*" to see him coming in the clouds of heaven. To do that they must be here on earth, alive and in possession of their normal senses, and Caiaphas and all his colleagues are dead, have been dead for nearly two thousand years, not to be raised from the dead until the "resurrection at the last day", to use the words of Martha attesting her faith at the awakening of Lazarus. There must therefore be a sense in which the "coming in the clouds" is continuing even after the general resurrection of the dead has commenced, and this itself is a process which does not begin until the earliest phases of the Advent have become a fact and the power of the Messianic Kingdom is operating in the earth.

Notwithstanding this consideration, it is clear that the coming in the clouds must at least begin to have its fulfilment before the general resurrection, for there is one more New Testament allusion back to Dan. 7, and that is the description in Revelation 14 of the harvest of the earth. Here, in a definite "Second Advent" sequence, the Revelator sees "*a white cloud, and upon the cloud one like unto a Son of Man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle*". (Rev. 14. 14). This visitant from the skies proceeds to reap the harvest of the earth and immediately thereafter follows the treading of the winepress of the wrath of God, clear symbols of the man-made strife and turmoil which forms so great a part of the judgment with which this Age will end. The "white" cloud is one that is gleaming and glistening—the same allusion appears in Matt. 17. 2 and several other instances—and here there is the same association of cloud and light, betokening coming judgment and blessing, that we have in the Old Testament. It is to be noted here that the A.V. has incorrectly

rendered verse 14 "one like unto the Son of Man" as it has in Dan. 7, whereas in both instances the Greek and Hebrew is in the singular "a son of man", a man-like being, one of the sons of men. The application of the expression to our Lord, who called himself "the Son of Man" is correct, but it is a matter of interpretation and not of translation. John saw a resplendent king-like figure in the form of a man on that cloud; like Daniel, who saw the same human figure in his vision, he knew it to be a symbol for the personal coming and presence of the Lord Jesus Christ, resplendent in his Divinity, without any reference to whether the appearance is literally visible to the natural sight or not. Every element in the vision is a symbol of a more profound underlying reality.

This fact helps to illuminate 1 Thess. 4. 17 where the members of Christ's Church, at the time of their resurrection, are said to join the Lord "in the clouds". It is a fundamental of Second Advent theology that the first event of the Advent is the raising of the "dead in Christ" and the "change" of the living saints that they might together be translated into the clouds to meet the Lord. In olden times when Heaven was believed to be "just beyond the bright blue sky" it was natural to think of these as the literal clouds, and the meeting as taking place in space just beyond those clouds, en route to that heaven. Now that it is more generally realised that the resurrection of the "saints" is a "change" to a celestial state and a totally different order of being in which terrestrial objects and conditions have no place, that conception is not so fitting. There may well be thought something incongruous in the idea of that wonderful meeting with our Lord in all the glory and power of celestial nature having to take place within the confines of a bank of fog floating only a mile or so above the surface of our planet. When it is seen that the usage of the symbol is to indicate that the meeting takes place out of the view of men and within the bounds of that period of combined judgment and blessing which is pictured by this "coming in the clouds" the way is open to a more spiritual and satisfying view of the "rapture of the Church".

The underlying meaning of all these allusions likening the Second Advent to the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven, then, embraces the progressive fashion in which the Advent is perceived by humanity in general. There are two associated principles, judgment and blessing, and God, unseen, is behind the sending of both. His storm-clouds of judgment and his bright light of blessing advances swiftly upon the world and men perceive their onset but do not see the Power behind them which is driving events on to their inevitable climax. What they do see is the figure of a man, one like a son of man, one like themselves, who once dwelt with them on earth and shared

their sorrows and healed their diseases and finally was put to death by them because they could not understand him, and who now comes again to them having all power in heaven and in earth to rule them in justice and wisdom until the last trace of evil has been purged away and the human race has attained its destiny. They do not see all this at once; at first the clouds do not more than mark the disappearance from the terrestrial scene of those who have been watching for his appearing and have already seen the *astrape*, the early dawnlight, flaming over the eastern hills to tell that the time has come. It must be so, for those who thus go to meet their Lord "in the clouds" must later on be revealed with him to all the world as his associates and willing followers in the work of world evangelism which will then commence. And so the picture of the one "like a son of man" appearing in the clouds for judgment and blessing merges with those of passages like Rev. 19 and Zech. 14 where that same son of man becomes a Rider on a white horse descending from the heavens, accompanied by armies of his followers, to the execution of judgment and the termination of the Age preparatory to the blessing that will follow.

The clouds of heaven, then, picture the onset of judgment and blessing associated with the end of this Age when the works of man perish in utter confusion. In the early stage of this period the resurrection and "change" of the Church takes place, thus fulfilling 1 Thess. 4. 17. Next comes the disintegration of world institutions and the "kingdoms of this world". Men will only gradually come to see that this disintegration is inevitable and that there is "no way out", the expression which is the literal sense of Jesus' words in Luke 21. 26 describing this time. Only then, when the Rider on the white horse is apparent to men and they realise that the powers of Heaven are concerned in this cataclysmic downfall of human institutions, will it be true that they "see the Son of Man" in "power and great glory". But once they have thus seen the Son of Man they will not lose the vision, for the time of judgment will pass and the time of blessing will come. The Son of Man will still be in the clouds of heaven, no longer against the dark background of stormclouds, but resplendent in the radiance of light. This is where the Millennial Kingdom is established in power and this is where Caiaphas will experience the fulfilment of Jesus' words of so long ago. Awaking from death he will see for himself the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven. For men like Caiaphas they will still be clouds of judgment, for even then it must remain true that what a man soweth, that he shall also reap, and retribution for the past cannot be avoided even although repentance may ultimately bring cleansing and a fresh start.

In a sense the Son of Man will remain seen in the

clouds of heaven during the entire Millennial Age, in that the glories of that Age and the progressive elimination of evil will be tangible evidences of his presence. Elihu's magnificent conclusion to his defence of God in the debates of Job (Job 37, 21-24 LXX) is the finest Biblical expression of this truth. *"For the light is not visible to all; it shines afar off in the heavens as that which is from him in the clouds. From the north come the clouds shining like gold; in these, great are the glory and honour of the Almighty. We do not find another his equal in strength . . . wherefore man shall be in awe of him and the wise in heart shall reverence him."*

After the storm, the calm. After the darkness, the golden light of Messiah's kingdom. The light is there, mingled with the storm clouds, but it has not yet penetrated all the darkness, and the people who sit in darkness have not seen the great light. But it will come. "From the north come the clouds shining like gold." Nothing can hinder their advance. And in the glory of those shining clouds men will see the power of God and know that, at last, the Lord from heaven has returned to earth and established that new order of things which the prophet so long ago promised would be "the desire of all nations".

To be continued.

PROGRESSIVE TRUTH

"Science is knowledge, and the primary characteristic of knowledge is not that it is for ever changing but that it is for ever growing. Of course, all growth implies change, so that science must continually change—like the tree which is for ever budding out in new directions—but this is only a secondary effect. The correct comparison is not with sand-castles, which change because they are continually washed away and replaced, but with a vast building which changes as one floor is built on top of another, or a new wing is built where none stood before. The building is not like a mediæval cathedral, each building after his own taste and fancy. It is an embodiment of scientific truth, and the truths of science are the same no matter who discovers them. Whatever artificers build the structure, the blue-prints have previously been drawn by Nature herself." (*Sir James Jeans*).

That pronouncement, by one of the most enlightened scientists of this century, might well be

spiritualised and the word "doctrine" substituted for "science". After all, doctrine is the science of the things of God, and we Christians should expect that our doctrines remain established, consistent, yet ever growing, affording deeper and clearer views of Divine truth and a more accurate understanding of the Divine Plan, but unchanged in their fundamentals. The great truths of the Christian faith were first of all proclaimed by the apostles and prophets, and if we think that we hold and understand doctrines that were hidden from Paul and Peter we simply betray our own egotism and spiritual short-sightedness. What we do see is a greater superstructure built upon the doctrine, because two millenniums separate us from the apostles and prophets and there has been much development. The foundations remain, just as they were set by those faithful "fathers in God" of olden time.

"What lack I yet?"

This young man who came to Jesus enquiring "What lack I yet?" was, evidently, one who was in many respects very exemplary. From his youth up he had carefully observed the Divine law, and had sought scrupulously to fashion his character in conformity to its precepts. The enquiry, especially under these circumstances, indicated most commendable candour, thoughtful consideration, and realisation that by the deeds of the law no flesh had yet gained the life it promised for obedience, as well as faith in the new and wonderful teacher to show him more perfectly the way of life. All of these were most promising indications of discipleship. In Mark 10 21 it says: *"Then Jesus, beholding him"*, and on this it has been commented beautifully: *"A life of moral purity, sincerity,*

thoughtfulness and truth had left no marks of degradation, but had given to the countenance that frankness and nobility which always accompanies a transparent character". This is particularly true of all who have become his disciples.

Of the rich young ruler it is written that after he had heard the terms of discipleship he went away grieved. No doubt the heart of Jesus was sad also when He saw the blight of selfishness and selfwill attacking that promising half-blown rose of character. A crisis had come in the young man's life which he failed to pass successfully, and thenceforth the beauty of character so far attained must surely decline, for we hear nothing of his subsequent conversion.

THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS

Now and again there appears a revival of a very old suggestion relating to our Lord's death and resurrection, to the effect that the traditional understanding that Jesus died on the Cross at 3 p.m. on Friday and the resurrection was early on Sunday morning is incorrect, that He actually died on Wednesday afternoon and was raised early on Saturday evening. This, it is argued, is demanded by Matt. 12.40, in which Jesus is recorded as saying that just as Jonah was three days and three nights inside the whale so He himself would be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. That is in no way possible with the traditional Friday to Sunday understanding.

The problem cannot be dismissed out of hand. There are many intertwining threads of evidence both embodied in New Testament texts and in fields outside the New Testament. The latter factor tends to confirm that, whatever the length of time Jesus lay in the grave, his crucifixion took place on a Friday.

The time features associated with the First Advent have been exhaustively researched by various authorities for nearly a century past and it is established that Jesus was born on or around September 30th in the year 2 B.C. and that He died on the 14th day of the Jewish month Nisan in the year 33 A.D. on the eve of the Passover. Some of the leading scholars who have established this position are J. K. Fotheringham (*Journal of Theological Studies* Vol. 35/1954. pp.158/160); Parker and Dubberstein, (*Babylonian Chronology 626 BC-AD 75*, 1956); J. Finegan (*Handbook of Bible Chronology*); Dr. A. Rutherford (*Bible Chronology*). These concur that the 14th day from the emergence of the new moon at Jerusalem in that year commenced at 6.0 p.m. on Thursday, April 2nd and closed at 6 p.m. on Friday, April 3rd. It is, of course, as easy for astro-physicists to calculate the moon's phases backward in time to earlier years as it is to calculate forward into future years, as is always done for next year's almanacs. (For a presentation of that data respecting the dates of our Lord's birth and death see BSM March/April 1976.) The only near-by year in which Nisan 14 fell on a Wednesday is AD 34, March 24, but this year could not be reconciled with the known dates of Herod, John Baptist and joint High Priesthoods of Annas and Caiphas.

It follows that the relevant New Testament texts must be examined to see to what extent they do or do not support the view that our Lord was crucified on the Friday and raised, as the traditions of the Christian Church have insisted from the beginning, on Sunday. It will be remembered that the

early Christians always celebrated the first day of the week, Sunday, as the one commemorating the Resurrection, and this is significant.

Considering the circumstances of the Crucifixion, it is sometimes not realised that although the lamb for the Passover feast was slain on the 14th day, it was not until the evening of that day, i.e. at the beginning of the 15th, that the feast was held. This stemmed from the first institution, laid down in Exod. 12.6; the lamb was to be killed "*ben erebaim*", "*between the two evenings*", (see A.V. margin), meaning between the time the sun begins to decline towards the west and the time of actual sunset, whereas the Passover feast itself was to begin at the "*evening*" (*ereb*) of the 14th day (Exodus 12.18), i.e. 6.0 p.m., which is equivalent to the beginning of the 15th day as is stated in Lev. 23.5-6. (This period of slaying "*between the two evenings*" is said by Josephus ("*Wars of the Jews*" 6, 9, 3) to have been between 3 and 5 o'clock in his day, a few years after the Crucifixion.) The Mishnah, precepts of the Talmud, instruct that when the 14th day is the day before the Sabbath, as it was in this case, the slaying of first, the daily sacrifice in the Temple, and then the Passover lamb, could begin as early as 1.30. This is significant; at the moment our Lord died on the Cross the Passover lambs were actually being slain.

This day, Friday, is called in the New Testament "*the day of preparation*" (*paraskeue*)—Matt. 27.6, Mark 15.42, Luke 13.54, Jno. 19.14, 31, 42. The word does not appear elsewhere in the New Testament and it means the day immediately before the Sabbath or a feast in which preparations are made. Josephus ("*Antiquities*" 6.6.2) records a decree of Augustus Caesar in which the Jews were granted certain privileges "*on the sabbath-day, or on the day of preparation to it.*" F. F. Bruce in "*The Books and the Parchments*" p.68 (1950) remarks that this word is the modern Greek word for Friday and has the same meaning in ecclesiastical Latin, and in Scripture means "*the day before the Sabbath*", i.e. the sixth day. (Although the great feasts were also called sabbaths the general and real application of "*Sabbath*" is to the seventh day.) The expression, in Jno. 19.31, "*that sabbath day was an high day*", referring to the day after Jesus' death, is literally "*a great day*"—doubly sacred because it was both the weekly Saturday sabbath and also the first day of the Passover feast. Now how does this stand with regard to the texts which mention the third day in connection with the resurrection? There are some sixteen such occurrences and they should be examined closely.

The first group of eleven texts states quite

clearly that Jesus was to rise again during a span of three days, therefore before the third day had expired. These comprise Matt. 16.21; 17.23; 20.19; Mark 9.31; 10.34; Luke 9.22; 18.23; 24.7; 24.46; Acts 10.40; I Cor. 15.4. In all these texts the expression is "the third day" in which the article "the" is in the dative case so that "in" "on" "during" or "appertaining to" the third day is the grammatical meaning. To this concurrence of statement there is one exception, Mark 8.31, which instead of "(on) the third day" has "*meta*" inserted, meaning "after three days" which needs some thought. This particular saying of Jesus is also recorded in Matt. 16.21 and Luke 9.22, both of which have "(on) the third day". In what ancient manuscript the difference crept in is unknown, but it seems reasonable to accept Matthew and Luke against Mark in this instance as the "testimony of two witness" against one.

The other instance where *meta*, "after", appears is in the rather ambiguous plea of the priests to Pilate recorded in Matt. 27.63-64 "*We remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, after three days I will rise again. Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day . . .*". There is a paradox here. If the predicted rising again was to be *after* the third day the priests would certainly not have limited the watch "until the third day" they surely would have extended it to the fourth or the fifth. The logical conclusion is that here Matthew's gospel has suffered a corruption and that the priests, remembering the many times Jesus said He would rise on the third day, asked for the guard to be placed "until the third day".

The remaining relevant text is Luke 24.21 where the two disciples on their way to Emmaus in the late afternoon of the day of the resurrection told the mysterious stranger "*today is the third day since these things were done*". On the basis that the Lord rose from the dead early on Sunday morning and this was certainly late Sunday afternoon the statement is understandable. It has been suggested as a factor in favour of the "full three days in the grave" thesis that the correct rendering of this passage is "it is three days since all these things happened", quoting a translation from the Syriac Gospels by one George Lamsa. Now this cannot be rendered from the Received Text on which the A.V. and other N.T. translations are based and the A.V. is perfectly correct here. The Syriac Gospels date from about the 2nd century onward and the official one is the Peshitta, prepared by Rabbula Bishop of Edessa in the 5th century, and were all translated from existing Greek Gospels at that time so that they can not be invested with any authority superior to the recognised Greek text. This remark of Cleopas therefore must be accepted in support of the third day resurrection.

An integral part of the Wednesday crucifixion argument is that the Resurrection took place, not on Sunday morning, but late on Saturday evening, soon after 6 p.m. (otherwise there would have been three days and four nights in the "heart of the earth") but no one knew of it until the women arrived at the tomb on Sunday morning. Against this, of course, is the record of Mark 16.9 (ignoring the eternal dispute as to whether this is a genuine part of Mark's Gospel or not) "*now when Jesus was risen early the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene . . .*" In order to bring this into line with the Saturday evening resurrection it is suggested that the comma is in the wrong place and should have been after "risen", to read "when Jesus was risen, early the first day of the week he appeared" etc. It is, of course, possible to change the sense of almost any sentence in the Bible by moving commas about. Although commas were only added in comparatively recent times they have been placed as indicated by the grammatical construction of the Greek. Probably not many cases exist where the A.V. translators inserted them incorrectly. In the light of so many texts to the contrary there would appear to be no justification for altering the position of the comma in this instance. A detailed analysis of the events surrounding the Resurrection (appearing in the BSM issue of May/June 1972) shows that in all probability the Resurrection and the earthquake etc. of Matt. 28.1-4 occurred about four or five o'clock in the morning; the keepers thereupon fled and had left the scene before the women arrived at about 6.0. a.m. A fair literal rendering of the Greek would be "having risen early the first day of the week he appeared first to Mary" and the meaning of this should be obvious to an English reader without any commas at all.

Finally we come to the text which started all this. They asked Jesus to give them a sign of his Messiahship. He replied "*an evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign, and there shall be no sign given to it but the sign of the prophet Jonas. For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth*" (Matt. 12.39-40). Now standing as it does, it is agreed that there is no way whatever in which it can be reconciled with the Friday 3.0 p.m. to Sunday 6 a.m. which is the orthodox belief, nor yet with the other statements which indicate the Resurrection as taking place on the third day. The most that can be said is that Jesus was in the grave parts of two days, one complete day and two nights, some thirty-eight hours in all. What is the solution to this conundrum?

It might be remembered in passing that the expression "heart of the earth" is a strange one. It is hardly feasible to think that Jesus expected to be

translated several thousand miles down to the earth's core. Such an expression is not used of the grave anywhere else. And the Greek word for "heart" is never used for "midst", although the Hebrew is so used on occasion and if Jesus spoke in Aramaic the word He would have used could have had this meaning. But Jesus was not buried in either the "heart" or the "midst" of the earth. He was buried in Joseph's burial chamber several feet above the earth's surface. A further critical examination of the text would seem to be necessary.

The incident is recorded, not only by Matthew but also by Luke (11.16, 29-30). *"Others, tempting him, sought of him a sign from heaven . . . He began to say, this is an evil generation; they seek a sign, and there shall no sign be given it, but the sign of Jonas the prophet. For as Jonas was a sign unto the Ninevites, so shall also the Son of Man be to this generation"*. Here is a fundamental difference; Matthew says the sign was Jonah's three days inside the great fish, and Luke says it was the fact that Jonas was a sign to the Ninevites when at last he got to Nineveh. Which one are we to believe? What did Jesus actually say?

There is no evidence that the Ninevites ever knew of Jonah's experience with the great fish. Both Matthew and Luke record Jesus as saying that *"they repented at the preaching of Jonas and behold, a greater than Jonas is here"*. The contrast is between Jonah's preaching and Jesus' preaching; the Ninevites repented but the Jews did not. Was that the sign? The Ninevites, continued Jesus (vs.41, Matthew, vs.32 Luke) will rise up in the judgment and condemn those Jews on account of that fact. Was the "sign" the preaching they did hear rather than the resurrection they did not see for none but the disciples were witnesses that He had risen from the dead?

If it should be that the words actually spoken by Jesus on that occasion were those recorded by Luke, and Matthew to this extent was incorrect, how can the difference be explained? Comparison of both narratives might well be held to show that Luke has the more reasonable version. But there is no ground for suggesting any textual corruption in

Matthew. So far back as existing manuscripts of the N.T. go the text in both Gospels is as we have it. The difference between the two must have been introduced at a very early time before the oldest of any known manuscript.

Just a suggestion. Luke is known to have been a sober and careful historian. He gathered his facts from men and women who had known Jesus, and the Gospel as we have it in Greek is from his own hand. Matthew's account is held by scholars to have had an Aramaic original so that the Greek text known to us is largely a translation. Could it be that the original of Matthew did not contain vs.40 about the three days, making Jesus say merely "there shall no sign be given it but the sign of the prophet Jonas" and when the Greek rendering was made vs.40 was inserted as the copyist's explanation of the sign of Jonas, ignorant of the definition given by Jesus as recorded by Mark. Jesus himself on a later occasion used the same simile without the definition—Matt. 16.4 *"there shall no sign be given unto it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas. And he left them and departed"*, and on the same occasion as preserved by Mark 8.12, *"there shall no sign be given to this generation. And he left them"*. There is no evidence, but there is the possibility that this is the explanation.

In any case, the dilemma lies between Matthew and Luke. If Jesus really did say, as Luke says He did, that the sign of Jonah was his achievement in securing the repentance of the Ninevites, and there was no mention of the three days and nights inside the great fish, then the only real support for the Wednesday crucifixion disappears.

If a choice has to be made, with the fact that all other references to the Resurrection (apart from the two questionable ones in Matt. 27.63 and Mark 8.31) stipulate *on* the third day and not *after* it, the logical course would point to acceptance of Luke's account. There would then seem to be no evidence in the New Testament justifying any repudiation of the consistent two-thousand year old conviction of the Christian Church that it was on Friday afternoon that our Lord died and early Sunday morning, "on the third day", that He rose from the dead.

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

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

THE SWEET INFLUENCES OF PLEIADES

From the beginning of history men have studied the stars, their arrangement and their movements, and woven into the glittering glory above their heads a wealth of imaginative romance and fable. Some of the oldest and most widely told stories known to mankind have been thus immortalised upon the face of the sky. It is not surprising, therefore, to find that the Scriptures themselves contain various references to the "story of the stars" and make use of them to illustrate some of God's dealings with men.

The well-known passage in the 38th chapter of Job commencing "Canst thou bind the sweet influences of Pleiades?" is one of the finest of such passages. The opening expression is well known, and is often quoted; the remainder of the passage not so often read, and much of the interest attaching to the Divine words to Job is thereby lost. It was when, at last, both Job and his three friends had nothing further to say, that the Lord spoke to Job out of the whirlwind, and demanded of him (Job 38. 31-32): "Canst *thou* bind the sweet influences of Pleiades, or loose the bands of Orion? Canst *thou* bring forth Mazzaroth in his season? Or canst *thou* guide Arcturus with his sons? knowest *thou* the ordinances of heaven? Canst *thou* set the dominion thereof in the earth?"

There can be no doubt that Job himself understood the import of the questions perfectly, or the Lord would not have asked them of him. That Job drew correct conclusions from the conversation is evident by his frank confession afterwards: "I know that *thou* canst do everything, and that no thought can be withholden from thee . . . wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42.2 and 6). We do well, therefore, to try to see these things as Job saw them, and draw from them the lesson for ourselves that he drew for himself. It means exploring somewhat unfamiliar ground, and delving a little into the ancient myths and stories associated with the constellations, but if we can discern behind these things something of that glory light which shone into Job's heart and gave him compensation for his sufferings, our search will have been worth while.

It is necessary to keep in mind throughout this study that the purpose of the Lord's questions to Job was to demonstrate that the ultimate truth respecting the great mystery of the permission of evil remains with God himself; and that He has the power to achieve the triumph of righteousness and will accomplish that triumph, in due time. As Job's attention was directed to these various constellations in turn, the ideas associated with them came into his mind, and from those ideas he discerned

the lesson God would teach him.

"Canst thou bind the sweet influences of Pleiades?" The more popular name of this constellation is the "seven stars", although the majority of people can discern only six. In ancient times they were thought to have an influence especially beneficial to mariners, this legend being due to the fact that they first appear in May when the favourable season for voyages, in the early days of the world, was due to begin. Pliny, who lived at the time of the First Advent, says (*Natural History, Book 2*) that the rising of the Pleiades on May 10th brings Summer, and their setting on November 11th marks the beginning of Winter. The idea that some mystic benign influence radiates out to earth from the Pleiades is also expressed by various Arab poets, one of whom (Hafiz) alludes to them as the seal or earnest of immortality. The word translated "sweet influences" is "*maadannoth*", one which has given the translators a great deal of trouble. It is considered by some authorities to have been misspelt, and they read it "*maanaddoth*", which comes from a root, "*anad*", meaning "to bind on." On this basis Margolis, Leeser and Ferrar Fenton translate "chains", and Rotherham "fetters", and it is then suggested that the appearance of the Pleiades in a cluster, like a delicate necklace, is referred to. On the other hand, the Authorised Version, standing by "*maadannoth*", has the advantage that this word comes from a root meaning "pleasures", "delight", "delicacy", and can be construed to indicate the operation of an influence radiating happiness and pleasure, and making for prosperity. This view well accords with the ancient tradition regarding the Pleiades, and gives point to the Divine question which made it plain that Job himself was powerless to "bind" those same "sweet influences".

What is the moral? It surely is that the sweet influences of the Love of God, shed abroad upon mankind, taking root in the hearts and lives of believers, and bringing forth fruit unto God, *can never be "bound" by man*. The sad time of sin and death stands between humanity and the Kingdom, for a while, but, like mariners on the hazardous deep, men can look up to the heavens and reflect that the sweet influences of the Divine care are constantly streaming down from above, and that they guarantee mankind's safe arrival at length at their "desired haven" (Psalm 107.30). Job, probably familiar with the seafaring tradition of those influences, and certainly well acquainted with Arabic thought—for Job was an educated Arab—must surely have read this lesson into the question which came to him from above, and drawn no little

comfort from the thought.

"*Canst thou . . . loose the bands of Orion?*" From reverently thankful thoughts of the loving Watch-care of God, Job's mind swung instantly to a vision of rebellion and sin—and sin's penalty. The constellation Orion is the most notable one in the heavens, and almost everyone has had Orion's head and arms, feet, girdle and sword, pointed out at some time or another. Orion, said the ancients, was a giant, and a mighty hunter, who once lived upon earth. He was greatly renowned because of his prowess in the chase, and eventually became a personal attendant to the goddess Diana. Having committed a great offence, he was bound to the heavens by means of strong chains, there to remain for ever as a warning to others of the consequences of sin. Looking up into the night sky, then, the peoples of old would gaze upon the mythical giant, arms and legs outstretched, suffering his perpetual sentence, and reflect upon the power of God Who ordains an inescapable penalty for sin.

To Job, then, came the question: "*Canst thou loose the bands which I have placed upon evil?*" No less certain than the love of God is the retribution that must follow upon deliberate, wilful sin, and no man can loose the chains which God has forged for the ultimate restraint of sin.

"*Canst thou bring forth Mazzaroth in his season?*" The A.V. translators, not knowing how to render the Hebrew word "mazzaroth", left it untranslated. There seems little doubt that it refers to the twelve signs of the zodiac. The zodiac is that broad path across the heavens which is apparently traversed by the sun in its daily journey. Month by month, as the earth travels around the sun, the latter is set against a background of groups of stars which vary according to the relative position of sun and earth. To an observer upon earth it is as if the sun enters into one constellation after another in order, and the ancients separated these constellations into twelve "signs", into each one of which the sun enters at a certain season of the year. The force of the question then was this: "*Canst thou bring forth, and present to the sun, each successive one of the twelve signs in its due time in the sun's onward journey?*" The evident answer is "No". No man has power to retard or advance the majestic course of the procession of heaven which has been ordained of old by God. *So with the ages and dispensations of the Divine Plan.* Just as the twelve signs follow each other in ordered succession, likewise do those epochs which God has devised for the accomplishment of his purposes for mankind, and no man can either alter their order nor stay their course. "*The days are prolonged, and every vision faileth*", wailed the unbelieving captives in the days of Ezekiel. Resonant with faith came the prophet's rejoinder: "*The days are at hand, and the effect of every vision*" (Ezek. 12. 22-

23) "The vision" came the word of the Lord to Habakkuk (Hab. 2. 3), "is yet for an appointed time . . . Though it tarry, wait for it, for it will surely come, it will not tarry." Can we bring in the Kingdom of Heaven on earth by our own efforts, *in advance of God's due time?* Can we bring out Mazzaroth in his season"? By no means; God alone can, and He will, at the time prefixed.

"*Canst thou guide Arcturus with his sons?*"

With their usual charming inconsistency, the A.V. translators have given us here the Greek name of the constellation which was known to the Hebrews as "Aysh", and, in England, variously as the Plough, the Wain, or the Great Bear. The later Greeks pictured it as a wagon drawn by horses, which gave rise to the English idea of the Wain (Old English for wagon), and of the Plough. The ancient Greeks called it the Bear, because, as they said, this constellation was none other than a nymph named Callisto, who, to escape the attention of her suitors, was changed into a bear and placed in the heavens. The Arabs, however, had a very different name for this group. They called it the Bier, and pictured the four main stars as forming a bier upon which a deceased person was being taken to burial, and the three stars behind as the mourners who follow, "daughters" or "sons" of the bier. It is much more probable that Job would be accustomed to the Arabic idea in preference to those of foreign lands, and this is confirmed by the fact that the Hebrew "Aysh" is derived from the Arabic word for "bier".

Unfortunately, nearly every translator of note has adopted the Western European name—the Bear—for this constellation, and whilst this is a perfectly correct thing to do in a translation meant for English readers (the expression "bier" would leave most readers wondering what constellation is meant), it does have the effect of obscuring the real meaning of the question. Perhaps Young's translation best brings out the thought, in rendering "and Aysh for her sons dost thou comfort?" Coming at the climax of this fourfold inquisition, this can bring a wonderful picture before our minds. The bier, symbol of death and the grave; the mourners, sons or daughters of the bier, symbol of all the heartache and sorrow that death brings in its train; can Job, *can any man, guide these things into the glories of the day when death shall be no more?* Once again, the answer comes, sadly and sorrowfully, "No". Only God can guide the bier and its mourners into the glorious day of life and joy. Only God can "bring to pass the saying that is written 'Death shall be swallowed up in victory' (1 Cor. 15. 54). Only by his power shall it ever be that the *"ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads"* (Isa. 35. 10). As Job looked up and saw the symbol of death engraved upon the heavens,

beheld it night after night moving on its slow course around the sky, he must surely have reflected on the inexorable law, "death leads all to *Sheol*," but remembered then that one day the great God of all men will break the power of death and restore to man the dew of his youth. "*All the days of my appointed time will I wait, 'until my change come'*" (Job 14. 14).

Thus, then, there is in this short passage of two verses an epitome of four fundamental features of the Divine Plan. The loving watchcare of God is over all his creation, his Holy Spirit ceaselessly active in pursuance of his wonderful designs for human happiness, "sweet influences of Pleiades" which no man can hope to bind or restrain. His manifest judgment against sin, and the certainty of retribution upon the one who sets himself deliberately against the goodness of God, can not be frustrated or defied by any, in this world or the next: none can ever hope to "loose the bands of Orion". Then the fixity of the Divine purpose: "By myself have I sworn, saith God" (Gen. 22. 16)—and the certainly of every feature of his Plan coming to pass in his own due time; every age and dispensation succeeding its predecessor in orderly sequence, no man having the power to haste these things or to

accomplish the work of any Age in his own strength: no man can "bring forth Mazzaroth in his season." Lastly, the enthralling theme of Resurrection and Restitution. Only God can do that, only He Who promised that He would in the fullness of times "*send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you, whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things*" (Acts 3. 20-21). God, too, watches that Bier with its three mourners, wending its way across the dark night sky of earth's present evil world; but God is guiding it with a sure hand, and that Bier will one day come forth into a fair pleasant land where the dead will be raised up and life enter into them; and the mourners will rejoice, for "*there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying . . . for the former things are passed away*" (Rev. 21.4).

These are the words God spake to Job on that memorable occasion. To him, as to us, they conveyed a message of hope, a confirmation of the Lord's great promise made to Moses in an hour when it almost seemed as if his great Plan was in danger of frustration, "*As truly as I live, the whole earth shall be filled with the glory of Jehovah*".

For no man, *NO MAN*, shall ever be able to "bind the sweet influences of Pleiades".

Words of a British Prime Minister

"For those who believe that the old foundations are unshaken still, and that the fabric built upon them will look down for ages upon the floating wreck of many a modern and boastful theory, it is difficult to see anything but infatuation in the destructive temperament which leads to the notion that to substitute a blind mechanism for the hand of God in the affairs of life is to enlarge the scope for remedial agency; that to dismiss the highest of all inspirations is to elevate the strain of human thought and life; and that each of us is to rejoice that our several units are to be disintegrated at death into 'countless millions of organisms'; for

such, it seems, is the latest 'revelation' delivered from the fragile tripod of a modern Delphi. Assuredly, on the minds of those who believe, on else on the minds of those who after this fashion disbelieve, there lies some deep judicial darkness, a darkness that may be felt. While disbelief in the eyes of faith is a sore calamity, this kind of disbelief, which renounces and repudiates with more than satisfaction what is brightest and best in the inheritance of man, is astounding, and might be deemed incredible."

(Rt. Hon. W. E. Gladstone, 1868-1894)

The tie that binds

The hymn "Blest be the tie that binds" expresses so clearly and with such earnestness the basis of life together in Christ that it can never be sung without feeling something of that wonderful fellowship its words express. It is said that it was written by a Baptist pastor, Dr. Fawcett, who while serving a small Yorkshire parish on a very small salary, received an invitation to minister to a London congregation.

Dr. Fawcett accepted the invitation, preached his farewell sermon, and prepared to leave the place where he had become so well-loved. With his household goods loaded and all ready to start, his parishioners and neighbours gathered round to say goodbye. But the expressions of love and affection, and the evident grief and sorrow so manifest

on the part of those who were seeing their pastor as such for the last time, completely overcame the minister and his wife. They found it impossible to go.

The furniture went back into the house. By the end of the day all was again in order, and the minister wrote to his London friends that his coming was impossible. So he continued to serve those among whom his life had been spent, held there by the subtle power of Christian love and fellowship, stronger by far than any band or bond forged by hand of man. It was then that Dr. Fawcett, to commemorate this event in his life, sat down and wrote the hymn which expresses so well the Christian attitude toward, and feelings for those who are joined together in this mystic bond of union whose centre and inspiring force is Christ.

PARADISE ON EARTH

Earth's coming glory

9. Let the earth bring forth.

A great deal is said and heard nowadays about energy. Energy, to the ordinary person, is something that results from the consumption of coal, oil, gas or electricity and furnishes heat and light in the home or power to drive the car. In the industrial world it powers the machines which proliferate in this modern age and puts more and more men out of work. Now and then a voice is raised asking what is going to happen when the coal and oil and gas is exhausted but no one takes very much notice of that, and the prodigal waste of earth's resources continues at an increasing rate. The world consumption of energy in the year 1950 was ten times what it was in 1850; in the year 2050 it is estimated that it will be five hundred times as much. And it all goes up, quite literally, in smoke. When one burns a hundredweight of coal in the domestic grate one has enjoyed a season of warmth but the coal has gone. When one turns on the electric light for say ten hours a unit of electricity has been used; a power station somewhere has burned a pint or so of oil and turned several pints of water into steam to produce that unit and the oil and the water have gone. When one uses a gallon of petrol in the family car one has travelled thirty miles or so but the petrol has gone. Coal and oil and uranium do not grow on trees; one day—within another half-century, say some authorities—it will all be gone, and what then?

To that growing body of Christians who share the conviction that we are living in the closing years of this Age, that the dawn of the Millennium is at hand, that God is about to intervene in the affairs of mankind for their benefit, this position presents no cause for alarm. It can be taken as certain that He who created the earth and provided for man's continuing existence upon it has not overlooked the necessity of such supplies of heat, light and power as man will need in that blessed day. And, let it be said, by more pleasant, and, shall we say, cleaner processes than man seems invariably to adopt. Digging coal from the bowels of the earth, scooping oil from the recesses of the deep sea, creating radio-active waste with all its unknown hazards and evils, are activities which can hardly be associated with the sunlit visions of the Millennial Age so eloquently pictured in the Bible. After all, what we call the processes of Nature is actually God's mechanism for running the earth and it is to the world of Nature that we should look for a solution to our problems, under the guidance and control of man, to produce a sufficiency for all of man's needs. If man is to go back to Edenic conditions, the Golden Age of Legend, will there be need for all this heat and light and power? It could

perhaps be thought that artificial light is not really necessary; we could go to sleep at dusk and awake at dawn. The birds do. If world climate is to be as equable and congenial as the Bible suggests—and as the modern climatologist C.E.P. Brooks in "*Climate through the Ages*" (1970) says is the condition to which the earth is tending as a stable and permanent state—and the human physique healthy and perfect, shall we want all this central heating? The horses live in the fields summer and winter without it. In a society where labour and activity is a pleasure rather than a drudgery, and human physical strength is at its peak and everlasting life means that time is no object, what need for all these rapid production machines, means of high speed transport, labour-saving devices, when there is plenty of time and strength to do all that one wishes to do. The great civilisations of pre-Christian history managed without a great deal of it. And who knows what hitherto unknown and unsuspected powers and attributes reside in the human body and brain when the curse of sin has been removed and men have become what God has always intended, an image and likeness of himself? Men take great pride today in inventing and constructing computers which can perform calculating functions thousands of times faster than can any man. Most of them forget that God can think faster than any computer. Is it unthinkable that one day in the perfect state man's own mental powers will be so enhanced that they will then be able to outdo the most sophisticated of today's computers?

But on the other hand, it is perhaps unreasonable to conclude that man in the eternal state is destined to rise no higher, in his development, than did Adam the first man in his original creation. The basic law of Nature, of all creation, is development, advance, achievement, a perpetual advancing forward and climbing upward. The story of Eden pictures the man in full possession of his faculties, placed in a prepared garden adequate to furnish the necessities of life, but it goes on to tell him that he must "*till* the ground that it bring forth more fruit, and "*subdue*" the earth, which means he was to explore and use its resources for his welfare and a satisfying life. The Book of Genesis tells of an antediluvian character of almost six thousand years ago named Jabal who was the first to discover that the earth contained metallic ores which could be refined into metals like copper and iron; within five centuries of his discovery the Sumerians were making works of art in gold, bronze, copper, which have never been equalled. Through the centuries men have improved the strains of wild grains and fruit trees and farming

animals so that their modern counterparts immeasurably exceed their ancient forebears. Who is to say that this process will not go on into the illimitable future so that man's future promises to be one of never-ending effort and achievement?

So although the next Age is often spoken of as though it is a restoration to Garden of Eden conditions, a little thought shows that such is only partially true. The world of the future will be what Eden was intended to become, what might be termed the appendages and conveniences and attributes of human society on a much higher level and making much more use of earth's possibilities than could ever have been the case in the old story of the first human pair. A great many of the necessities of civilised society would seem to be inherent in the framework of human life upon earth in the day of Christ's reign over the nations. And this brings us back to the question of light, heat and power.

It goes without saying that the nuclear power stations will have to go, and quickly. They are too dangerous to handle. Gas and oil will have gone before the Millennium gets well started (by 2020, said the BBC in Nov. 1986). The mining of coal, no matter how safe the process can be made to be, will certainly have no place in the Millennial world and this too would run out eventually. Mankind will be left with the original sources of power of ancient times—wind, water and the sun.

Primitive men, and mediæval men too, got on very well with such means. True, there were not so many of them and their needs were less. England in the 13th Century had ten thousand windmills in operation. They pumped water, ground corn, operated simple machines, with no fuel costs. Some people now living can recall seeing such mills working in their youth although they are all gone now. The Babylonian king Hammurabi, contemporary with Abraham, used windmills in his empire to pump water. In recent years there have been serious attempts to use windpower to help solve current energy problems, taking the form of propeller-driven electric generators mounted on poles or steel towers. Russia had 30,000 such operating in 1954 and the USA had 50,000 in 1965. The United Kingdom is experimenting with them in favourable spots such as the North of Scotland and the Isle of Man, feeding electricity into the national grid. It is said (by the BBC) that 10% of Britain's power needs by the year 2020 AD will be met by wind power, nearly twice as much as the much-vaunted nuclear stations produce at present. And the potentiality is great, Golding, the leading 20th century authority, has said that the total world windpower available for this purpose amounts to some 15 times the present world consumption of energy.

Water power comes next. Every major country in

the world has its hydro-electric stations where water stored in a man-made lake, fed by rivers or streams in the mountains, passes to a lower level where it operates turbines driving electric generators. In the Middle Ages every English stream of any size had its water-wheels along the banks, turning millstones or operating weaving looms, or on farms pumping water. Ancient Egypt got much of its power from water-wheels and so did ancient China. But despite the use modern man does make of waterpower, there is plenty more available, estimated to amount to nine or ten times the amount of energy at present used by the world. As with the wind, there is plenty there.

Tidal power and devices using the force of the waves of the sea are often talked about and some installations are in use although an admittedly satisfactory design has yet to be produced. The potentiality is very great—one estimate puts it at over one hundred times the energy at present being used by the world.

But all these devices involve intricate and heavy machinery and one wonders if man in the perfect state is intended to construct and use such means when the Lord can ordain the forces of Nature to serve his needs. There is one source of energy which in magnitude as well as simplicity exceeds by far all these devices of man's creating. That source is the sun.

The sun's energy is in its light, falling upon the earth. (The sensation of heat felt when the sun shines is caused by sunlight agitating the atoms of the atmosphere as it passes through.) The light is the energy and this is manifested either as heat in the familiar way, or transmuted into solid substance by chemical reaction as when falling upon a leaf, or transformed into electricity when agitating the electrons of certain light-sensitive metals in what is called a solar cell. The science of solar energy has developed for over a century but it is realised that we are as yet only on the fringe of what can be achieved. All kinds of devices for collecting and utilising the sun's energy have been tried. Sets of mirrors reflecting its rays to a focal point where an intensely high temperature is attained sufficient to melt steel; banks of collectors in which water is heated and used for domestic purposes; evaporators which convert sea-water into fresh water; small cookers, used extensively in India, where meals are cooked by the sun; an ambitious Russian scheme commenced in 1955 near Mount Ararat comprising a number of circular concentric railway tracks a mile across with trains of waggons carrying mirrors which follow the sun round and beam the heat to a central building where it raises steam to run a huge power station—there are no apparent limits to man's ingenuity in this field and the distinguishing feature is that the heat is free and everlasting.

Later research, since the middle of this century, has resulted in the discovery of the solar cell. Thin wafers of certain metallic elements, exposed to light, generate electricity. A number connected together yield sufficient current for the purpose intended. Such cells have the merits that there are no moving parts, nothing to wear out, and so far as can be known at present are probably everlasting.

All of this is leading up to the conclusion that as the sun shines on the trees and plants silently and efficiently, creating food for man's sustenance, fabrics for his adornment, and materials for his use, so there may well be a means whereby every need that man may have in the way of heat and light and power will be similarly supplied. There have been in recent years some experimenters who have found that certain trees under certain circumstances produce electric currents when a wire is run from the topmost boughs to the ground. It is fascinating to think that perhaps, after all, knowledge might be so increased that what now is produced with much toil and labour becomes available, free of cost, from the powers of Nature around us.

If such proves to be indeed the case, we can forget the windpower and the waterpower and the tidal power, all of which together could furnish 125 times the energy per annum at present used by the world, in favour of the sun, which could provide over five thousand times that energy if needs be. It has been calculated that an area of the New Mexico desert only eighty miles square could supply all the power at present required by the United States. One thousandth part of the Sahara Desert could produce as much as is now used all over the world. It would be tedious to cite other instances; suffice to say that there is every reason to expect that Nature will prove adequate to meet every need.

But, says one, coal is not the only product of the earth. Metals, such as iron and copper, minerals like sulphur and carbon, have to be obtained from the depths. What about the iron-miners and copper-miners? Will metal also grow on trees? Or do we have to do without metals?

There are just a few pointers to another sphere of Nature's creative powers, at present doing no more than point the way to possibilities. There has been in recent years—the latter half of this century—a great deal of attention paid to the powers of bacteria in bringing about chemical changes in

materials. In the past their usefulness has been more or less confined to sewage treatment works where they break down organic waste into useful fertiliser and pure water. In more recent times bacteria have been made on the one hand to generate electricity from vegetable products, and in the other hand to produce edible protein from oil and natural gas. Now it is being found there are other possibilities. One species of bacteria has the property of extracting pure iron from iron ore; another does the same with uranium, and another with sulphur. Most of these processes are still in the experimental stage but there is definitely something there, and men are trying hard to find out what it is. It may yet be found that there is a natural process of "growing" minerals and other substances which at present and throughout past history have had to be won by arduous labour from the depths of the ground. And of course, the present supply would in any case run out one day, just as coal and oil and uranium. Unless the Lord has arranged for continuing supplies to be produced as needed then eventually man would have to do without them.

Much of the foregoing is largely speculative. It cannot be otherwise. But we live in an age when the fantastic of today is the commonplace of tomorrow. These endeavours of present-day researchers to solve the problems which are admittedly facing the world of the immediate future are pointers to the solutions which will undoubtedly come. The point being made here is that those solutions do not lie in the field of increasingly complex mechanical devices, a world of computers and robots, but in the field of Nature where the whole earth will bring forth everything that is good and necessary for the service of man, where Nature is man's handmaid, and men learn to manipulate the forces of Nature to his own advantage and for his well-being. In the Eden story God put the man whom He had created in the garden, "*to dress it and to keep it*". The two words mean in the first place to cultivate and in the second to preserve, as a steward or guardian. So in the Millennium mankind will learn to care for and to maintain this earthly heritage, so that, as it was said so long ago by the prophet "*the earth shall yield its increase*". Just as the trees and plants will bring forth the food that man needs, so will Nature, in one way or another, albeit by the activity of man and the oversight of man, bring forth his other necessities.

To be continued

It is not given to us, as it was to Isaiah, to see in vision the Temple of God opened in Heaven, and to behold the Lord, high and lifted up, his glory filling the sanctuary. It is given to us to approach and worship him in the beauty of holiness, to draw near in spirit and behold him by the eye of faith.

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

“AS NEVER MAN SPAKE”

“He taught them; as one having authority.”

In this world of dictators and totalitarian States, where the gospel of individual submission to the will of the Leader is paramount, such a statement as this would cause disquiet of mind were it not that we know of Whom the words were spoken. Not for Jesus the blustering arrogance of the bully, nor the cold passionless orders of the man of steel. Christ's teaching was warm, tender, vibrant with the love of humankind and pity for their unhappy condition; yet underlying his words there was a calm authority which carried conviction that this man who “spake as never man spake”, told of things He had both seen and heard. Having known and shared in the glory of that spiritual realm of which the Infinite Creator is at once the centre and the all-in-all, He spoke to the hearts of men and women who themselves were part of God's creation, and his words came with the force of that authority which is engendered, not by the outward trappings of physical force or mental superiority, but the inward power of the Holy Spirit of God.

Christians right down the Age have realised this, and rejoiced in our Heavenly Father's own way of imparting knowledge to mankind—knowledge not only of himself and his Plan, but also of themselves, their relation to each other and their mutual obligations and responsibilities as fellow-citizens of the earth. But it still remains true that those who remain to listen are far smaller in number than those who turn away “to walk no more with him”. The day has yet to dawn when the emptiness and worthlessness of these much-vaunted earthly dictatorships will be appreciated by all men, and, in the appointed day when God shall judge the world in righteousness, that gentle, insistent teaching of the stranger from Galilee's shores will come into its rightful heritage.

Therefore, knowing this to be the outcome of the Divine Plan for humanity, we can with confidence turn to our own position as men and women who already have accepted the Divine principle of teaching and have rejected the earthly policies. Not for us to sit at the feet of teachers who impress their claims to overlordship as by right, or enforce their dogmas by appeals to the intellect or alleged loyalty to personal teachings of past or present ministers to the Church, or considerations of policy or allegiance to the group. Such things are manifestations in our Christian fellowship of that same spirit which is producing in the political world menacing forms of government and national life and filling the minds of worldly thinkers with apprehension for the future of humanity. “Mass-thinking” and the restriction of personal liberty may yet prove to be an important factor in bringing the nations to Armageddon. The same principle within the Church must produce, in a different sphere, the same results.

We turn then to Christ's words. Here is our salvation. *“If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”* In quiet discussion of Scriptural teaching between ourselves; in the appeal, not to force, not to intellectual reasoning, but to the enlightening and illuminating influence of the Holy Spirit, dispensing to every man severally, shall the word of old be fulfilled, *“And they shall be all taught of God; and great shall be the peace of thy children.”* So shall every teacher and pastor the Church has known be held in rightful esteem and honour, “for his works sake” and true loyalty to those who in the past have been our personal mentors manifested. So shall we progress in understanding of the Divine Will, until at length, like Christian in Bunyan's immortal allegory, we see with our own eyes the city to which we journey, and hear with our ears the strains of celestial song.

A Note on Amos 5.26

“Ye have borne the tabernacle of your Moloch and Chiun your images, the star of your god, which ye made” (Amos 5. 26).

The S.R.V. has (vs. 25-27) “Did you bring to me sacrifices and offerings forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel? You shall take up Sakkuth your king, and Kaiwan your star-god, your images which you made for yourselves; therefore will I take you into exile”. The Hebrew “sakkuth” is

Babylonian “sakkut”, the name for the god Ninuras, the planet Mars. Likewise, “kaiwan” or “chiun” is Babylonian “kajamana”, the god Nergal or the planet Saturn. (In the A.V. the word “sakkuth” is translated “tabernacles” from its likeness to “sukkoth”; and “melech”, king, is translated “moloch”). The old Babylonian terms show that Israel had adopted the star-worship of the Babylonians, hence the strong condemnation Amos passed upon them.



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

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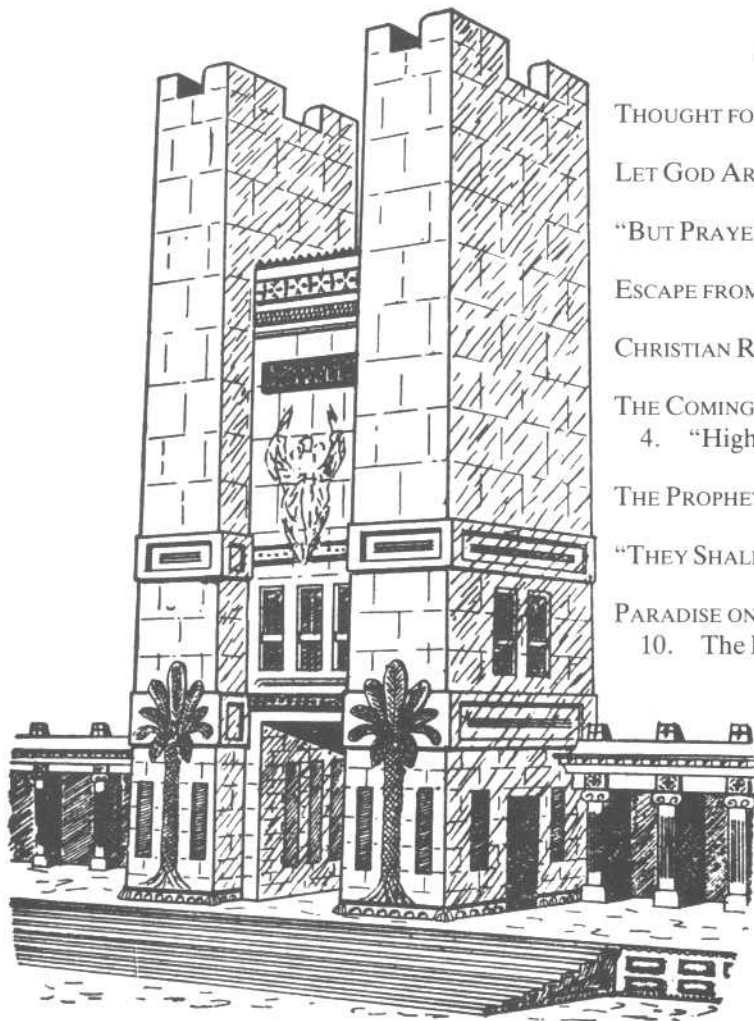
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*Lift up your heads, O ye gates
And be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors,
And the King of glory shall come in.*

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THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH

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

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

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

fellows. We fail often enough with our own brethren, and how much more with the world. And it brings leanness into the soul.

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

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

LET GOD ARISE

"Let God arise—let his enemies be scattered; let them also that hate him flee before him" (Psa. 68:1).

The first man to utter that clarion call was Moses. Moses, who led the people of Israel through a waste howling wilderness to the Promised Land. Moses, who brought the era of Israel's bondage to an end and carried them into the Age of freedom. Moses, who made them the people of a Covenant and instructed them in the plans and purposes of God the whole while they were progressing to the fulfilment of their hopes. What a picture of the Church in the flesh during this end period of the Age, a period in which believers in Present Truth are making their way through the waste howling wilderness of this fast disintegrating world, fortified by the knowledge of their Covenant with God and the revelation of Truth He has given, under the leadership of their returned Lord who will bring them at the end into their Promised Land.

This 68th Psalm is a song of triumph. It is a song of victory to be sung by those who know that God has risen up to intervene in the affairs of men, to deliver his own faithful from bondage, to take them into the glories of the future eternal state, and to use them as his agents in bestowing gifts upon those who had oppressed them. It is a song of certitude that the time has come for God to act against evil and bring to an end the power of the oppressor. It is a song of gratitude for the revelation of understanding and enlightenment which has come to those who formerly walked in darkness and dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, but upon whom now the light hath shined (Isa. 9:2). And it is poetry.

Because it is poetry the sentiments of this Psalm can be made to delineate a picture of our own experiences during this closing period of the Gospel Age. It is not a prophecy of the future; the events it describes are those experienced by Israel in the days of the Exodus, but because those events parallel in miniature the greater things that have happened and are still happening to the Christian church in this Time of the End they can be made into a picture of Divine activity which will encourage and strengthen each one who treads the Narrow Way. The time is come; let God arise; let evil be destroyed and let the Day of Righteousness blaze forth in all its fulness. That is the message Psalm 68 has for all who realise that those who now live are living in the Time of the End.

This indicates action. The Lord comes into the space and time of our world to intervene in its affairs and set them in order of readiness for his Kingdom. Says Joel (3:16) *"The Lord shall roar*

out of Zion and utter his voice from Jerusalem, and the Lord will be the hope of his people and the strength of the children of Israel". Zechariah adds his voice *"Then shall the Lord go forth, and fight against these nations as when he fought in the day of battle . . . and the Lord shall be king over all the earth in that day"* (14:3 & 9), and again, on a softer note *"I am returned to Jerusalem with mercies . . . the Lord shall yet comfort Zion, and shall yet choose Jerusalem"* (1:16-17). Those three announcements define the sequence of events which characterise the period of our Lord's Advent-presence prior to his open revelation and his Kingdom. First, the preparation of his own faithful disciples for the work of witness which is to be so marked a feature of this Harvest period. This is pictured in verses 1-10 of the Psalm. Second, the Lord gives the word and the reapers go forth armed with knowledge and conviction to reap the harvest of the Age. That is the burden of verses 11-16. Then come the chariots of God sweeping down from the heavens, the mighty forces of the unseen world breaking to pieces the power of world evil, verse 17, and finally the proclamation to all men that both the King and his Bride, ascended each in their turn to Heaven, are revealed for the world's blessing and the abolition of death. All this is the message of the 68th Psalm.

The story really commences in verse 3. *"Let the righteous be glad; let them rejoice before God; yea, let them exceedingly rejoice. Sing unto God, sing praises to his name . . . rejoice before him"*. There used to be an expression well known in certain circles, "the joy of the Truth". That phrase expressed the joyous attitude of mind which came from the realisation that the old mediæval idea of a vengeful and despotic God, intent on the everlasting punishment of such of his creatures as failed to measure up to the strictness of his laws, was a travesty of his character, that on the contrary He is a God of Love, actively planning for the eternal welfare and happiness of his children if by any means He can convert them to a state of loyalty to himself. "Ransom and Restitution"; these were the keywords. When it was said that our Lord Jesus Christ gave himself a Ransom for all, the operative word was "all" and when Peter spoke of his coming again to initiate "Times of Restitution of all things" that did mean that by virtue of the Ransom all men would have restored to them all that was lost in Adam, that every element of ignorance and incomprehension of God's ways which heretofore had hindered their reception of Christ might be removed and every encouragement to accept him as Saviour and Lord might be given. No wonder

that the predominant feeling was that so well expressed in Psalms 40:3 *"He hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God"* with its glorious consequence *"many shall see and do reverence, and shall trust in the Lord"*. Some who have been long in the way may remember seeing a tract which was once widely circulated, bearing upon its front a picture of a door in a wall and a hand holding a key. A caption ran *"There is a door to which we have a key"*. Upon opening the folder it was found that the key was the Divine Plan of the Ages (Eph. 3:11) opening the door to an understanding of the benevolent purpose of the Heavenly Father such as had not been known since the close of the days of the Apostles.

This was the time of preparation for the Gospel Age Harvest. It was written in the counsels of God that at this end of the Age there should be the preparation and commissioning of a people utterly dedicated to the final witness of the Age, to announce the presence of the King of Kings and the imminent establishment of his Millennial Kingdom. No wonder the righteous were glad. No wonder that they rejoiced before God. No wonder that they sang praises. Here was something to be glad about, to sing about. A highway of holiness for all who will of all mankind, the ransomed of the Lord returning to Zion with songs and everlasting joy, obtaining joy and gladness whilst sorrow and sighing flees away (Isa. 35:8-10).

But now comes the time for action. It is one thing to receive the joy of the Truth into one's own heart, finding comfort in the knowledge of God's beneficent plan for mankind; quite another to do something about it and go out to tell mankind what is in store for them and urge them, in the words of another Psalm, to *"taste and see that the Lord is good"*. And this implies breaking the bonds which have hitherto restricted such freedom of action, repudiating the errors of understanding of the past and coming together with others of like mind in what the Apostle calls *"the glorious liberty of the children of God"* (Rom. 8:21). Here in Psalm 68:6-7 the Lord is pictured doing just that for his people. *"God setteth the solitary in families; he bringeth out those which are bound with chains . . . O God, thou wentest forth before thy people"*. That implies the formation of a body of disciples emerging into a new-found liberty under the leadership of their Lord, utterly dedicated to his service and ready to follow and act as He directs. A people for a purpose, delivered out of darkness into his marvellous light. In another Scriptural setting that is defined as a call to *"come out of Babylon"*. When Israel was in captivity and bondage in the ancient city and land of Babylon in the days of Daniel there came a time when a new king assumed power by right of conquest and proclaimed freedom to those captives and return to their own land, so many as

desired. Isaiah predicted that momentous happening many years before it transpired, in the burning words *"depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence: touch no unclean thing: go ye out of the midst of her. Be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the Lord, for the Lord will go before you, and the God of Israel shall be your rereward"* (Isa. 52:11-12). So they came out, a holy and consecrated people, to make known the name of God and to serve him in his Temple. Now, in this end of the Age, at a time when the greater King of Righteousness is in the act of assuming his power and commencing his reign, there is a spiritual sense in which those his people who have entered into the joy and gladness of his unfolding truth do rid themselves of the restrictions of their former immature understanding, and the defiling effect of erroneous beliefs, and step forward into the light of *"Truth now due for the Household of Faith"* and in the light and fervour of that experience stand ready to herald the great event which is then so soon to come—heralds of the Advent.

Then God sent the rain. *"Thou, O God, didst send a plentiful rain, whereby thou didst make ready thine inheritance when it was weary. Thy congregation hath dwelt therein; thou, O God, hast prepared of thy goodness for the poor"*. So verses 9-10. What is this plentiful rain, descending in torrents to refresh and vitalise the waiting ones? They have come out of Babylon, they are ready to serve; what has the Lord in store for them next?

Obviously, the doctrines of the Truth. These whom the Lord has called to carry out a great work of witness at the end of the Age must be mentally equipped for that work. They must have a clear understanding not only of the basic principles of salvation of faith in Christ, but also of the relation of these principles in operation to the ages and dispensations marked out in the Divine Plan. There are to be two classes of the saved, a heavenly and an earthly, one to be associated with Christ in the heavens to all eternity, one to inherit the Millennial earth and enter the eternal state on the terrestrial plane of life. One the Church, to have its time of development on earth during this present Age; the other, mankind in general, to be faced with the final time of decision, for Christ or against, in the next Age, the Millennial. There has to be an understanding of the Abrahamic promise and Covenant, how it is that Gentile and Jewish believers in Christ are related to God by a covenant which makes them the spiritual seed of Abraham (Gal. 3:29) a bond closer by far than that enjoyed by the natural seed. They have to appreciate what it means to be ministers of the New Covenant, in association with their Lord mediating between the Father on the one hand and mankind on the other as that covenant does its work of writing the laws of God on the hearts of men. They must appreciate

what it means to pour out their lives unto death to the service of man as did their Lord (Isa. 53.12), associating their lives' offering with his "outside the camp" (Heb. 13.13.), that out of that suffering might be born a force that is effective in turning many to righteousness (Dan. 12.3) in that day when the fountain of the water of life is opened to all men (Rev. 22.17). And what is perhaps the most heart-warming theme of all, the conviction that this world has already entered into "the days of the Son of Man", the period during which our Lord is behind the scenes actively overruling the play and byplay of contending world forces so that the powers of this world will come to their end at the time appointed, his ancient people Israel be restored to their own land and become a purified and converted nation, and his own Church changed from terrestrial to celestial conditions preparatory to their appearance with him at the time of his manifestation to the whole world at the inception of his Kingdom, the fulness of his Advent. What greater stimulus to faith and activity could there be than the replacement of the age-old waiting and looking for an Advent which is somewhere in the indefinable future by the realisation that the signs of the times verify that he has already come, unseen except by the eye of faith, unknown to mankind at large, but present as Leader of his faithful ones in the final proclamation of Truth which is to close this Age. Scribes instructed in the things of the Kingdom of Heaven, Jesus called those faithful ones, bringing forth out of their store things new and old. He spoke a parable (Luke 12.35) about servants watching for their lord; when he came, he provided a feast and served them. In such fashion does our Lord serve his watching followers with truths now due, an understanding of all things needful for the work they are to undertake. A plentiful rain indeed.

All things are now ready. The "people for a purpose" have been called, and they have answered by presenting themselves in consecration, separating themselves from all past associations and other things that might hinder. They have received the joy of the Truth and the new song; more, they have received an understanding of the doctrines which equips them for the service ahead. It is time for action.

"The Lord gave the word! Great was the company of those that published it. Kings of armies did flee, did flee; even she that tarried at home divided the spoil! Though ye have lain in the sheepfolds ("pots" in the A.V. is an incorrect rendering) "yet ye shall rise on the wings of a dove covered with silver, when the Almighty scattered kings as snow in Salmon" (vss. 11-14). "Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields, for they are white already to harvest" said Jesus to his disciples "and he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eter-

nal" (Jno. 4.35). That was the harvest of the Jewish Age, then about to close, and those men reaped that harvest. Now we have here the parallel call to reap the harvest of the Gospel Age at the time when this Age also is near its close. The Lord gave the word; reapers were ready, they went into action, and the harvest was reaped. The 14th chapter of Revelation has a vision of a crowned king coming from heaven to earth armed with a sickle, with which he proceeds to reap the harvest of the earth; fitting picture of this important and initial work of this period which Jesus himself called the "days of the Son of Man" (Luke 17.26). "This gospel of the kingdom" He said, talking of the signs of his Advent "shall be preached in all the world for a witness to all nations, and then shall the end come" (Matt. 29.14). That witness was given; the furthermost ends of the earth were reached with the Gospel. Today the reaction has come; in many of those lands the preaching of the Gospel in its fulness is no longer possible. But the witness has been given and its fruits remain. The Baptist cry "the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand" was heard again in the world and hard on the heels of that message came the outward evidences of its verity; world society, political, social, economic, ecclesiastical, began to break up. This world began to come to an end, the end predicted so long ago by our Lord and the prophets who preceded him. True it was that kings of armies did flee, the bastions of misconceptions regarding the Divine character and Plan began to crumble and fall, and the scattering of those old forces of ignorance and prejudice was as the falling of snow on the low wooded slopes of Mount Salmon in the land of Israel—as soon as it reached the ground it melted and disappeared; it was never known to lay and remain visible. So may all thine enemies perish, O Lord.

At this point the Psalmist lifts his eyes to the heavens and beholds a wonderful and majestic sight. He sees, advancing from heaven to earth in battle array, the chariots of God—thousands upon thousands of them (vss. 17-18). Overcome at the vision, he cries out in mingled awe and ecstasy "*the chariots of God, two myriads of thousands of myriads of thousands, the Lord is with them, as He was in Sinai the holy*". The import of his cry is lost in the A.V. translation "The chariots of God are twenty thousands of angels" which is hopelessly inaccurate, confusing a Hebrew term best understood as "repetition" with that for "angels". In fact we have here a mathematical expression which is equal to twice ten thousand times a thousand multiplied again by another ten thousand times a thousand—a stupendous number which equals two hundred times a million millions (in English parlance until recently that would be two hundred billions; now that the American billion of a thousand millions has been adopted by Great Britain it is

equal to two hundred thousand American billions, a sizable number). These are the chariots of God, speeding to earth to overcome all opposition, to overthrow all enemies, and to leave the way clear for the establishment of the Kingdom of God upon earth.

What are God's chariots, advancing in well-nigh inconceivable numbers to work the works of God in this time of the end of the dominion of evil over human society?

What can they be but the massed impact of the infinite power of God brought to bear against this "present evil world", as Peter calls it, the weapons of Heaven wielded against the failing power of men who defy God? What can they be but every political, social or ecclesiastical happening alien to righteousness which only makes more certain the imminent collapse of the present order of things upon earth? Said the Lord *"my determination is to gather the nations, that I may assemble the kingdoms, to pour upon them mine indignation, for all the earth shall be devoured by my fiery zeal. Then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the Lord, to serve him with one consent"* (Zeph. 3.8-9). Joel in his third chapter speaks of God gathering all nations and bringing them into judgment. John the Revelator saw God gathering the nations together *"into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon"*. The effect of that prediction is such that that word has passed into the English language as a synonym for the final destruction of the powers of evil at the hands of the forces of God. Those forces are God's chariots; they have been active in the earth throughout this present century. Few thinkers now deny that the year 1914 marked the beginning of a great change in human affairs; nothing has been the same since and nothing has changed for the better; all is for the worse. And still the chariots of God advance.

The work of the chariots of God is evident in the affairs of his ancient people of Israel. They have yet to fulfil their destined role of being a light to the nations, to declare God's salvation to the ends of the earth. The remarkable renaissance of Israel during this Twentieth century is no accident. It started with the close of the first world war and the British mandate for a national home for the Jewish people. It progressed to the declaration of the sovereign state of Israel in 1948 and the series of wars which have consolidated its position among the nations. There has yet to be witnessed the conversion of that people to a genuine God-fearing nation renouncing the policies as well as the weapons of this world and then they will be ready to receive their long-awaited Messiah as Lord and Deliverer. But the chariots of God are manifestly fighting for Israel and the long-propheesied sequel is certain of attainment.

The supreme manifestation of the chariots of God will be at the extreme end of the Age when

Heaven's forces meet in battle the inveterate opposition of the powers of this world's evil. John in the Revelation saw it happening. He saw a Rider on a White Horse coming from Heaven with his followers behind him, and drawn up against him in battle array *"the wild beast, and the false prophet, and the kings of the earth, and their armies"* (Rev. 19.19-27). The issue is never in doubt. The powers of Heaven are victorious, and with that victory a new era of peace, justice, righteousness and everlasting life dawns on the sons of men. Zechariah, talking about the same event, gives the clue why the issue is never in doubt. It is because Heaven's weapons are not as earth's weapons, and Heaven's weapons are of a nature which cannot be withstood by the most sophisticated and effective of earth's weapons. Says Zechariah *"their flesh shall consume away while they stand upon their feet, and their eyes shall consume away in their sockets, and their tongues shall consume away in their mouths, and a great panic from the Lord shall be among them"* (Zech. 14.12-13). The Lord has no need of warplanes and submarines and nuclear missiles. He can win the war without the wholesale devastation and misery such things involve. Snow, unprecedented snowfalls to ground all the planes; fog, hitherto unknown densities of fog to stop all movement; solar magnetic storms, not lasting a few minutes as they do at present, but continuous, rendering ineffective every radio control and message over all the planet; these forces of Nature, introduced at the right moment and of sufficient intensity, will silence the tongues and blind the eyes and consume the armies in a sense which is infinitely more effective just because it is symbolic and not literal.

Now the chariots of God are seen no more. They have gone back into the heavens, their work done, and the Psalmist, watching their going, realises that the most sublime event of all has taken place to signal that this present Age has ended and the next has begun. *"Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive; thou hast received gifts for men, yea, even for the rebellious, that the Lord God might dwell among them"* (vs.18).

This is resurrection. Our Lord ascended on high forty days after his raising from the dead. He had gifts for men even then but it was not yet time to bestow them. His Church, the Christian Church of this present Age, must first follow him and that could not be until the end of the Age. Now the Psalmist sees that completion. All who are truly Christ's will have finished their course in death and they, like him, experienced the "change" of 1 Cor. 15.51 from earthly to heavenly life. They too will have ascended on high. No barrier remains to hinder the inception of the Millennial Age with all its blessings for men. So the Lord and his resurrected Church are manifested to all earth's new rulers, bearing precious gifts of peace and healing and

everlasting life to "whosoever will". Even the formerly rebellious are to share in those gifts; no one is excluded.

So this Messianic rhapsody comes to its inspiring end with vs. 20. *"Our God is the God of salvation; and unto God the Lord belong the issues from death"*. The word means "goings out" or "escape". This is where men at last escape the fear and the prospect of death. Life, full, glorious, eternal life

opens before them with no discordant note. The Divine Plan of the Ages has achieved its object and all who live are doing so in full harmony and communion with their Maker. *"Then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written 'Death is swallowed up in victory' O Death, where is thy sting? O Grave, where is thy victory?"* Gone, gone for ever, for *"unto the Lord our God belongs the escape from death"*.

"BUT PRAYER WAS MADE"

An intense persecution had broken out in the days when Stephen was arrested and stoned to death, and had continued with great ferocity through all the subsequent weeks and months. Many members of the mother Church had fled for safety to other towns and villages, and had been the means of spreading the gospel story over a wider field (Acts. 11.19) and of winning converts to the church of Christ. Some, if not all, of the Apostles had remained resident in Jerusalem, to keep the standard of the faith flying in the city which had raised its hand against the One through whom God had spoken to them, and against the first martyr who had been privileged to follow the Master in the way of sacrifice and death.

In view of the intensity of the persecution, instituted and conducted by Saul of Tarsus, it required a rare courage to stay on, even though maintaining discreet silence in public about the great things committed to their care. When the conduct of people is actuated by blind passion rather than cool reason, it calls for heroism of the finest quality to linger on under circumstances where misdirected zeal and burning fanaticism may, at any moment, kindle the fiery furnace. In spite of the fact that the hand of the Lord Jesus had plucked the chief of the persecutors as a brand from the fire, there was not respite from the severities of the persecution. Rather, that even fed fuel to the flames of wrath which burned in the cruel hearts of priest and Pharisee alike, so that to remain in Jerusalem became increasingly dangerous for the Apostles and for those stalwart souls who chose to remain with them in the metropolis.

To curry favour with the Jews, King Herod, while on a visit to Jerusalem, caused James the brother of John to be arrested and slain with the sword. This act gave great satisfaction to the Jewish hierarchy—a satisfaction which was openly made known to the royal murderer. Desiring to give further pleasure to the flattering Jews, Herod next proceeded to arrest Peter, and threw him, under guard, into prison. But because the Jewish people were engaged in the observance of one of their great feasts, Herod postponed the act of

execution for a few days. When the ritualistic solemnities of the Passover feast-days were at an end, he purposed to bring Peter forth from prison and give him to the headsman's sword, and thus deprive the followers of the Nazarene of the second member of that favoured trio which had enjoyed the closest intimacy with their Master so many times.

Herod had done all that a royal despot could do to ensure Peter's safekeeping in custody. Two soldiers were chained to his wrists, and two others mounted guard outside his prison door, in relays, day and night. Also, his cell was deep within the building—within the *"first and second wards"* (v. 10) and the guards were under strictest orders to keep the prisoner safe and secure, in readiness for Herod's act of appeasement when the appropriate moment should have come.

Thus far the royal and military position! What of the prisoner? Was he cowed and broken, ready to forswear his faith in the face of death? Three words only describe Peter's state of mind. *"Peter was sleeping . . ."* (v. 6). Not much is said, but enough to show that Peter's heart was at rest in the Lord. Without doubt, he knew of Herod's purpose on the morrow, for soldiers' tongues would talk! But Peter found a "Power" in his heart, which enabled him to look death in the face without fear or dread. He had learned to live or die without regrets, submissive to his Master's Will and Providence.

Peter was "at rest"! What of his brethren? It could not have been wholly a happy Passover-time for them. Their fervent remembrance of the Master's death would be tempered by remembrance of Peter's plight. They would have remembrance of a long record of martyr sufferings, beginning with Stephen and ending, within recent days, in the death of James. They would be cognisant that God had permitted the persecutor to prevail and work his evil will upon the defenceless flock. Would He permit Peter to be slain? Would Herod do with Peter as he had done with James? They did not know. The apprehensive little company had remained together in continuous session through

all the days of the Feast. And now, knowing perhaps of Herod's intention to slay Peter on the coming day, with full heart they betook themselves to prayer. What else could they do? They had no one with influence at Herod's court; there was no ray of hope there. They could not expect a change of the Pharisaical heart. Save for God's intervention, there was no way out. Peter's deliverance was but a forlorn hope. "*But prayer was made*". It was the prayer of human extremity, prayer in the dark! For what did they pray? Was it for Peter's deliverance? Was it for the frustration Of Herod's plans, and the return of Peter to their midst? It may have been, but it is somewhat doubtful whether that was so. Their reaction to his knocking "*at the door of the gate*" scarcely agrees with such a thought. They were doubtful even after Rhoda had heard and recognised his voice, whether Peter could have been set free. Their reply to the damsel's joyful words reveals only too well how little they expected Peter's release. For what then, had they prayed, if not for Peter's release? Is it not more likely that prayer was for Peter's "faith"—that he might be faithful in the hour of death, that he would not retract one word, nor flinch his eye, when face to face with the headsman's sword.

God has his own way of teaching his children to trust him. To Peter he sent that inward peace, so that on the last night before the fateful morrow Peter could sleep. Peter would never forget—could never forget—the holy calm that possessed his soul and closed his eyes in sweet repose. Then, after his restful sleep, came the unexpected release. God gave him deliverance from his foes. Can one wonder that it was Peter's hand which wrote the deeply confident words "*kept by the power of God, through faith, unto salvation . . .*" (1 Pet. 1.6). The mighty power of God kept Peter from his own weaknesses, and from his enemy's sword—a lesson which tintured every word and thought from that day on; though long centuries have passed, that confidence "yet speaketh".

The lesson for the little prayer-circle was that God can take man's extremity as his opportunity. In royal circles Peter's decapitation was as good as

done. To the little assembly it was all but accomplished, but God decreed otherwise. The Divine caretaker allowed the peril to persist till the last night, till hope was all but dead, then, out of the "seemingly inevitable" God rescued his trusting child. Could the little band ever forget that God gave more than they had asked—"exceedingly above all they could ask or think".

Every circumstance of life is an occasion and an opportunity for the child of God to pray. He has causes without end to voice his gratitude to God. He has need more than he knows to utter his requests, but in all the changeful experience of life it is the prayer of the "extremity" and the "forlorn hope" that best shows the moral fibre of the soul. A weak faith may say "it is too late", a doubting heart could say "What is the use of it all?." A dauntless faith will say "But prayer may still be made". Thanksgiving and request are the appropriate prayers for the ordinary occasions of life. The "but prayer" is the prayer for the extraordinary times, when we have reached the end of our tether, and we can see no way through the tangled thicket that surrounds us. Like the little company in Jerusalem, we may not always word our prayer to the right end, but the essential thing is not the mere fact of asking, but the attitude of asking. "*Men ought always to pray and not to faint*" said Jesus, and it is when fainting seems the next obvious human thing to do, that "but prayer" wins the Divine reward.

"*When all around my soul gives way, He then is all my hope and stay.*"

When the Herods of this world have laid their evil plans and so we seem to have no way of escape from their toils, as may yet well happen amid the strains of present life, we must not faint or fall, but remember that prayer can be made, and out of the dark scene the angel of the Lord will lead the way to the working of the Will of God. Let us ever remember that whether we are the "prayed-for" (as Peter) or of the praying Church, it is the prayer which rises from the edge of our extremity that will bring the Divine blessing in full measure into our lives.

Some of us think of ourselves as members of the "conquering bands with banners waving, pressing on o'er hill and plain", without remembering that there can be no conquest without conflict.

* * *

"The universe is not a steel gauntlet, hard and inflexible. It is a silken glove. And what is more wonderful still, it is a silken glove with the hand of God in it." (*Prof. Cairns*)

The story of Divine grace is the record of One who has been disposed to "give", and "give", and "give" again, because it pleases him to dispense of his fulness to helpless needy men.

* * *

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

ESCAPE FROM DAMASCUS

*A story of
St. Paul*

A ripple of indignation passed over the synagogue. This man was voicing the most outrageous heresies. It was not that he had espoused the cause of the crucified Nazarene; these orthodox Jews of Damascus knew that several prominent Pharisees of Jerusalem had already done that. Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, Jerusalem Pharisees both and members of the Sanhedrin, had acknowledged their belief in Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ. For all its bigotry and formalism, organised Judaism allowed considerable latitude in matters of belief to the individual, and it was possible to be a passive believer in Christ without risking excommunication or loss of office. At Jerusalem in fact, a "*great company of the priests were obedient*" to the new faith (Acts 6. 7). But no one had as yet suggested this to be anything else than another new sect of Judaism; a few peculiarities, an undue and altogether mistaken reverence for the man who had been crucified, but, now that he himself was safely out of the way, not likely to threaten any established institution. The top ecclesiastics in Jerusalem, the High Priest, the Sanhedrin and some of the more prominent Scribes and Pharisees, seemed most unaccountably disturbed over the development and were doing all they could to suppress it, but really these Jews who accepted the claims of Jesus seemed in all other respects orthodox enough; they upheld the law of Moses and refused to have anything to do with Gentiles. They kept the feast days and observed the usual customs. So far as the synagogues up and down the land went there was nothing to bar a "follower of the Way", as they called themselves, from participating in the worship or taking a leading part. But this man was going beyond all that others of the persuasion had heretofore practised, and beyond all the bounds of decency. The Galilean disciples had proclaimed, as the basis of their faith, their belief that they had seen the crucified Jesus walking the earth after his death, talking with them, eating with them, and behaving generally as a man behaves, a thesis which could be tolerated on the basis that Elisha had been known to restore a man to life and what had happened once could happen again. Saul the Pharisee had shifted the grounds of argument to something much more dangerous; he claimed to have seen this same Jesus resplendent in heavenly glory, standing at the right hand of power, and was making it all too obvious that the new faith so far as he was concerned was not going to be a divergent sect of Judaism but was going to challenge Judaism, overthrow it and supersede it. They were compelled to sit in their own synagogue and listen while the man before

them "*preached Christ that he is the Son of God*" (Acts 9.10).

This was quite a departure in Christian evangelism. Peter and John and the others in their public ministry had not stressed the Divine Sonship of Christ; rather they had dwelt upon his office as the Divine Messenger, the One that should come. "*This man hath God raised up*" they said. God had exalted him to be a Prince and Saviour. He was the foretold prophet like unto Moses; when they did use the term "Son" they softened the effect by referring to him as "*his Son Jesus*" without any inherent suggestion of Divinity. Perhaps at that early stage they had hardly grasped the deeper truth themselves. But Saul had. His experience on the Damascus road, coupled with three years' study and meditation away in Arabia, had shown him in crystal clarity that this One who appeared on earth in form as a man and after his death revealed himself in glory from his resumed station at the right hand of God could be no other than the pre-human Word, the manifestation of God to man, the heavenly Son of God. Upon that basis Saul built his message and his listeners knew that here was a challenge to their whole system of belief and way of life, and they bristled with anger.

Neither indignation nor anger availed them against the remorseless logic of the arguments which Saul had at his command. The word used in Acts 9. 22 "*proving that this is very Christ*" comes from a root implying the accurate and intimate fitting of one part to another; in this connection it describes the building of conclusions upon arguments, the erection of doctrines upon underlying theses. Without doubt Saul brought to bear all his own not inconsiderable knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures, and when to that was added the illuminating power of the Holy Spirit by which he was guided the result was a dynamic which could not be resisted. Even before his conversion Saul would have been a formidable antagonist to engage in debate, but now there was more than a keen, intellectual mind buttressed by the gift of rhetoric and profound knowledge of the subject. Behind Saul stood his unseen Master, imparting to him a spiritual discernment and a force of conviction which nothing in Damascus could hope to withstand. So the more extreme among the leading Pharisees and Scribes plotted to solve the problem by deliberately encompassing Saul's death.

How the assassination was planned to be carried out is not stated. Saul became apprised of the conspiracy—he knew his men well and was probably only too familiar with similar schemings in previous days—and decided that it was time to leave

Damascus. To do so openly was impossible; the city gates were being watched and Damascus was completely surrounded by a high wall. The Christians were equal to the occasion; dwelling-houses joined to the inside, with windows piercing the wall, were not uncommon. Through such a window the Apostle was put and lowered to the ground outside; thus alone and without possessions, in the darkness of the night, he stole away from the city and headed on foot towards Jerusalem.

This was not the return journey he had planned. More than three years previously he had set out from Jerusalem expecting to be back in a few weeks at the head of a procession of captives, entering the city amid the plaudits and congratulations of the ruling officials and doubtless in expectation of further honours to be bestowed in recognition of his services. Now he was making his way back alone, unknown and unrecognised, with small prospect of any better treatment at Jerusalem than he had received at Damascus. In all this experience Saul must have perceived the Divine law of retribution in operation. He condemned Stephen for declaring that he beheld heaven opened and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; he saw the same thing himself not many weeks later. He went to Damascus the persecutor; he left Damascus persecuted. He purposed to take Christians bound to Jerusalem for punishment; he began to realise now that in all probability bonds and imprisonment were to be his own lot before Jerusalem had finished with him. But he did not falter; he knew that his path must inevitably take him to Jerusalem. His departure from Damascus was not a flight; he journeyed now to meet the next stage of his experience as an Apostle of Jesus Christ.

That experience opened with a crushing disappointment. Of course Saul expected to be cold-shouldered by his former friends and associates. He was to them a renegade, a traitor, and they wanted nothing more to do with him. His career lay in ruins, his reputation and influence gone, and no door even of hospitality open to him. He entered Jerusalem penniless, friendless, alone, without even knowing where he would lay his head that night. But he must have consoled himself with the thought that he could claim the fellowship and hospitality of his brethren in the faith, those whom once he persecuted but now recognised as fellow believers. He thought of the friendliness and Christian love extended him by Ananias and his fellows at Damascus, their solicitude for his safety, and zeal in aiding his escape from that city, and he must have looked forward to a similar fellowship in Jerusalem. So immediately upon his arrival "he assayed to join himself to the disciples" and in that effort, educated and shrewd man of the world that

he was, manifested an unexpected ignorance of human nature. Even although the bitterness and terror of his persecuting was three years in the past, how could he have expected them to receive him? He had no sponsors; none to speak for him or endorse his claim to discipleship. The story of his conversion three years previously would certainly have come back to Jerusalem and be known to the brethren, but Damascus was a great distance away and how could they be sure they had the story aright? Much more likely that this was a trap of some kind into which they could easily fall and be taken. So "they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple".

Did that bitter experience break down the last remnant of the one-time arrogant Pharisee's personal pride and self-will, and bow him to the dust that he might become the submissive bond-slave of Jesus Christ for ever? It was now three years since he had seen the vision and counted himself commissioned an ambassador for Christ, and what had he achieved? His preaching at Damascus had ended in an ignominious flight from the city; a similar endeavour to preach to the Jewish upper classes here in Jerusalem was clearly out of the question; now even the believers themselves wanted nothing to do with him. Not only was there no shelter for his body, there was no prospect of an opening for the exercise of his mind and his talents in the one cause which meant anything to him. Discouragement and frustration oppressed his mind; the work of three years appeared to have been wasted, and to a man in his middle thirties three years is a long time when that man is aching to make of his life a thing mighty in the service of the purposes of God.

This was Paul's darkest hour and the dawn was not far away. Seemingly by accident, but of course in Divine Providence, and without doubt precisely at God's appointed time, he met an old acquaintance, Joseph Barnabas, himself a Christian and well known to the Christian community in Jerusalem. Where and how these two men first met is not known; Barnabas hailed from Cyprus which is not far from Saul's birthplace, Tarsus, and Barnabas could probably in earlier days have had business on the mainland which would take him to Tarsus and in such case he would certainly have contacted the Jewish colony there and could thus have known the youthful Saul. Barnabas was one of the earliest converts after Pentecost and was in Jerusalem at the time—Acts 4. 36 records how he sold his land and donated the proceeds to the needs of the fellowship—so that it is perhaps more likely he was in Damascus during Saul's sojourn in that city and knew him there; he appears from Acts 9. 27 to have been quite well-informed on the details of Saul's conversion and work at Damascus. At any rate, Barnabas proved a real friend in need; he

took Saul to the apostles and certified his sincerity. With that recommendation the church was content to receive the newcomer into their fellowship and Saul found at last the haven his soul desired.

He only stayed in Jerusalem fifteen days (Gal. 1. 18). Saul's turbulent spirit, allied with his irrepressible zeal, quickly got him into trouble with the Jews, and here again, as at Damascus, they plotted to kill him. Once more he had to flee for his life; once more the brethren rallied round to assist him and got him away to the seacoast where he could get a boat to his native Tarsus. It is possible that the Christians at Jerusalem were not altogether sorry to see the back of their rather embarrassing new convert; they had been enjoying a relatively peaceful time, free from persecution, prior to Saul's arrival, and the commotion he was creating in the city was not likely to be appreciated by these who knew what persecution meant. St. Luke was probably quite unconscious of a certain unintended humour in his narrative when immediately after his account of how the brethren succeeded in getting Saul out of the country, he says "*then had the churches rest throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria . . .*" (Acts 9. 30-31). Really the brethren had seen very little of Saul; he says himself that he only saw Peter and James the half brother of Jesus among the leaders. Peter seems to have given him the hospitality of his own home and the two men must have had much to say to each other. Saul must have learned a lot about the Lord's life and

sayings from Peter on this occasion, and fifteen days seems a remarkably brief time for Saul to confer with him and also whip up Jewish opposition to the point of plotting his death. Perhaps as the boat sailed away from Judea he reflected that twice now his life had been saved by men and women whom once he had persecuted unto the death; he was being given a lesson on returning good for evil.

So, for the second time, Saul was to be laid aside from the work he had been commissioned to carry out, remaining quietly at Tarsus, learning to wait upon his Lord for instruction and guidance, wondering probably why he seemed so definitely to be obstructed and frustrated in every endeavour to commence the work to which he had been called. Maybe a lesser man would have grown tired of it all by now and concluded that he was not really called to this work after all, and turned aside to some other interest. Not so Saul; the vision he had seen on that memorable occasion outside Damascus remained with him still; he knew on whom he had believed, and waited now in quiet submission for the summons to action which he felt sure would eventually come. And although he could not possibly have known it at the time, forces were already in operation in a completely new centre of missionary activity that would very shortly demand of him all that he had to give. Those few months in Tarsus were the last quiet, peaceful days the great Apostle was ever to know.

(To be continued)

CHRISTIAN RELATIONS

"One is your Master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren" (Matt. 23.8).

The Word of God is the unfailing guide for Christians who are "in the world but not of it", and its pages reveal many relationships, so many that to consider them all would take a long time; but there are four in particular which we do well to ponder over as we strive to follow in the footsteps of our Lord and Master. These are:— Our Relationship to Christ; Our Relationship to the World; Our Relationship to the Brethren, and Our Relationship to God.

Regarding the first, our Lord said "*Ye are my friends, if ye do what I command you*". He did not say "you will be called my friends" but "ye are (actually) my friends". At the time these words were spoken the disciples would not understand their full import; this was revealed to them later by the Spirit. The disciples had a great experience at Pentecost (so great that others thought they were intoxicated) and they there learned how they were really to be his friends. They had known him, witnessed his crucifixion, seen him laid in the grave, and thought their hopes were dashed; but then

they saw him raised and knew He was raised to the Father's right hand, and their hearts were filled with joy. They were friends of the One Who died and was raised, and had fulfilled all the conditions that would give them life.

This friendship is upon conditions:—"*If ye do whatsoever I command you*". For three and a half years He kept his Father's commandments himself, then He said, "Walk ye in my footsteps". Our path, therefore, will be a difficult one, for it means we must strive for the perfection of Christ. He laid nothing upon us that is impossible. His commandments are all possible and we have the Holy Spirit in our hearts, helping us to obey. The gospels, from Matthew 5 to John 16, are full of our Lord's commandments. They teach honesty of heart; we should bring no dishonour on the name of Christ. They teach purity of mind; our minds are changed and purified and become the mind of Christ. They also teach forgiveness; we should be ready to forgive. Our brethren need forgiveness, and we are even to pray for those who harm us. The spirit of forgiveness should be strong in our hearts. Some say that the Sermon on the Mount is impossible of

attainment; but if so, why did the Lord give it? He said, "I will send you the Holy Spirit"; the Holy Spirit shows us how to obey all his commandments and so become his friends.

Our relationship to the world. The first commandment in Matt. 5. is "Ye are the light of the world. Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in Heaven". How can we glorify God before men? Our Lord came and let his light shine before men, but they did not glorify God; they blasphemed God and crucified his Son. Men do not yet glorify God; they still continue in the downward path. Light is best seen in darkness by those who are seeking for light. The astronomer does not work by day, but by night, and sees things never seen by others; so, only to the few, the "spiritual astronomers", are these things revealed. Our Lord did not say "all men shall glorify God" but "they". The day is coming when our lights will be gathered into one and in the Kingdom we shall shine forth as the noonday and then all men shall see the Lord.

Our relationship to the brethren. Ephesians 4.25. "We are members of one another" How very close this is, closer than being brothers. We are one body linked together. Are we neglecting one another in any sense? If we take opportunity to help those with whom we come in contact we are fulfilling his commandment "bear ye one another's burdens and so fulfil the law of Christ". This union with the brethren is brought about by our Lord calling us his friends, the Light drawing us together and we becoming bound by the Holy Spirit. Rom. 15.1. says "We that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak and not to please ourselves". Who are the weak ones?; the Lord will show us because the weak ones need our help and prayers, and by this they become strong and we become stronger. We are told in 1 Thess. 4.18 to comfort one another and in Eph. 4.32 to be kind to one another. We should esteem those who labour for us, praying for them, for we cannot pray too much for the brethren who are serving us. In the body of Christ

nothing from outside can hurt us; nothing can touch our real life; only from within can that life be harmed. The "old man" is our enemy, for paradoxical as it may seem, that which is dead may come to life again. The body of Christ must be holy, for without holiness no man can see the Lord. Have you seen the Lord? Can you recognise him? If so, you are holy. "Be ye holy, as I am holy". Holiness must be a habit, and this is not an easy habit to attain; but it is something we can practice in our daily lives and it will then become a part of ourselves. Prayer is essential to the attaining of holiness; therefore pray without ceasing, lifting up hearts to him, morning, noon and night.

Our relationship to God. There are many figures in which our relationship to God is shown in the Bible. We think of him as our Father and we his children, or He as our shepherd and we his sheep, but these show more his relationship to us. The particular relationship we are dealing with now is shown in 1 Cor. 3.16. "Ye are the Temple of God". He has called us out of the world to become the Temple in which He will abide forever. How glorious is the thought that when the Temple of God is complete we shall be stones in that Temple.

We were in his heart before the foundation of the world and his Name is to be glorified in us. There was an Ark in the Temple containing the golden pot of Manna, representing Jesus Christ, the Bread of Life, the Manna on which we feed continually. The Rod that budded was there also. Are there buds coming forth from us, promising fruit to the glory of God? The Ark also contained the Tables of the Law, written on stones representing the Law of God written in our hearts, and it is because we are in the Ark, Jesus Christ, that we can keep the Law.

In our daily walk and conversation, then, strive to bear in mind these relationships which are so vital to the Christian life, and live as becomes friends of Christ, lights in the world, members one of another and stones of that Temple in which God will rest for ever.

Tower of refuge

The same God who was a wall of fire round about Elijah, defeating the resentment of Ahab and Jezebel; delivered Daniel and his three companions; released Peter from prison; in the case of Luther, the monk of Wittenberg, put to shame the power of the Pope and of other numerous and mighty persecutors—the same God still liveth, and is with his people always, even to the end of the world; he is their succour and defence. Depend on it, Christians, you would not pass your days and nights so quietly as you do, were it not his continual interposition against those who would molest you. The enmity of the prince of this world, and of his servants, is still unabated. Many an arm of strength, both in the higher and lower walks of life,

would be stretched out against you, but that He stays it. For as many as profess Christ sincerely and faithfully before men, as many as will live godly in Christ Jesus, must suffer molestation on that very account in this present world. That we live so peacefully and quietly and that our lives are so safe, though in the midst of dangers, is altogether owing to the protection of God, who neither slumbereth nor sleepeth; who never remits his vigilance over us day or night; whose mighty angels encamp about his people and who is himself their bulwark. In eternity we shall discover, to our great astonishment, how many enemies our Father prevented from injuring us, and how oft He has delivered us. "The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runneth into it, and is safe." (Selected)

THE COMING OF THE KING

4. "Higher than all heavens"

*A series of studies
concerning the
Second Advent*

A number of years ago there was published a book which set forth the views of twelve Christian ministers on the characteristics of Heaven. In nearly every case they pictured it situated a long way from the earth, somewhere in space, beyond the reach of telescopes or cameras, but having a definite geographical location so that presumably if one had some means of travelling through space and could live long enough it might be possible to take a journey to Heaven and come back to Earth. Of course none of the writers suggested as much but that is what would logically be implied. Even although some of them stressed the fact that heaven is a "spiritual" realm, inhabited only by "spiritual" beings, the idea of locality in relation to the earth and the sun and the stars remained. It is difficult for anyone to think of Heaven in any other terms. The well-known hymn, *"There's a home for little children, above the bright blue skies"*, is a tolerable correct reflection of the idea that exists in most minds respecting Heaven. Somewhere up there, beyond the sun and the moon and the stars, there is, suspended in space, the golden floor which constitutes the land of Heaven; there stand the hosts of the redeemed round the Throne of God. Somewhere in the upper skies shines resplendent that Holy City of which God and the Lamb are the eternal light.

When considering Scriptural teaching regarding our Lord's return to earth at his Second Advent it is important that we clarify our ideas, as far as possible, about the nature of Heaven. Naturally enough, the way in which we visualise it in our minds will affect and colour our understanding of what the Scriptures say about his return. If, for example, we believed that Heaven was on the moon, we would picture his Coming as a simple journey through space for two hundred and thirty-eight thousand miles from moon to earth, and easily imagine him cleaving our atmosphere at the end of the journey and landing upon earth in full view of those who happened to be on the spot at the time, in just such a manner as 1 Thess. 4. 17, and Matt. 16. 64, would indicate if interpreted strictly literally. We are saved all that since we do not believe that Heaven is on the moon—which is just as well, since man, in his inexhaustible hunger for exploration, has now succeeded in effecting a landing on that satellite. And yet, if the place to which our Lord ascended when He "appeared in the presence of God for us" is not in fact a physical locality in our Universe to which men might conceivably travel if they had the machine and knew the way, and from which our Lord does travel when the time comes for him to return to the earth, how and in

what terms are we to picture his coming? Putting it crudely, where does He come from and how does He get here? The answer to that question might help us to understand the manner of his coming more clearly. We might well question now whether the time has come when, in the development of our understanding both of Divine revelation and natural science, it is necessary to consider from a new angle Scriptural statements such as that Christ "ascended into Heaven" and "sat down at the right hand of God"? A clearer appreciation of what really happened to our Lord when the cloud veiled his ascending form from the eyes of the disciples on Olivet, cannot fail to be enlightening when the manner of his return to earth is considered.

It is difficult to think of the Second Advent except in terms of some kind of journey from a distant part of space. The very fact that our Lord's spiritual presence is with us all through the centuries (*"Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the Age"*) implies that his Second Advent is a personal coming to the earth, something more than merely being present in thought and care for his Church. One truth upon which all agree is that for thirty-three and a half years the Son of God was literally present in the earth, communing and associating with men, and that after the Olivet scene following his resurrection He was thus literally present no longer. Even although during those last few weeks He was for the most part invisibly present, there came a change at Pentecost. Thereafter He was in the earth no longer; He had "ascended into Heaven".

It may be useful at this point to trace the progressive development of human beliefs about Heaven. From earliest times the place of the after-life has been visualised as lying just outside the boundaries of the known physical creation, transcending this earth in all the things which make for happiness and contentment, but essentially of the same physical nature as this earth. As men's knowledge of the universe widened so their ideas of the place of Heaven perforce receded farther away. The Sumerians of 2700 BC and earlier looked on their sacred mountain, the "Mount of the East", on the border between Iraq and Iran (Persia) as peculiarly the place of the gods. Somewhere in the skies above its summit they had their home from whence they ruled the world. In the Babylonian story of the Flood it was on that mountain that the Ark came to rest and from which the earth was re-peopled. Later on the Greeks fixed on the heights of their Mount Olympus as the home of the gods and the eternal abode of the blessed, and that did duty until some hardy adventurers, greatly daring,

climbed to the summits of the mountains and found no marble halls, no playing fountains, no rich feasts of food and drink of life, no gods and no goddesses—nothing but a line of snow-clad peaks across which the wind howled and chilled them to the bone. Then in the days of the philosophers Heaven was pictured as a world in the upper atmosphere enveloping and enclosing this earth, where the gods and their favourites dwelt in eternal felicity. Plato describes this celestial world, saying that just as men dwell on earthly continents and islands which themselves float on the seas, so the islands of the heavenly world float on the top of earth's atmosphere, the air, so that righteous souls at death have only to ascend upward to find themselves in the heavenly realm. (This, the general belief in St. Paul's day, is the meaning of the reference in 1 Thess. 4.17 to the resurrected Church at the end of this Age meeting the Lord "in the air", i.e., meeting him in Heaven above.) The later Christian conception of Heaven is founded almost entirely upon this belief.

But men were beginning now to study the heavens in a spirit of scientific enquiry. The first great Greek astronomer, Hipparchus, a century and a half before Christ, accounted for the motions of the sun and planets by developing suggestions made by another, Eudoxus, two centuries earlier. According to his theory the earth was the centre of creation. The moon, sun, planets and stars revolved around the earth in a succession of concentric orbits not very far away. Outside these orbits there were three great crystalline spheres or "heavens", something like vast glass envelopes completely encircling and enclosing the earth, sun and stars. The surface of the third and outermost of these three spheres was the "sphere of happy souls", the eternal abode of the righteous. This was the accepted scientific view of astronomy at the time of the First Advent. A century later a then leading astronomer, Claudius Ptolemy, elaborated the system in his writings from which it is now generally known as the "Ptolemaic cosmogony", and this remained accepted scientific belief until the seventeenth century when it was superseded by the discoveries of Kepler and Galileo. As late as 1626 John Speed's map of the world—now in the British Museum—showed these concentric spheres with the place of heaven marked!

The Christian Church in the early centuries of the Age grew up against the background of this system, and thus the idea of Heaven being somewhere out in space, on the uttermost of these spheres, became firmly fixed. The principal reason why the Catholic ecclesiastical authorities persecuted Galileo in the seventeenth century for denying the Ptolemaic theory by declaring that the earth and the planets were really moving round the sun, and the earth was not the fixed centre of the universe,

was because it upset their theology in so far as the place of Heaven was concerned. In demolishing Ptolemy's crystalline spheres Galileo and his predecessor, Copernicus, had unwittingly demolished Heaven as well!

It was in consequence of this rapidly expanding knowledge of the heavenly bodies that in 1750 Thomas Wright, a British astronomer of Durham, hazarded the theory that the constellation known as Pleiades is the centre of the universe, and that all other stars, including our sun and its planets, circle around that central point. His thesis was not accepted but in 1846 it was elaborated and revived by a German astronomer, Prof. Maedlar. Dr. Joseph Seiss, a noted Lutheran minister of Philadelphia, came across the idea and concluded that here, surely, was the ideal place of Divine rule. He wrote "*Science has discovered that the sun is not a dead centre, with planets wheeling about it, and itself stationary. It is now ascertained that the sun also is in motion . . . around some other and vastly mightier centre. Astronomers are not yet fully agreed as to where that centre is. Some, however, believe they have found the direction of it to be the Pleiades, and particularly Alcyone, the centre one of the Pleiadic stars . . . Alcyone, then . . . would seem to be the 'midnight throne' in which the whole system of gravitation has its central seat, and from which the Almighty governs his universe . . .*"

But as with Ptolemy, so with Maedlar. So far from Pleiades being the centre of visible creation, current discovery has established that it is but a member of our own "galaxy" or cluster of stars, and not even at the centre of that. Pleiades is in fact a relatively near neighbour of our own sun, and with the sun is itself revolving round some other and greater centre. And even that does not locate Heaven, for outside our own galaxy there are other galaxies, great "star-cities," at a distance so great as to defy the imagination. The extent of creation is unplumbed and unknown, and Heaven as a geographical location farther away than ever.

Against this should be set the sublime words of Solomon in 2 Chron. 6. 18 "*But will God in very truth dwell with men on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house which I have built?*" Speaking thus at the dedication of the Temple, the Israelite king glimpsed a truth which all the seekers after a geographical heaven have passed over—that God "*dwelleth not in temples made with hands*" (Acts 7. 48). He exists from eternity, before any part of the material universe came into being. He cannot be contained within the structure of that which He created. It is with this in mind that enquiry into the "going" and "coming" of our Lord Jesus Christ must be made.

In the search for Scriptural allusions that may help us to understand these things a little more

clearly we are led quite naturally to the experience of the Apostle Paul when he was "caught up" to the "third heaven" and heard "incredible things which it is not possible for a man to relate" (2 Cor. 12. 4 Diaglott). The Apostle cannot be expected to have been wiser in things scientific than his own generation and the "third heaven" of which he speaks is, of course, the third sphere, the heaven of happy souls, of Hipparchus and Ptolemy. That is where St. Paul must of necessity have visualised the location of Heaven. Whether he was literally translated to the celestial world "out of the body" or merely experienced a vision "in the body" he himself knew not and it has no bearing on the matter now at issue. The fact remains that he perceived and retained a definite mental impression and memory of sights and sounds unlike anything occurring in human experience, and in consequence no words or analogies existed in human experience whereby he might describe them to his fellows.

To illustrate: Two hundred feet below the surface of the sea all sunlight is so filtered out that only blue is left. All things there appear in various shades of blue. A diver, cutting his hand, sees the blood emerge as blue. Men have descended to that depth with floodlights and colour film cameras and found that when their powerful lights are switched on, the seabed and all its myriad forms of life show up in a magnificent and resplendent blaze of all colours. Suppose there had been on that seabed a race of intelligent beings, accustomed to spending their lives in that environment of blue, knowing nothing else, and one of them coming in contact with the scene thus illumined by floodlights. How could he describe to his less fortunate fellows, afterwards, what he had seen and the glory of the reds and greens and yellows? He could carry the brief vision in his own memory for ever, but it would be to him, so far as his companions were concerned, an "incredible thing which it was not possible to relate". So must Paul have felt when he penned those words.

The celestial world from which our Lord comes at his Advent, then, is something so different from the world we know that we could not understand or visualise it even if the Scriptures tried to describe it. It is not just that the trees are greener and the streams are clearer and the gold is brighter and the music sweeter. It is described in the Scriptures by many such devices but only because that is the nearest we can get to comprehending it. As Paul said to the Corinthians "*Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath entered into the heart of man, the things that God hath prepared for them that love him*". Yet he goes on in the very next breath to declare "*But God hath revealed them to us by his Spirit—for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God*". And if that last remark means

anything at all it must mean that those who are the Lord's disciples should expect to comprehend at least the fundamental principles of the celestial realm even though they may not visualise its citizens and its landscapes.

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

What if that "change" is a change to life on a different "wave-length" so to speak, as if one had switched from the BBC-1 to the BBC-2 programme on the TV? That may be a difficult thing—it may even seem a ludicrous thing—to contemplate. But it may serve to indicate a possibility. It is a common experience in everyday life to switch on a television receiver and "tune in" to a particular wavelength. The room is filled with music—a definite world of sight and sound is created and is perceptible to the eyes and ears of the observer. Almost everyone realises that simultaneously with that programme other worlds of

sight and sound, inaudible and unperceived, are pulsating through that room, not seen or heard only because the force that creates them is on a different wave-length. They are just as real, and in other rooms, on correctly tuned receivers, are yielding sight and sound just as evident. Each receiver can discern only that to which it is adapted and tuned.

If the spiritual world can, by analogy, be pictured as something like that, and existing, not in some other part of the material universe, but as it were upon a different wavelength, then, imperfect as this analogy must be, it can at least serve to free us from the geographical limitation which has of necessity shaped men's thoughts in the past, and help us to visualise that world as divorced from this, and yet in a sense superimposed upon it. If such a conception in any way approaches the truth, then our Lord Jesus Christ, Who left the earth and ascended to the right hand of God, effected that transfer of his personal presence from earth to Heaven, not by continuing his upward progress through the cloud that received him out of the disciples' sight to some far distant point in outer space, but by passing into a world which is just as near to us here, and at the same time just as far away, as the unheard radio programme is near and yet far from the one that fills the room in which we may be sitting.

Likewise, at his coming again, He can, for a

period at least, be present on the scene of earthly affairs without having necessarily come "into tune" as it were, with the material creation of human sense, and therefore unperceived by human senses, even as during most of the forty days between his resurrection and ascension. Only upon occasion then did He become apparent in a terrestrial body, the rest of the time He was out of this world and yet still near his disciples; only at the end of the forty days did He leave them to return to the Father. All the evidence goes to show that our Lord "descends from heaven", not by a physical journey from some recess of outer space into the solar system and so to the earth, but rather by something analogous to a change of "wave-length".

Perhaps the analogy is too hard to grasp. Perhaps it is not a very good one after all. But that our returning Lord comes, not from somewhere else *inside* our universe, but from a celestial realm which is *altogether outside it*, ought to be realised as a fact even if we cannot fully comprehend it; and that in turn should help us to understand why the early stages of his Advent are described as being thief-like, unobtrusive, not detected by human eyes and ears but by the mental and spiritual faculties, rightly appraising the signs of the times. The *outward manifestations, appealing to the natural senses, come later.*

(To be continued)

Earthen Vessels

"We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us." (2 Cor. 4. 7).

The "treasure" which is here spoken of is the ministry of the Gospel (vs. 1) which is committed to each one of the Lord's followers in harmony with his own parting admonition "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation" (Mark 16. 15). We are bidden remember that it is God's Gospel we proclaim, not our own, and the power that inspires us to go forth with it, and sustains us whilst we proclaim it, is the power of the Holy Spirit, not something having its source in our own physical or mental strength. It would have been so easy for God to have committed his work to the wise and noble and influential of this world;

He could easily have wrought some miracle in their characters, thus transforming them into efficient servants and missionaries. He did not. He chose instead the weak and the poor and ignoble of this world, those who may or may not have possessed earthly advantages but were at any rate rich in faith and love and devotion toward God, requiring no miracles working on their behalf to ensure *that*. So it was that it pleased God, in his wisdom, by the simplicity of preaching to refute the wisdom of the world and save those that believe. That is why we have this inestimable treasure of the ministry in the earthen vessels of our weak and imperfect human frames. The fact reminds us that the power we have is that of God and that his grace can be made perfect in our weakness.

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

* * *

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

God will never force his gifts. He always waits for some form of co-operation.

* * *

Putting away Baal is of little use if we keep the calves of Dan and Bethel.

THE PROPHET AND THE LION

*An examination
of 1 Kings 13*

A strange story, this, of the man of God who denounced King Jeroboam for apostasy, and afterwards on account of an apparently trivial breach of instructions was waylaid and slain by a lion in punishment. Some have asked if God is really so vindictive as the story, on the surface, would appear to indicate.

The scene is set almost immediately after the separation of the Ten Tribes and the Two Tribes consequent upon the death of Solomon, and the account is recorded in 1 Kings 13. Jeroboam had just become the first king of the newly constituted Ten Tribe nation, henceforward to be known as Israel, and had been told by Ahijah the prophet that if he and his people remained faithful to the Lord God of Israel their prosperity was assured. Notwithstanding this he had at once instituted what amounted to idolatrous worship and was actually engaged in personally officiating at the pagan altar when the man of God, sent from Judah for the purpose, publicly reprovved him. Jeroboam gave orders that the prophet be seized for punishment and at once the Lord gave a sign. The altar was riven from top to bottom and Jeroboam's arm paralysed so that he could not move it. In sudden terror the king begged that his opponent would intercede with the Lord for him. His request granted, the prayer was answered and the king's arm made whole. Impressed with the miracle, and not a little subdued, Jeroboam invited the man of God to accept his hospitality and a fitting reward, but this the prophet declined, saying that he had been instructed neither to eat nor drink in the pagan land or to tarry for any reason, but to return home directly his mission was accomplished.

So far so good. He set out on the way to Judah, but before passing out of Jeroboam's domains sat down to rest under a terebinth tree. There he was found by an "old prophet" who in his turn invited him to accept the hospitality of his home. He gave the same reply as to Jeroboam, but the old prophet went further. He told the man of God that he also was a prophet of God and that an angel of the Lord had commissioned him to bring the traveller into his house and insist on his sharing a meal. "*But*" says the narrator "*he lied unto him*". Willing to believe the story, the traveller gave way and returned with the old prophet. Whilst at table, the Spirit of the Lord came upon his host and under that influence he told the traveller that because he had disobeyed the commandment of God he would meet his death in a strange land. The narrative goes on to describe how, upon resuming his journey, he was attacked and killed by a lion, and his body buried in the old prophet's own sepulchre,

with an expression of grief on the part of the latter and a declaration that the dead man's prediction concerning the fate of the nation would surely come to pass.

As related, the whole story seems so pointless, and the fate of its central character seemingly so unnecessarily severe, that the reason for its inclusion in the record might well be queried. The man was so evidently deceived by the old prophet of Bethel that the infliction of the death penalty seems out of all proportion to the crime. It is evident that a closer scrutiny of motives and implications hidden in the story is necessary.

The man of God was sent into an apostate land, to utter his message and depart, doing nothing whilst in its borders that would savour of participation in, or toleration of, its apostasy. Jeroboam had set up images of the golden calf, saying as did his forebears in the days of the Exodus "*behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt*" (1 Kings 12. 28). No true-hearted worshipper of God could tolerate or condone that blasphemy and in fact most of the priests and Levites and prophets among the Ten Tribes had left and gone into Judah. The Lord's word had been clear and explicit; he was neither to eat bread nor drink water with anyone in the land and he was not to linger or turn back whilst within its frontiers. So far as the prime object of his mission was concerned he had obeyed, flatly refusing Jeroboam's invitation and immediately setting out for home.

Perhaps his sitting down to rest under the terebinth tree, still alien territory, was his first mistake. There was really no need for him to rest, or to eat, at all. Bethel is only twelve miles north of Jerusalem; from the hastily set up frontier between the two kingdoms he would only have about seven or eight miles walking to make the round trip. He could have been back in Judah within three hours of setting out had he been as zealous as he should have been to leave the land defiled by apostasy. He chose instead to take his ease under the tree and there the old prophet found him.

One might ask what this old prophet, if indeed he was a prophet of the Lord, was doing in Bethel, the centre of the apostasy? Why had he not accompanied his probably more God-fearing fellows to Judah? It is possible that he had compromised his conscience to the extent of tolerating the false worship that had been instituted and had no intention of leaving home. The fact that he deliberately lied to the traveller shews that in any case he was not a very good prophet. For what purpose did he thus seek to persuade the other to abandon his principles? The most logical suggestion is that he

sought to obtain some concession, some outward sign from the traveller that a basis of fellowship or agreement might be possible between the rival faiths. It must not be forgotten that the sharing of a meal together meant a great deal in the East in those days, much more than a similar proceeding amongst us today. It bound the participants together in a tie of friendship and even of brotherhood. It implied that neither would seek to injure the other and the two would make common cause against any external threat to either. For the traveller to eat bread in the house of any of the apostates meant that he was prepared to join with them in fellowship and make common cause with them. This is what the traveller did, and in so doing he greatly mitigated the effect of the message he had just delivered and the judgments of which he had been the agent. The people around might well consider that their position in the sight of God was by no means so serious as had at first been suggested, if his messenger of condemnation was prepared to eat bread in one of their houses.

He did this thing in the assurance that an angel of God had told the old prophet the former command was rescinded. It seems very probable that the traveller wanted to believe it. As an instructed messenger of God he should have known better than to think that the Lord would change his mind after giving explicit instructions. He ought to have reasoned that even if the Lord had so decided, He was not likely to pass on his revised commands at third hand through a discredited prophet who was himself an apostate, when the original mandate had come direct to the traveller from God himself. The whole setting of this part of the story seems clearly to indicate that he was only too willing to accept the explanation and to go with the old prophet, heedless of his original very definite instructions.

It may seem strange that after all this the Lord should in fact speak through this treacherous old prophet. The account says that *"the word of the Lord came unto the prophet that brought him back"*. The Divine sentence was that because he had disobeyed, *"thy carcass shall not come unto the sepulchre of thy fathers"*. It is not unusual, though, for the word of the Lord to be spoken by the mouth of an unworthy instrument. Balaam could well have been one such case. This might well be an instance where the man was impelled by the Divine Spirit to utter words despite his own volition and even perhaps against his will. The point should not be missed here that the traveller himself, because of disobedience, or more likely because of an inward unfaithful condition of heart which had now led him to his disobedience, had severed the link between himself and God, so that God had departed from him.

The meal ended, the traveller set forth again,

riding upon an ass, the gift of which he had accepted from the apostate. He had only four miles or so to go but he must needs arrive in Judah with visible evidence of having accepted a present from the "people of the land". But he did not get so far. A short way out of Bethel *"a lion met him in the way and slew him"*. Speculation as to whether the Lord actually sent the lion or the account merely records an incident which was all too common in those days and this was an accidental encounter, is rather beside the point, for this, being the focus of the story, must enshrine the principle which its preservation in the Old Testament is intended to illustrate.

That principle is this. Whilst the prophet was faithfully discharging his duty to God in circumstances involving danger—not only from lions but from the wrath of King Jeroboam—he was under Divine protection. When he became faithless he lost that protection and must take his chance. From the moment he broke bread in the apostate's house he lost God, and when the lion met him he had no defence. So with Israel, the nation over whom Jeroboam was at that moment king. If they continued faithful, Divine protection was guaranteed; if they apostatised they were at the mercy of their enemies, and eventually their enemies would destroy them—as in fact they did do some two centuries later. That was the object lesson which the untimely death of this unfortunate messenger presented to the spectators. That, perhaps, is why the story was recorded and has been preserved through the centuries.

The old prophet who had been the cause of the happening buried the dead man in his own tomb, and mourned him, and gave instructions that he himself should be laid to rest beside him when his own time should come. Does this indicate a rather tardy repentance for the part he had played? Did this Divine judgment upon the traveller awaken him to a sense of his own false position before God? It might well have been so. The story closes with his admonition to his own sons declaring that the word of the Lord against the apostate nation would surely come to pass, so that he seems to have changed his attitude considerably.

The event must have produced an impression. Three and a half centuries later, long after the blow had fallen and the Ten Tribes taken into captivity, good king Josiah of Judah, coming into Bethel, found a monument by the wayside. Enquiring its significance he was told that it marked the grave of the man of God who had prophesied the downfall of Israel and had been slain by the lion for his own disobedience (2 Kings 23. 16-18). That monument, then, must have stood near Bethel, a silent witness to the Divine condemnation, during the entire history of the Ten Tribe kingdom from the time of its organisation under Jeroboam to the day that Shal-

maneser of Assyrian carried them all away captive. It remained, in the deserted land for more than another century at least, to the time of Josiah.

So, even in his death, the man of God was a witness to the Ten Tribes, through all their national history, of the fate they would incur by continued apostasy. But they did not heed, and so God executed judgment.

In later days the same principle holds good. "Separate yourselves from the people of the land" was the call in Old Testament times. Christians of this Age are under the same obligation. "What

concord hath Christ with Belial? Or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?" asks St. Paul in 2 Cor. 6. 15-18 "Wherefore come out from among them and be ye separate, and touch not the unclean things; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you . . . saith the Lord God Almighty". It is as necessary today as it was in the days of Jeroboam to be positive and definite in our stand for the ways of the Kingdom of Heaven and to admit no compromise that would appear to the unbeliever to be condonation of his unbelief.

"THEY SHALL NOT TASTE OF DEATH"

"There be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power." (Mark 9. 1).

A strange statement, and one that has given rise to endless discussion in our own day, and probably in past days as well. The fact that the apostles "fell asleep" nearly two millenniums ago, but the Kingdom has not even yet been established, has encouraged the advancing of a number of explanations designed to make this text consistent with that fact. Thus it is suggested that the Transfiguration scene, which is recorded immediately afterward, was a vision symbolic of the coming Kingdom, and the fulfilment of these words. The fact that each of the three Evangelists, Matthew, Mark and Luke, place the Transfiguration record in conjunction with these words of Jesus does seem to indicate that they recognised a connection. Another suggestion, that the Variorum rendering "there be some of them that stand, which shall not taste of death", indicates that Jesus referred to those "standing" at the end of the Age who would witness the coming of the Kingdom hardly deserves consideration. But there is such a unanimity among the three men who recorded the words that we are justified in examining the text closely in an endeavour to discern more accurately just what Jesus did mean.

Whilst it is quite a reasonable deduction that the Transfiguration scene was intended to symbolise the Kingdom and hence could be that to which Jesus referred, it is hardly a complete explanation of the matter. What are the actual words? Luke says that some of them would not die before they had seen "the kingdom of God"; Mark, "the kingdom of God come with power", and Matthew, "the Son of man coming in his kingdom". Matthew and Mark probably heard Jesus speak the words, Luke must have got his version from one of the disciples, for he was not a disciple himself at the time, and the fact that his version agrees with Mark, added to the fact that Mark's Gospel shows signs of being generally more verbally correct than is Matthew's

may justify us in accepting Mark's form of words as representing what Jesus really did say on that occasion.

The usual approach to this problem is to assume, at once, that the expression "kingdom of God in power" refers to Jesus' coming power and glory at his Second Advent, attempting then to reconcile this with the fact that all the disciples did "taste of death" before that event has taken place. Perhaps a new approach to the question may be helpful.

This promise must have made a profound impression on the minds of the disciples. It was as definite an assurance as they had ever had from Jesus that they would live to see their hopes fulfilled. They ardently desired the Kingdom; they knew that the Kingdom was to be the reign of Messiah over the nations with Israel as the missionary people to declare God's salvation to the ends of the earth, and they themselves to occupy key positions in that Kingdom. They attached sufficient importance to this promise to record it, years afterwards, in practically identical words in each of their Gospels. Is it not reasonable to think therefore that the fulfilment, if and when it did occur in their lifetime, as it was promised it should, would be prominently recorded as evidence for all subsequent readers that their faith was not founded on the sand? When, thirty-five years later, Peter looked back over his life and testified to the reality of the things he had believed and preached, there came to his mind this very occasion, and he stated, as setting the seal upon the truth of his words, "this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount" (2 Pet. 1. 18)—the Mount of Transfiguration. And the whole tenor of that passage in Peter is one which seems to indicate his feeling that the fulfilment of the promise was a past event with him, not one that awaited the end of the Age for its accomplishment. Peter, writing in his old age, had already seen the Kingdom of God come with power, even as Jesus had promised him. That is the impression we get from this passage in 2 Pet. 1.

Is there then any record in the stories of the apostles that would seem to fulfil the words of Jesus? It is suggested that there is—a record familiar to us all. Peter, standing up with the eleven on the Day of Pentecost, quoted Joel's prophecy of the Kingdom and declared that it was then being fulfilled before his hearers' very eyes. "This" he said "*is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel 'And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh'.*" (Acts 2. 16-21). If we are honest with ourselves in the examination of this passage we shall have to admit that Peter was preaching as though the Kingdom was being set up in power there and then; the whole of the quotation, from vs. 17 to vs. 21, is Messianic and refers to the power of the Kingdom which is to be manifested to men at the end of this Age and the beginning of the next. Peter was very definitely offering Israel an opportunity to receive the Kingdom both in its spiritual and its earthly aspects at once, and if we look at vs. 19-21 of chapter 3, remembering that "*when*" in vs. 19 should be "*that*", this conviction is heightened. Israel, as we now know, did not respond nationally to that invitation; only a "remnant" did accept it: and in consequence the Call went to the Gentiles and the earthly Kingdom was postponed for two thousand years, "until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in" (Rom. 11. 25). But that does not alter the fact that the Kingdom was offered to Israel at Pentecost and that Peter saw a very real sense in which the Kingdom had come "in power".

Now how can we define this sense in which the Kingdom did come to the apostles "in power"? Is there evidence in Scripture that such a thing was to be expected? Is there any sense in which it can be said that the Kingdom was already come at Pentecost and that the power of the Kingdom was then manifest?

There is such a sense, one with which we are all familiar. The Apostle Paul tells us that we, believers, have been "*delivered from the power of darkness into the Kingdom of God's dear Son*" (Col. 1. 13). Again, Hebrews exhorts us "*wherefore we, receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace whereby we may serve God acceptably*" (Heb. 12. 28). We which have believed have already entered the Kingdom, not in its aspect of outward glory and power, which does not come until the Messianic Age, but in an inward aspect which is none the less real and none the less "in power". The power of the kingdom *now* is the power of the Holy Spirit, and it was that manifestation, seen at Pentecost by all men in the inspiration of the eleven speaking with tongues, "declaring the wonderful works of God" (Acts 2. 11) that constituted the Kingdom in power and gave fulfilment to Jesus' words. To Peter and the other disciples, and to the multitudes of dwellers at Jerusalem who saw

and heard them, the Kingdom of God was indeed "come with power".

John the Baptist preached, saying "*The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand*". He must have had this Pentecost aspect in his mind, quickened as he was by the Spirit, for he went on to speak of the Harvest of Wheat and Chaff, (Matt. 3. 12), a harvest that commenced at Pentecost and continued until the final burning of the chaff in A.D. 70 when Jerusalem was captured and destroyed. Jesus said on one occasion "*the law and the prophets were until John; since that day the Kingdom of Heaven is preached and every man presseth into it*" (Luke 16. 16). Again He said "*from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force*" (Matt. 11. 12). In both cases the underlying idea is that strenuous endeavour and a determination to "fight the good fight of faith" would be required of all who would enter the Kingdom of Heaven in its spiritual phase, the phase which at that time was about to be opened to men. Every man who *does* gain entry does so in consequence of effort and hardship, like a soldier who storms a city. But both texts indicate that entrance into the Kingdom could be gained there and then; the consecrated disciple, having intelligently entered in the High Calling, had thereby entered the Kingdom in its hidden or veiled aspect. That is what Jesus must have meant when He said to the Pharisees "*the Kingdom of God cometh not with observation*"—(with outward show, as of a scene spread before one's eyes) "*neither shall they say 'Lo, there', for behold, the kingdom of God is within you*". (Luke 17. 20). This Scripture cannot refer to the Kingdom in power at the "revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ from heaven" (2 Thess. 1. 7), for men will then most definitely be able to say "Lo, here". The Kingdom will be plainly visible and all men will know it and see it. That text can only refer to this present Age, when the Kingdom, although real and in power—the power of the Holy Spirit—is hidden and veiled from men. "The Kingdom of God is within you" (The Diaglott rendering "God's Royal Majesty is among you" is not strictly correct. "Royal Majesty" is not a correct translation, and *entos* can be equally "within you", in the sense of being inside an individual, or "among you" in the sense of being in the midst of a number of individuals.) Since Jesus was talking to a group of men, either meaning may have been in his mind or even both! What He really did say was a definite, convincing word "The Kingdom of Heaven is, at this present time, in the midst of all of you, unseen, unknown to men, but present in spiritual power of the Holy Spirit".

It is suggested therefore that Jesus' declaration to the effect that some of those around him on that day would not die until they had seen the Kingdom

of God come with power was fulfilled a few years later when on the Day of Pentecost the eleven disciples experienced, and the people around them witnessed, a display of Divine power of a nature that had never been known before. For the first time the power of the Holy Spirit, the power that sustains the Kingdom, was seen in operation commencing with the invitation to join the spiritual phase of the Kingdom, continuing through the Age, completing that spiritual called company and glorifying its members by a change to heavenly nature, then going on to perfect a missionary nation, in fulfilment of God's promise to his ancient people, and finally calling all men to perfection by restitution processes to what is admit-

tedly the *outward* power of the Kingdom, its manifestation in the Messianic Age. It is one Kingdom, commencing its operations at Pentecost with the Call of the Church and continuing into the time when the invitation of the "Spirit and the Bride" to come and take of the water of life freely goes out to all men. We are accustomed to thinking of the "kingdom in power" in terms of outward might and glory; we of all people should know that the greatest power is that which is unseen and the greatest glory that which is spiritual, and it is this power and glory which has been working in and through Christ's disciples from the days of St. Peter too the present day.

Spurgeon on the Millennium

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

* * *

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

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

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

We may have an intellectual appreciation of God and his attributes, but it is only as we develop a heart reliance upon him and his word, resulting from an experience of that sonship which is ours through vital union with Christ, that we can find that real peace which came to Jesus whilst He was bearing the greatest burden that man was ever called upon to bear.

PARADISE ON EARTH

Earth's coming glory

10. The Foundations of the Earth

"Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind: 'Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Gird up your loins like a man; I will question you and you shall declare to me. Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements, or who stretched the line upon it? On what were its bases sunk, or who laid the cornerstone? . . . Have you entered into the sources of the sea, or walked in the recesses of the abyss? Have you comprehended the expanse of the earth? Declare, if you know all this' " (Job. 38.1-18 RSV).

The unfortunate Job had nothing to say. In the face of this interrogation from the Most High he had to admit that with all his knowledge and intellectual acumen, which had made him renowned and respected among men, the things he did know were as nothing compared with those he did not know. His lifetime's learning of the world in which he lived was infinitesimal compared with that knowledge of the world to which he had not attained, and which, perhaps, was forever beyond his reach. In a flash his confidence in his own wisdom and his own understanding vanished, and in a moment of self-revelation he answered the Lord *"I know that thou canst do all things, and that no purpose of thine can be thwarted; who am I who cherishes counsel without knowledge? Therefore have I uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, beyond the power of my intellect . . . I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes"*. Here was a man who honestly confessed that he could not be expected to understand all the workings of God, that the world in which he lived must present many factors in its creation and its continuance which held elements beyond his understanding. But one thing he did know and was assured of. God had all power and in no way could his purpose be thwarted. Despite all human reasoning to the contrary, God's word must and will be fulfilled, and the fact that the level of human knowledge at any one time in history presents reasons for doubting or denying its possibility makes no difference to that. Paul's words to the Corinthians are apposite here: *"Our knowledge is imperfect, but when the perfect comes, the imperfect will pass away. When I was a child, I spake like a child; when I became a man, I gave up childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, then I shall understand fully."* (I Cor. 13. 9-12).

More than in perhaps any other field are these sentiments true in that sphere which has now to be considered, the sphere of so-called "natural disas-

ters"; earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, hurricanes, typhoons, tidal waves, and the like. The question inevitably comes up for consideration, if the Millennium is to be a time of peace and security with no fear of injury or death, are all these phenomena of Nature to cease instantaneously, and if not, how will redeemed humanity of that Age escape their menace? The short answer, viewed from the standpoint of existing scientific knowledge and with all the optimism and faith that can be brought to bear on the subject, is, we simply do not know. There are many existing death-dealing scourges which at present afflict humanity, such as war, famine, pestilence, which are capable of elimination by mankind if only man would set his mind to overcoming them, and previous sections of this treatise have shown the possibilities inherent in the administration of the Millennial Age by means of which this desirable end can and will be effected. But when it comes to volcanoes and earthquakes and tidal waves, never in the wildest flights of human fancy has it been imagined that man can suppress these. Further, the best scientific thought of the day is that these things are inherent in the nature of the planet itself and must continue as long as the earth endures. And this poses a real problem.

This is where the words of the Lord to Job so long ago must be remembered. Whilst rendering all due acknowledgement to the marvellous discoveries of this 20th century relative to these natural phenomena, it must be realised that even so men do not have the whole story and are not aware of all the factors which must be taken into account in solving the problem.

Just to illustrate: there was a time in the emergence of the earth from chaos at the hand of its Creator, estimated by geologists as being several thousands of millions of years ago, known as the Protozoic. The earth was a flaming mass with continuous earthquakes and volcanic eruption over its entire surface. All water and many chemical elements had gone up into the skies as vapour and enshrouded the earth in an impenetrable canopy which shut out the light of the sun and left the only light that which came from the flaming fires of the interior. Now if it could be conceived that there were living scientists in the midst of that maelstrom of flame and convulsions and it was prophesied to them that in a future day the earth would be quiet and relatively peaceful with fertile land clothed with grass and trees, calm seas upon which ships could sail, brilliant sunlight illuminating the earth by day and soft moonlight by night, earthquake and volcano a relatively infrequent

occurrence, one could imagine those scientists from the standpoint of their knowledge dismissing the whole idea as fanciful nonsense. Yet so it has been. And we, like those imaginary scientists, can only view the future from the standpoint of our present knowledge—unless we bring the foreknowledge of God into the picture. Which is where we go back to Job. With all our boosted knowledge of the natural phenomena of the earth, we simply do not know what possibilities the future holds.

But God does. He who is the great creative Power has ordained what we call the forces of Nature to achieve at the last the end He has in view, the establishment of the Earth as the home of a happy and peaceable community of ever-living human beings. It must follow therefore that no paroxysm of Nature, whether a tropical rainstorm or a volcanic eruption, will be a menace to human life or comfort. It might reasonably be thought that since these phenomena have undeniably lessened in their intensity through the long pre-human ages of earth's history, the process will continue into the future until, their work done, they sink into quiescence. The giant reptiles of the Triassic period, long before man, must have had their place and purpose in creation; they have long since gone, and no one wants to see them back.

The factor which has to be borne in mind is that all the experts admit that even in the present time there is no real certainty about the precise cause of these violent convulsions of Nature nor how they may be expected to develop in future ages. It is obvious that they originate from deep down in the interior of the earth but just what are the conditions in that interior is still largely a matter of interpreting the facts obtained from various detecting instruments. The generally held theory is that volcanic eruptions derive from the accumulation of intense pressure of gases or steam in what is called the second sublayer of the upper mantle, a region of almost fluid rock at high temperature and pressure about a hundred miles beneath the surface, forcing molten rock upwards through weak portions of the earth's crust where a channel to the top has been formed. Is this high pressure being constantly renewed or will it finally expend itself and volcanoes be no more? No one really knows. Earthquakes have been the subject of many theories as to their cause; the favourite at present is that extensive blocks of solid rock called "plates", eighty miles thick and hundreds of square miles in extent, are "floating" upon the aforesaid fluid rock and from time to time exert a tremendous strain on each other until something "gives" and the earth's surface above is affected accordingly. There are now seismic listening stations all over the world which can detect these movements and give advance warning of the imminence of an earthquake. (It has been observed for ages past

that animals and birds give evidence of sensing earthquakes before they happen.) It has been said by one leading seismologist that continuing earthquakes can be expected "*if the accumulated stresses in the earth's crust have not yet been fully released*" which is another way of saying that a time could come when the earth will have so adjusted itself that the pre-disposing causes of earthquakes will have disappeared. With that would come the cessation of tidal waves, which are caused by earthquakes in the bed of the ocean.

Incidentally, the assertion sometimes met with in some quarters that earthquakes are increasing in frequency at the present time is based upon a misapprehension. It is true that in recent centuries the reported ones do show a substantial increase but this is due to the improvement of world communications and invention of detecting devices. Every country in the world is now on the lookout and many earthquakes which in the past would have gone unnoticed outside the immediate locality are in the world's press next morning. Where in the 17th century there were 15 known major earthquakes and 27 in the 18th, the 19th recorded 69 and the 20th to date over 100, but this is due to improved reporting and in fact it is possible that there were less earthquakes in the later centuries than the earlier.

Another question put to exponents of the Biblical doctrine of the Millennium is that the earth is known to have passed through several Ice Ages, during which large portions of the globe became uninhabitable, and the experts predict that more Ice Ages are inevitable in future times, and what of the Millennial earth then? It is true that our planet does show signs of having passed through such aberrations of Nature—the last Ice Age seems to be generally agreed as having ended about 10,000 years ago, being, according to climatologist C. E. P. Brooks, succeeded by a warm and genial period in which the earth was fertile right up to the poles and conditions were eminently suitable for human life. All of which makes it look as though Adam appeared upon the earth at just about the right time! And despite the fairly frequent alarmist warnings in the popular Press about the imminence of another Ice Age, it is declared by competent authorities that there are some sixty different theories professing to account for the onset of such, which looks as though even the experts are not quite sure what it is all about and there would seem to be nothing to get concerned over. Like so many other extreme conditions in the developing earth before life appeared on its surface, the Ice Ages may well have served some essential purpose and come to their end before man appeared.

There remains the question of the Polar regions. Contemporary generations have never known anything but ice at the Poles and so it is generally

assumed that it has always been so and always will be so. Modern climatologists such as Brooks and Lamb tell a different story. From the close of the last Ice Age ten thousand years ago to about three thousand years ago there was no ice in the Arctic. There was then a sudden degeneration and the ice began to form. By the year 500 BC there was a permanent ice cap covering northern Greenland and around the Pole. By the 5th century of the Christian era the ice was all gone again and within a few more centuries the Vikings from Denmark and Norway were colonising Greenland and reaching as far as the eastern coast of Canada. One Viking ship is reputed to have found the famous "North-West passage" around Canada and sailed down the Pacific to California. But about 1400 AD the ice returned again, the Greenland colony died out and by AD 1800 the ice had reached its present limits. Since 1880 average world temperatures have risen by one degree Fahrenheit and the ice has commenced to recede. It follows that the Arctic has been ice-bound for only some 1500 years out of the last ten thousand which does not look as if it is a permanent feature of the earth's economy.

The Antarctic continent began to ice up about the sixteenth century BC and the solid ice cap formed in 500 BC at the same time as the Arctic and so far as is known has remained ever since. It is said (in journalistic write-ups for the popular press) that if the Antarctic ice melted the sea level of the world would rise by two hundred feet and many major cities would be submerged. This assertion is based upon the estimated quantity of ice which exists and assumes that the ice is several miles thick over the whole Antarctic continent. Since the height of the mountains under the ice has only been ascertained at certain points this assumption may be doubtful. If it were true, and since the ice was not there in the days of early Egypt and Sumer, those lands would have been covered with two hundred feet of water and those civilisations would never have existed, so there would appear to be something wrong with the calculation. Daly, in *"Our Mobile Earth"* (1926) says that at the time of the formation of the Antarctic ice-cap the level of the world's seas sank by twenty feet, from which it would appear that if the ice did melt there would be only that much rise in level, which seems a little more plausible. Admiral Richard Byrd, leader of the U.S. research bases in

Antarctica, flying over the central plateau in 1956, found the mountains bare of ice in many places and he could see lakes of blue water. The "icy wastes" of the Southern Continent may well have been exaggerated by explorers.

Summing up, if the climatologists are to be believed, these cataclysms of Nature which loom so large in our minds, and would seem, if continued, to constitute a menacing blur on the fair Millennial landscape, have themselves been of comparatively transient a nature in the historical past and may well be still less so in the future. Over the period which up-to-date Bible history indicates as being the time of mankind inhabiting the earth, less than 8000 years, the Poles have been permanently frozen over for less than one-third of the time. Periods of intense volcanic activity, with which must be associated continuous severe earthquakes, are three in number—one for five centuries soon after the Flood, one for five centuries just after the Jews' return from Babylon, and one for three centuries in the days of William the Conqueror. Periods of intense cold have alternated with periods of greater warmth than are experienced today, with consequential storms and floods of colossal extent. But in all this there is a possible pattern of the earth slowly emerging into a final state where all these disruptive influences have settled down and the earth is at rest. The storm rages through the night, the lightning flashes, the thunder peals, the rain lashes down, and one wonders when it is all going to end. Then, almost suddenly, the last peals die away in the distance, the last light flickers on the horizon, the rain ceases and there is a wondrous calm. Perhaps, for all we know, the last stages of the physical development of the earth were ordained to be played out during mankind's experience of sin and death, so that it too may enter into the eternal state simultaneously with redeemed and perfected man. Of one thing we may be sure. When the Lord said, of that future blessed state, that *"nothing shall hurt nor destroy"* He certainly did not forget that there are natural forces as well as man-made ones which do most decidedly hurt and destroy. Although we may not understand, with our limited knowledge, just how these forces will be tamed, He does know, and at the right time will say to them, as Jesus did to the raging waters on the sea of Galilee, *"Peace, be still"*. And there will then be a great calm.

To be continued.



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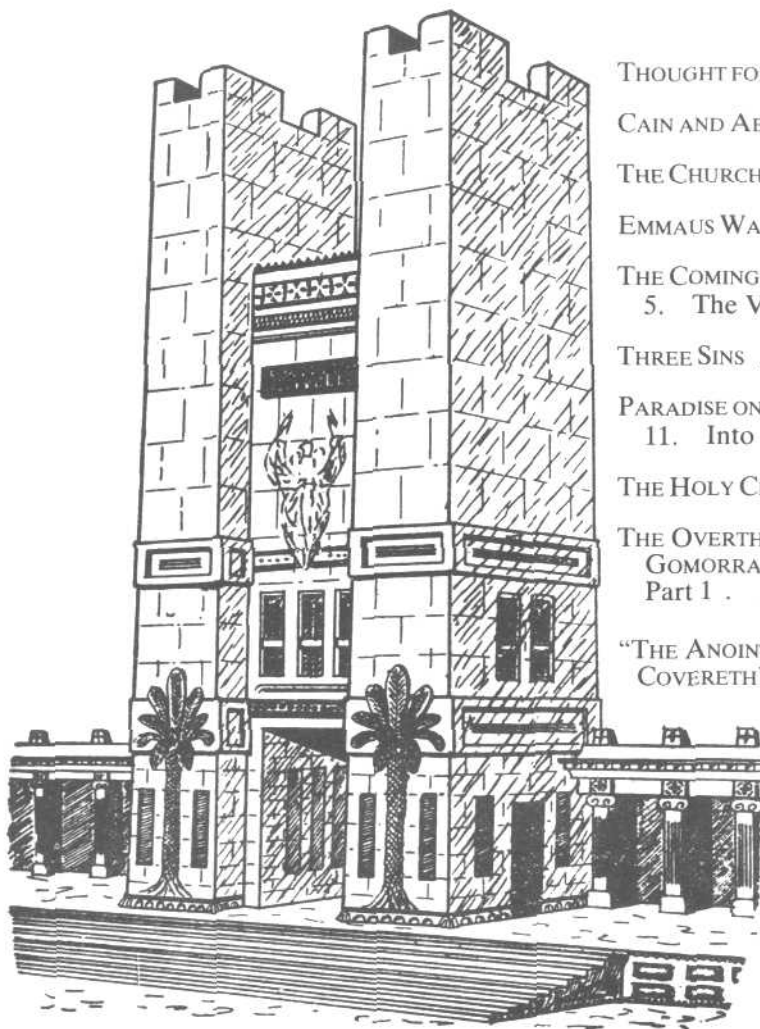
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Thou, therefore, endure
hardness as a good
soldier of Jesus Christ

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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

"Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them, for in doing this thou shalt save both thyself and them that hear thee" (1 Tim. 4.16).

There is no substitute for the reliable, healthy teaching of the tenets of the Christian faith. It is true that the word "doctrine" in this text is better rendered "teaching" but the end result is the same. Those who would merit the Saviour's description of "scribes instructed unto the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 13.52) must needs acquire an understanding of the basic principles of salvation, that man is a fallen creature, deposed from an originally sinless state to one of subjection to sin, the only deliverance from which is by acceptance of the life which comes only through Jesus Christ, who gave himself a Ransom for All by means of his death on behalf of man. He must gain knowledge of the purpose and nature of our Lord's Second Coming, that He comes for the purpose of setting up a world-wide kingdom of righteousness in which all will face the final issue of acceptance or rejection of Christ, of life or death. He must have a clear vision of the Divine purpose for man, of the ages during which that purpose is being worked out, and be alert to recognise the significance in that purpose of the times in which he may be living. Nothing less will do if the dedicated Christian is to be like John the Baptist, a herald of the Coming One who will transform the kingdoms of this world into the Kingdom of God. It is a great thing to find personal salvation be acceptance of the Lord Christ, and endeavour to walk in his ways; a greater one to go out and proclaim that faith in order if possible to win others to Christ, but the greatest thing is to realise and proclaim the transcendent truth that the time has come for the Lord Christ to take his kingdom and establish his rule over all the world, that the ends of the earth may seek after him. It is

not sufficient to preach Christ and him crucified without amplifying that to include the purpose for which He was crucified, the ultimate salvation of "whosoever will", with no man eternally lost who can possibly be saved by the provisions of the Divine Plan.

That is why it is necessary to give attention to doctrine. It is just not good enough to live a more or less comfortable Christian life in the assurance of personal salvation with a little personal evangelism and pleasant Christian fellowship thrown in, with no regard paid to the evident fact that we live now in a world which is fast heading for utter disaster, a disaster which is utterly beyond the power of man to avert and which will only be rectified when our Lord does rise up and take control. That is the message which ought to be combined with all our preaching and witness, the Baptist cry, "the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand". Those who see in the signs of the times so clearly evident in our own generation and day the evidence that the long-looked-for Advent of the Son of Man is even now in progress, bringing into focus all the conflicting powers and forces in this world and so leading them to the final denouement in which He will be manifested with his Church in heavenly glory for the salvation of mankind, are those who have best heeded the injunction to take heed to the doctrine.

Gone from us

— ❀ —

Sis. M. Shephard (Kingsbridge)

— ❀ —

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

CAIN AND ABEL

*An Old Testament
Study*

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

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

So the first human child was born. *"I have gotten a man from the Lord"* said Eve reverently, according to the A.V. of Gen. 4. 1. It seems that there is another shade of meaning in her words which is difficult to recover now, due to the fact that the Hebrew text of Gen. 4 is derived from a much earlier Sumerian language which recorded the original story, and repeated translation from earlier archaic tongues has rendered some words obscure. It is considered that the original expression meant she had "acquired a man" with the help of, or by the power of, the Lord. Now Eve must have been perfectly familiar with the processes of birth among the animals with which she was surrounded, yet upon the birth of her own child she immediately gives the credit, so to speak, to the Lord. There is an indication here that despite the tragedy of the Fall, and the measure of alienation from God which resulted, the first human pair had retained some reverence and loyalty toward God, and the first impulse on the birth of the child was to acknowledge the hand of the Lord in the event. God had already promised Eve that her seed would become the means of undoing the damage that had been done in Eden, that he would "bruise the serpent's head", which could only mean the overthrow of sin and the restoration of primitive sinlessness, and without any doubt at all she saw in the birth of this child the first step to the fulfilment of that promise.

Hopes must have run high, therefore, as the lad grew to manhood's estate, joined later on by his younger brother Abel, and, of course, sisters.

With the elder devoting his energies to cultivation of the soil and the younger to the raising of sheep and goats the family must have been reasonably happy, waiting for the next move in the Divine purpose, and with no indication of the tragedy soon to come.

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

"In process of time" therefore—perhaps anything up to two centuries after the Fall—*"Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord. And Abel, he also brought of the firstfruits of his flocks and of the fat thereof. And the Lord had respect unto Abel and his offering. But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell."* (Gen. 4. 3-5). Some thought must be given to the purpose of these offerings. It has been suggested that Abel offered slain lambs on an altar; that this, prefiguring the shed blood of Jesus Christ after the fashion of much later Levitical ceremonies, was on that account acceptable to God where Cain's offering of agricultural produce was not. In this manner, it is suggested, Abel thus prophesied the death of Christ. In the light of cold hard facts, however, it is not likely that anything of this is inherent in the story. This is the first recorded instance in history in which men brought a spontaneous offering of the fruits of their labour to God. To suggest that on such a significant occasion God should reject one and accept the other in the interests of an academic illustration of theological philosophy which neither of those men in their very primitive condition could have been expected to understand in the slightest degree is not very reasonable. And there is an important element in the text which disallows the idea completely. Abel brought "firstfruits" of his flock, and the text has *"bekorah"* which means female firstborn, of either sheep or goats. But female lambs were not admissible as blood sacrifices prefiguring Christ in the ceremonies of Israel—Passover or Day of Atonement.

ment. The Passover lamb must be a male, of the first year. Had Abel been Divinely led to enact a prefigure of the later rituals he would have been told to bring a one year male and not a firstborn female. But there was a place for firstborn females in later Israel ceremonial. They were specified, not for sacrifice, but to be included with the firstfruits of the ground—fruit and crops—as thank-offerings to the Lord. Our modern harvest festival is the lineal descendant of such ceremonial. Deut. 12. 6. Deut. 14. 23 and Neh. 10. 36 are instances of *bekorah*, female firstlings, being thus employed. Lev. 27. 26, Num. 3. 41 and 28. 17. Deut. 15. 19 tell of *bekor*, male firstlings, treated similarly. The point is that the thank-offering has to be the firstborn, whether male or female, animal or vegetable, on the principle that the firstborn of anything is peculiarly the Lord's and should be given to him. (Exod. 13. 2).

When it is thus realised that what these two men were doing was quite spontaneously bringing a thank-offering to the Lord as recognition of his overruling power in giving them success in their respective spheres the story begins to take shape and a further examination of the Hebrew text offers a reasonable explanation why Cain's offering was rejected. Dr. Young's translation says that Abel brought "*the female firstlings of his flock, even from their fat ones*". In other words, rightly surmising that God should have the first and the best of his flock, he chose the fattest and best of the firstborns as his contribution. Why he chose female instead of male, thousands of years before the Mosaic Law provided for female offerings, is a point of interest. For some reason Abel must have considered female the more appropriate, as, in some sense, better than the male. Perhaps, in the rudimentary state of knowledge of that first family, the female was considered the channel of life, life that came from God. That would explain Eve's crediting the coming of Cain to God rather than to her husband. It is significant that it was Eve and not Adam who named Seth, and perhaps the other sons too. But Cain did not bring the best of his produce. This is shown by the words used. The "firstfruits", in the sense of the earliest to ripen, is *bikkar*. The firstfruits in the sense of the best of the produce is *reshith*. Both these terms are used in the O.T. to refer to the offerings of firstfruits in Israel. The term for fruit in general is *peri*, and this is the word used in Gen. 4. 3. Cain did not bring firstfruits as did Abel; he brought of the fruit of his labours but it was not of the best or choicest or earliest, and that was why his offering was rejected. That was why "*Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain*" (Heb. 11. 4). The Almighty can only accept of our best, and Cain did not give of his best.

So "*Cain was very wrath, and his countenance*

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

Tragedy followed swiftly. According to the LXX Cain invited his brother into "the field", the Hebrew word denoting cultivated or irrigated land as distinct from pasture or wild land. In other words, Abel was enticed away from the family home into Cain's own area of labour. There, in the field, Cain slew his brother. It may have been a pre-meditated act; it may have been a sudden uncontrollable upsurge of jealousy. In any case it is a sad commentary upon the ease with which human free-will, undisciplined by loyalty and allegiance to the Divine way of life, can sink to actions so contrary to the basic instincts of man. These two must have grown up as boys together in the wonder of a world revealing ever new and increasingly exciting discoveries. The knowledge that death must one day come, because of the original sin, was with them but in the vigour of their near-perfect manhood the event must have seemed almost inconceivably far away. It is not likely that Cain intended the death of his brother but rather that in the intensity of his resentment he struck a blow which proved fatal. But the sequel of his animosity proved the reality of the Lord's warning. Sin was already there, crouching at the door, waiting to obtain the mastery. He could overcome it if he would, but he must exert his will so to do. And Cain, like Eve his mother before him, failed to do so.

His immediate reaction was fear, a futile endeavour to avoid the consequence. In what manner the Lord spoke to Cain we know not, but the dialogue between the two must have been real in Cain's mind. "*Where is Abel thy brother?*" came the accusing question from Heaven. "*I know not*" the surly yet apprehensive reply "*Am I my brother's keeper?*" Then was pronounced the fearful condemnation before which Cain quailed and

was broken. *"What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground . . . when thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength; a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth"*. The "ground" and the "earth" from which Cain was banished is *adamah*, the land of their habitation, but the "earth" in which Cain was to be a fugitive and vagabond is *erets*, meaning the earth as we use the term, the whole extent of the world, the earth as a planet. Cain was to be exiled from his home, his family, and his land and doomed to wander—"fugitive" is a wanderer fleeing as from an enemy or from justice; "vagabond" a wanderer as having no home—an exile in the earth.

"My punishment is greater than I can bear" cried Cain. The Reviser's marginal alternative *"mine iniquity is greater than that it may be forgiven"* is a possible construction of the Hebrew but the general assessment of scholastic opinion is that the traditional rendering is correct. There is really no indication in the story that Cain felt any remorse or was in any way repentant; his concern appears to be only with the consequence upon himself. He was to be cast out into the desolate earth with no means of subsistence, he was to be hidden from the presence of God; and he was to be in danger of death at the hands of his fellow-men. *"Thou hast driven me out this day from the face of the earth"* he cried *"and from thy face I shall be hid, and I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth; and it shall come to pass, that everyone that findeth me shall slay me"*. His dismay at being banished from the Divine presence is thought by some to be an indication of some residual reverence for God which led him to lament the separation; more likely, perhaps, it reflected a fear that banishment from God's presence implied withdrawal of Divine protection, leaving him with no shield against possible avengers. There is a fundamental principle here. Fear of the consequence of sin is no basis for acceptance with God. An upright life gains no credits in the books of Heaven if that uprightness is dictated only by fear of the alternative. Many of the old-time revivalists, and a few modern preachers too, have not realised this. They tried, and try, to stampe out unbelievers into the good life by painting lurid pictures of the fearful fate awaiting the unregenerate. The Almighty does not want that kind of allegiance; more, He will not have it. The man who eventually gains his place in the Divine scheme of creation will gain it because he has fully and completely given himself in willing conformity to the Divine way, not because he is afraid of what God will do to him if he does not. He recognises that he owes life and all that life means to his Creator and wants nothing better than to place himself in that Creator's hands to be used as He wills. Had Cain admitted the enormity of his crime, given evidence

of sincere contrition, and placed himself in the hands of God for judgment, the outcome would have been different. But he did not, and he went out into the wilderness unrepentant and resentful.

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

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

reason that Cain, who had shown himself capable of destroying one life, might well do the same thing again, and must himself be destroyed to avoid the possibility. Hence God stepped in with his prohibition. The "mark", Hebrew *oth*, meaning a sign, set upon Cain, need not have been a physical disfigurement as is often popularly thought, but an indication of some kind to his fellows that he must not be interfered with, but left to go his way into exile.

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

There he disappears. His descendants to the eighth generation are recorded, and then, silence. The man who was the firstborn of the first family,

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

When the Kingdom comes

"When Christ's kingdom has come, it will indeed be "the desire of all nations." It will be just what all men need. At first it will rule with a rod of iron, dashing the now tottering kingdoms of this world in pieces like a potter's vessel (Psalm 2.9), breaking up every civil, social and religious system of tyranny and oppression, putting down all authority and power opposed to it, humbling the proud and high-minded, and finally, teaching all the world to be still and know that the Lord's Anointed has taken the dominion. (Psalm 46.10). Then the blessings of its peaceful reign will begin to be experienced. Truth and equity will be established on a sure and permanent footing; "*justice will be laid to the line, and righteousness to the plummet*" (Isa. 28. 17), and the great restitution work will progress grandly to its glorious consum-

mation. There will be sweeping moral reforms, great educational and philanthropic enterprises, wonderful faith-cures from every disease and deformity, mental and physical. There will be awakenings also from death, and a grand re-organisation of society under the new order of the Kingdom of God. And all the world's bitter experience during the six thousand years past will prove a valuable lesson on the exceeding sinfulness of sin; helping them to appreciate the new rule of righteousness, and to live in everlasting conformity to the perfect will of God, and thus to accept God's gift of everlasting life, designed for all who will receive it on his conditions of love and loyalty and obedience to him."

C. T. Russell 1852-1916.

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

Once deny that God can answer prayer, and He is degraded into a being less than his universe, a prisoner in the heart of his own creation.

(G. Campbell Morgan)

THE CHURCH AT ANTIOCH

*A story of
St. Paul*

Something like five years had elapsed since the martyrdom of Stephen and the journey of Saul to Damascus which resulted in his conversion. For Saul they had been five eventful years, first his short time with the brethren in Damascus, then his three years in Arabia preparing himself for his life's work, after that his equally short stay in Jerusalem and his flight, and for the remainder of the time a quiet residence in his native town of Tarsus in Cilicia. Five years gone, and as yet nothing definite achieved, and still no positive lead as to the future. The Apostle must have been sorely puzzled; the circumstances of his call were such as to indicate in no uncertain terms the importance of the Lord's purpose for him. The need was so obviously there; the gospel of the Kingdom was to be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations and he was ready to play his part in that preaching, the more especially since it did not seem as though the other disciples, still at Jerusalem, were particularly concerned about leaving that centre of the faith to extend its power and influence into the farther territories of the wider world. The ways of God are passing strange, Saul must have thought. The harvest was great and the labourers few; even Jesus had bidden his disciples to lift up their eyes and look on the fields, and see that they were white already to harvest, and exhorted them to pray God that He would send forth reapers to gather in that harvest. Well, here he was, an ardent reaper, burning with desire to take the message of life and salvation to all whomsoever he could persuade to listen, where-soever he should find them, and yet for all his zeal and eagerness and readiness the door remained obstinately shut; the word to go forward remained unspoken. Nothing is said as to the results of such missionary work as he may have carried on in and around his home town of Tarsus; he was of course well known there and although he may have been tolerated because of his connections and friends in the city it was probably true, as it was of Jesus in Nazareth and Capernaum, that no prophet has honour in his own country. So Saul must have remained, frustrated and yet, we must believe, assured that God would reveal his will in his own due time and that as a faithful servant he must patiently bide that time.

Now, at last, his faith and trust were to be vindicated and his eager spirit given the sphere of action he so ardently desired. For five years past the stage had been in process of being set, the place of his service being prepared. Right back at the beginning, when the persecution he instigated in Jerusalem at the time of death of Stephen led many

of the Christians to seek refuge in far off lands, that preparation had begun. A few of those Christians from Jerusalem had reached Antioch, third city of the Empire and political capital of Syria, some four hundred miles from Jerusalem. There they had settled and there they had exemplified and preached their faith to such good effect that within that five years there came into being a flourishing Christian community which had the distinction of including within its numbers a substantial proportion of Gentiles—pure-blooded Greeks. (Although the account in Acts 11. 20 uses the term *Grecians*,—*Hellenistos*—meaning Jews of the Dispersion, Greek Jews, the A.V. is at fault and the correct term is *Greeks*—*Hellenes*—definitely indicating true Gentile Greeks). It would seem from verses 19-20 that at most places in which they found themselves the refugees from Jerusalem confined their missionary activities to their fellow-Jews but those who settled at Antioch, perhaps because it was so predominantly a Greek and Roman city, extended their preaching to include non-Jews, with a most spectacularly successful result. "*A great number believed, and turned to the Lord.*" (vs. 21).

Antioch was at that time a magnificent city of half-a-million inhabitants, ranking politically next to Rome and Alexandria in importance, the official residence of the Roman governor of Syria and a busy commercial centre. It was adorned with many handsome buildings and public monuments and was in no respect inferior to Rome itself in splendour and luxury. It is not surprising therefore that all the pagan religions of the world were represented at Antioch; the city boasted temples to every deity known to the Greeks and Romans and many others too, among which the synagogues of the orthodox Jews stood in almost equivalent splendour, for the Jews of Antioch constituted a wealthy and prosperous community. It was in no mean city, therefore, that the first Gentile Christian church had its birth and rose to a position of influence among the general community of believers.

It was inevitable that news of these developments should reach the Church at Jerusalem, still recognised as the central authority by virtue of the continued residence there of the twelve apostles. The acceptance of Gentiles as fellow-believers and fellow-heirs was as yet an unacceptable proposition to the Christians of Jerusalem, brought up as they had been under the discipline and restrictions of the Law of Moses, and further investigation and consideration was obviously indicated. So they determined to send a commissioner to Antioch to find out at first hand just what was going on and

report the position. The mission was evidently projected in a spirit of love and helpfulness, for the messenger chosen seems to have been under no obligation to return at all quickly—in actual fact he was away more than a year.

The one chosen was Barnabas, Saul's old friend. Himself a Jew of the Dispersion and a native of Cyprus, he was probably better fitted than most of them to undertake a mission like this to a virtually Gentile city where his contacts would be mainly with Gentiles. Barnabas is described here as "*a good man full of the Holy Spirit and of faith.*" It is evident from various references in the Book of Acts that he was held in high esteem by his brethren.

So Barnabas went to Antioch and joined himself to the Church there and laboured with them. Continued success crowned their efforts and again "*much people was added unto the Lord.*" Barnabas began to feel the need for more help—perhaps the high degree of culture and education in the city, the intellectual level of many of the potential converts, so different from the simple peasantry of Galilee and Samaria, or the insular Jews of Jerusalem, pointed to the desirability of an apologist having greater educational attainments than Barnabas felt he himself possessed. At any rate, he bethought himself of his friend Saul, living in obscurity in Tarsus, and determined to bring him to Antioch to assist in the growing work. Without much doubt the thought was instilled into his mind by the Holy Spirit, for the time had now come when Saul must take up his destined vocation. The long time of training and preparation was ended; now the call to action was to be given. So Barnabas made his way the sixteen miles to the seaport of Seleucia and found a ship which would take him the hundred miles across the Mediterranean to Tarsus in Cilicia

The day had been much like every day for a long while past, Saul reflected as he sat, quietly reading the Holy Scriptures. His work for the day was done—his trade of tentmaker was standing him in good stead these days and although it was commonly only a meagre remunerative occupation he was able to provide for his modest needs and still leave time for further study and consideration of the Word of God. Some day, he firmly believed, all this study and meditation would prove to have been worth while and have fitted him for whatever work it was that God would ultimately direct him to do. The waiting time seemed long and unnecessarily protracted, but the One he served knew best and would reveal his will in due time. His thoughts strayed for a moment to that last night of his short visit to Jerusalem after his conversion, when he was in the Temple praying, and saw in a vision the Lord Jesus commanding him to make haste and get out of Jerusalem and giving him that staggering

promise "*Depart; for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles.*" He had departed and come to Tarsus, and for two years now had watched and prayed and waited, but no indication had come. Sometimes he had gone down to the sea not far from the city and looked across the sparkling Mediterranean, watching the merchant ships coming in and going out, bound for Alexandria and Rome and the cities of Greece, fascinating lands of the Roman Empire with peoples of many races, none of whom had heard the only Name by which men may be saved. Sometimes he had climbed the slopes of Mount Taurus behind the town and looked inland across the mountains and valleys of Asia and wondered if that was the way he was going to be called to go. But no word had come and he was still reading the Book which told of God the Author of salvation and still harbouring within his breast the burning message of the One who came to earth to bring the word of salvation. He felt like Jeremiah of old "*his word was as a burning fire shut up within my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay.*" Saul stirred in his seat as a knock sounded on the door of the house. He heard voices—that of his housekeeper alternating with deep, resonant tones which somehow sounded vaguely familiar, and his own name being mentioned. He looked up as the door of his room was flung open and his eyes took in, with astonishment changing to warm pleasure, the stalwart form of the man who had befriended him in Jerusalem those two years ago.

It is not likely that Saul hesitated before agreeing to accompany Barnabas back to Antioch. His alert mind would discern instantly that here was the call he had been awaiting; here was the commencement of his being sent "*far hence unto the Gentiles*", here in a city through which Gentiles of all nations were constantly passing. There was probably a hurried leave-taking of relatives and friends, a quick packing of a few essential belongings, and then Saul was on shipboard and on the high seas again, not as a fugitive this time but a man setting out on the greatest adventure of his life. When the ship reached the Antioch port of Seleucia and the gangplank was thrown across it was almost certainly Saul who was first ashore.

So, at last, Saul was fully accepted into the community of the believers. The greater part of his newly found brethren knew nothing of the old persecuting Pharisee; the few at Antioch who had originated from Jerusalem and remembered the martyrdom of Stephen and the havoc their new leader had then made in the Church were by now fully reconciled to the evident fact that this man was a chosen vessel unto God to preach his Word among the Gentiles and they were thankful for his fellowship and his help. For an entire year the work proceeded without interruption and with

continuing success and steady increase in the number of the believers. It is remarkable that no indication of hostility on the part of the orthodox Jews of Antioch is given. Unlike almost every other place in which the Apostle afterward laboured, Antioch seems to have tolerated and accepted him. The fact that this city was the political capital and seat of Roman government and that any kind of public disorder would have been more sternly and ruthlessly repressed than elsewhere probably had something to do with it, as would also the greater pre-occupation of Antiochean Jewry with commercial activities and money-making. Religion, other than the purely formal kind, most likely played only a secondary part in their lives.

It was at this time and in this city that the name "Christian" was coined and first used. It was not originated by the believers themselves; the form of the word is Latin and not Greek or Hebrew and it is more likely that the term arose among the general population of the city in reference to the constant dwelling of the believers upon the name of Christ—which at that time had not attained the status of a proper name; the word only means "the Anointed" and conveyed that meaning to Jewish Christians. The only proper name by which the Lord was known was the one given to him at his birth, Jesus, the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew Joshua, a name which was common in Israel anyway. The believers themselves still referred to their faith as "the Way" and if they called themselves anything at all it was "brethren of the Way". The usual term applied to them by others was "Nazarenes" but from now the word "Christian" began to come more and more into common use. Perhaps the greatest memorial to Saul's twelve months' labour in this Gentile city is the fact that *"the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch"*.

It was at some time during this period that a further commission came to Antioch from Jerusalem and Saul met some of the brethren whose doubts upon the occasion of his last visit to the Holy City had precluded their acceptance of him. Now there were no doubts; they knew him to be one of themselves and fellowshiped with him accordingly. These men possessed the prophetic gift and during their stay one of them, Agabus, his perception of the future sharpened by his spiritual attunement with the Holy Spirit, declared that a

wide-spread and serious famine was imminent and would affect all the Roman world. Such happenings were not infrequent; it only needed a year of bad weather over Egypt and the Middle East to throw the whole grain-producing economy of the Roman Empire out of gear and something like near-starvation for much of the town populations was the result. St. Luke records the realisation of Agabus' prophecy in the same verse by the terse comment *"which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar"* (Acts 11. 28). Claudius reigned A.D. 41-54 and his reign saw several famines, a notable one affecting Judea and Syria being recorded by Josephus as occurring in about A.D. 45. The visit of Agabus to Antioch must have occurred in A.D. 41, and the immediate response of the church was to build up a relief fund for the benefit of their poorer brethren in Jerusalem. Barnabas and Saul were appointed to carry the money to Jerusalem evidently with the idea that the recipients would have time to buy in stocks of food before the famine came upon them.

So Saul returned to Jerusalem the second time. There was no opposition and no incident; evidently the two messengers did not engage in any kind of preaching or evangelism. They may not even have met the church. Their mission was to the elders, and having delivered the gift and the greetings of the church which sent the gift, they probably were eager to get back to their own sphere of labour and did not delay to depart.

They took back with them a companion, John Mark, nephew of Barnabas and son of his sister Mary, in whose house at Jerusalem, tradition has it, the Last Supper was held. Mark would be about twenty-four years of age at this time, probably already collecting the material for the Gospel which bears his name, although many years were yet to pass before that, the first of the four Gospels to see the light of day, was to be written. Why he decided to go with them is not stated but in all probability he also wanted to have a part in taking the Gospel to the far places of the earth and the opportunity of joining up with Saul and his uncle, and labouring with them in a virile and active community like Antioch, was too good to miss. So three earnest and zealous men travelled back the four hundred miles to the northern city to take up their places in the expanding work of the first church to send out missionaries to the Gentiles.

"Always be glad in the Lord; I will repeat it, BE GLAD. Let your forbearing spirit be known to everyone—the Lord is near. Do not be over-anxious about anything, but by prayer and earnest pleading together with thanksgiving, let your requests be unreservedly made known in the pre-

sence of God, and then the peace of God which transcends all our powers of thought will be a garrison to guard your hearts and minds in union with Christ Jesus." Phil. 4. 4-7.

(Dr. Weymouth).

EMMAUS WALK

"Abide with us . . . for the day is far spent." What a change that Stranger's conversation had made in the demeanour of those two down-cast men who had left Jerusalem for the quieter scenes of their village home. Hopes dead, faith shattered, expectations gone—a melancholy state of heart and mind indeed! "We trusted"—despondent words! not "we trust"! *"We trusted that it had been He which should have redeemed Israel"* (Luke 24. 21). And now all the fair hopes of Israel's redemption lay dragged in the dust, decayed, withered, dead! The glorious dawn, at one time deemed so near at hand, was now enshrouded in deepest midnight gloom, and none could give assurance now that Israel should at any time be redeemed. And if He, of all the sons of Israel, had failed to bring deliverance, who, among her waiting hosts could hope to break the foreign yoke? He in whom they had trusted had been laid away in a borrowed tomb, and there their shrivelled hopes lay too. Even the excited words of some womenfolk in Jerusalem, that they had seen him alive again, had not rekindled the spark of expectancy and hope—for them the disappointing affair was over and done with, once, and for all.

With an Eastern freedom and courtesy the Stranger had joined himself to their company, and for a while had listened silently to their tale of woe. Then in a quiet re-assuring way He insinuated himself into the conversation to make their grief-shocked minds begin to work again. Slowly his "Whys" and "Ought nots", interspersed with reasoned explanations, began to take effect, as emotion and understanding began to "burn" within. As He walked and talked with them along the way the miles rolled by and their journey was all but at an end. At the fork of the road that lay just ahead He would bid them a friendly adieu, and go on alone, for "He made as though He would go further". Had they tired of his company? Had his searching words probed too deeply and left a wound, or a sting? Had He dominated them too long? No! not a bit of it. The burning fires within their souls had kindled goodwill to such a traveller and made them long for more such conversation. Would He come in and stay the night with them? At least He should not go forward without an invitation to their abode! He did go in with them to

their quiet home—then came the Revelation—and He was gone! Withered hopes revived again, a new joy gripped their hearts, as their travel-stained feet began the journey back to Jerusalem again. Wonderful journey—and yet more wonderful Guest.

Not alone on life's pilgrim journey was that walk from Jerusalem. We too have had our melancholy walks. We too have felt the chill of withered hopes, of disappointing expectations, and of over-powering frustration. And there may be amongst us some who made as if to withdraw to some distant "Emmaus" home, and let the whole thing go by. It is so easy to go aside, like some wounded animal, and there in loneliness lie down and die. But we were precious in his sight. He, "watching over Israel", saw our melancholy plight, and came out upon our outward way to revive our withered hopes, to fan anew our flickering love, and to make our hearts burn within us by the way. How? By some word spoken to us in loving confidence, by some good word in a re-assuring article, or by some sincere warm-hearted clasp of a welcome hand. Some dear servant of the Lord, himself at rest in God, walked out on his behalf and talked with us, and that was all! But it was enough. And then the invitation went forth again—*"Come in to me, dear Lord. Abide with me, as the evening shadows fall"*.

In the maturing experience of every true child of God there comes at last—sometimes earlier—sometimes late—a deepening sense of Christ-consciousness. It is the expression of a deep inborn desire for Someone on whom to rest implicitly and with confidence. In the earlier years of life, when one's mental powers are at their prime, the need for this harbour of repose may not be so keenly realised. It is only when the brain with its reflective and retentive faculties begins to fail, and to function less capably, that the desire for something that is central to every element of Truth begins to assert itself. It is then that the maturing saint begins to feel his need of the abiding Presence of the Lord. But the Lord awaits the invitation to enter in and be our abiding Guest. He will not thrust himself upon us unsolicited. He "waits" to be gracious—but He awaits our solicitation.

"In life, in death, O Lord abide with me"—be that our "evening prayer".

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

He who prays without ceasing is likely to rejoice evermore.

(Adam Clarke)

THE COMING OF THE KING

5. The Voice of the Archangel

*A series of studies
concerning the
Second Advent*

One of the finest passages of Scripture relating to the Second Advent is that which enshrines St. Paul's words to the Christians of Thessalonica who were fearful that their departed brethren might be forgotten when the Lord came. Those words have been an inspiration to all succeeding Christian generations and they remain a stimulus and ground of confidence today. That some understand their background literally and others spiritually makes no difference to the assurance and incentive that all derive from them, but the very fact there are differences of thought on the structure of the passage makes it certain that no matter how sure one may be of the meaning, a fresh approach to the question will be of interest. There is no disagreement upon the principles of the doctrine itself, only differences of view as to precisely how and when the event comes to pass.

Let the glorious beauty of the words themselves rise before the mind again as prelude to consideration of what they involve. *"If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so" (we must believe) "them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the presence 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 with 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 in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord" I Thess. 4. 14-17).*

There is an evident association of thought between this passage and the noteworthy words of 1. Cor. 15. 51-52. *"Behold, I shew you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump; for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed."* In both passages there is a distinction between the "sleeping" and the "living" saints. The former are "raised" to the glory of immortal spiritual nature, the latter are "changed".

The descent of the Lord from heaven in this context, then, is intimately associated with the resurrection of the Church, the entire body of dedicated believers in this Age, whether they be in the grave or still living upon earth at the time of the Advent. It may be said with justice that this entire statement in Thessalonians is concerned with the Advent only as it relates to the Church; the complete picture of the arrival, the voice, the trumpet, the air and the clouds, have to do entirely with the dead in Christ and their fellows who remain. The wider

aspects of the Advent as respects the Lord's manifestation to all men, his work of bringing this Age to an end, and his initiating the Messianic Kingdom, is neither mentioned nor hinted at. In short, here is presented a picture of the Lord coming for his own, to gather them to himself preparatory to his being manifested with them for the evangelical work of the next Age. The popular idea of the "rapture of the saints" illustrates this principle; those dedicated men and women whose lives have been yielded to Christ, and who have been fitted by their Christian experience for the task of world conversion in the future Day, are now taken, from death or from life, to be ready for the commencement of that great work.

The nature and manner, both of the Lord's "descent" and the resurrected ones "ascent", come naturally for consideration at this point. Does our returning Lord appear visibly in the sky, as a gloriously radiant human being, attended by flying angels, to the sound of shouts and silver trumpets audible to the human ear, or are these expressions vivid metaphors expressive of a reality which cannot itself be defined without some such material analogy? Are the air and the clouds the literal atmosphere and vapour masses of this planet, or did the words convey a meaning to the Thessalonian believers which is not easily appreciated in our day and generation?

It is well known and accepted that the Scripture writers, including St. Paul himself, frequently used "figures of speech" to convey a meaning perfectly well understood by their readers, just as we do ourselves. We habitually refer to the death of an aged believer as "passing beyond the veil" without claiming that there is a literal veil which has to be passed in order to gain entry to the spiritual world. We speak of such an one as having gained his "crown" without implying that he is to be presented with a literal laurel wreath as adornment for all eternity. The "white robes" of the redeemed and the "robe of righteousness" of the justified are recognised for what they are, metaphors expressive of a reality which cannot otherwise be defined in human terms. All these allusions are commonly used without further explanation and no one ever thinks of taking them literally. Likewise when Paul declares that the Lord shall descend from heaven with a shout he is clothing a truth that we with our human limitations cannot understand in literal everyday terms that we can understand. And we have to remember that the extent of human knowledge in St. Paul's day was considerably more restricted than it is now so that in many respects truths concerning the celestial realities "on the

other side of the veil" had to be stated in even more down-to-earth terms than are necessary today. After all, at the First Advent and right into the Middle Ages even the best scientific knowledge of the times held that this earth was the centre of the universe and that the heaven of God's throne was situated on the surface of a kind of crystalline sphere which revolved around the earth at not too great a distance away, so that the only possible manner in which any man could picture the coming of the Lord was by an aerial descent from "there" to "here" through the atmosphere. No one dreamed then that the air extended only a few miles up and the wings of the angel would be of no possible use in empty space!

In our own day, although we know so much more of the physical universe now, and the vast distances involved, and that this earth, so far from being the centre is but the merest speck in the immensity of God's creation, we ourselves are quite unable to visualise the reality. We must be frank and confess that we do not know *how* our Lord returns at his Second Advent or from whence He comes; what we do know is that He *does* come to earth at the appointed time. We cannot understand the nature of the celestial world and we do not know "where" it is, nor how one gets there. It might well be that when St. Paul says "the Lord shall descend from heaven" he was, under guidance of the Holy Spirit, framing his words to express the truth within the general knowledge and belief of his time; the value of his definition is shewn by the fact that even now, two thousand years later and with a totally different understanding of astronomical science we still think instinctively of our Lord as coming down from above, although we no longer consider that heaven is only a few hundred miles up on the outside of an encircling glass sphere. The reality is that at the time of the commencement of the Advent our Lord leaves that sphere of being which we call the celestial, the company of its angelic citizens and everything of which that creation exists, and comes within the space and time framework of this material creation, with its stars and suns and circling planets, and this earth in which He once lived as man for thirty three earth years. Such a coming can be a reality without demanding necessarily a visible appearance, any more than our Lord was visible to his disciples during the major part of the six weeks intervening between his resurrection and his ascension.

He will descend "*with a shout, the voice of the archangel*". The shout and the voice of the archangel are one and the same. The word "shout" is "*keleusma*", used nowhere else in the New Testament and evidently intended to convey a meaning which could not be indicated in any other way. It is a technical term for the cry of combined

command and encouragement given to horses by charioteers, hounds by hunters, and especially to oarsmen of galleys. In order to ensure that these latter pulled on their oars in unison, an overseer known as the "*keleustes*" stood in a commanding position on the ship and at regular intervals uttered the "*keleusma*", which, urging the men to sustained effort, became a call of combined authority, direction and encouragement. Michael the archangel was pictured in Jewish tradition as the leader of the hosts of heaven and the princely champion of the nation of Israel, standing in the presence of God as the executor of Divine judgment upon angels and men. The prophet Daniel was told that at the end of the age of evil, and the inception of the kingdom of righteousness, Michael would stand up and wage war for the overthrow of God's enemies and the establishment of his kingdom on earth. (Dan. 12. 1-3). The "voice of the archangel" thus becomes an allusion to the heaven-sent signal of command and encouragement which indicates that the Advent has begun—encouragement that the time is at hand, and command to recognise and accept the implications of the event and proclaim the fact of the Advent in positive terms. Such a proclamation has in fact been given; from the days of the Baptist minister William Miller a hundred and fifty years ago, Christian recognition that the "time is at hand" became clear and positive. Miller's own expectation of a visible descent from the skies in the year 1843 was not realised, but later in the century sober reflection and discussion shewed that the initial stages of the Advent are not accompanied by an outwardly visible manifestation, and the voice of the archangel is heard, spiritually, only by those who recognise the significance of the times in which they live. This view began to be propounded and debated from 1840 onward, and that recognition, against the background of contemporary events, is abundantly demonstrated, not only by the work of William Miller and the Second Advent movement of the early nineteenth century, but also by a widespread proclamation later in the century and a general awareness among thoughtful Christians of all schools of thought, then and since, that the world is moving into the "days of the Son of Man". In England the inter-denominational Mildmay conferences of 1873-1878 discussed every aspect of the Advent and gained the support of hundreds of ministers and students, as did similar conferences—notably Clifton Springs in America—at the same time. The level of understanding of both the purpose and manner of the Advent was higher—more enlightened and more sober—than that of the Miller thesis half a century earlier. It might well be true, therefore, that the voice of the archangel has been heard for more than a century past.

"And the trump of God." This is the traditional "Last Trumpet"—popularly known as "Gabriel's Horn"—announcing the onset of the Day of Judgment. Paul's letter to the Thessalonians was written at least twenty years before St. John, in exile on the island of Patmos, witnessed the visions of Revelation which still constitute the most familiar picture of this momentous event to Christians. "And the seventh angel sounded and there were great voices in heaven saying, *The kingdoms of this world are become the Kingdom of our Lord, and of his Christ, and He shall reign for ever and ever . . . and the nations were angry and thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that thou shouldst . . . destroy them which corrupt the earth*" (Rev. 11. 15-18). St. Paul therefore drew his allusion from an earlier basis and both in Thessalonians and in Corinthians associates it with the resurrection of the Church. "We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump; for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed" (1 Cor. 15. 51-52). This idea of the great trumpet which signals the coming of Divine judgment upon the evil things of this Age and the introduction of a new and better world "wherein dwelleth righteousness" (2 Pet. 3. 13) has its origin in the Old Testament, where the prophets used the simile to picture God rising up to take action for judgment upon evil. Zech. 9. 14 and Joel 2. 1-15 are cases in point. It is a military metaphor; the trumpet is blown to announce that the forces are about to attack; many such references appear in the historical books of the Bible. Since an essential prerequisite to the destruction of man's world edifice of evil and its supersession by the Messianic Kingdom is the resurrection to celestial conditions of all who are to be associated with Christ in the administration of that kingdom, it follows that the "last trump" is the symbol, not only of the imminence of "Judgment day", but also of the immediate resurrection of the Church, and this explains the close association in the mind of St. Paul between the two ideas. The mediæval idea was that "Gabriel's horn" sounding on the air would cause those hearing it to know that the time was at hand. The modern understanding is that when outward evidences in the world accumulate to the point where there is no longer any possibility of avoiding the obvious conclusion that the world of men is running into disruption and dissolution and judgment, then the "Last Trump" is sounding. Many Christians believe that this position has already been reached. Other men, far-sighted and sober thinking men of the world often, are increasingly coming to the same conclusion. "Upon the earth distress of nations with perplexity . . . men fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the

world" was Jesus' description of the position, (Luke 21. 26 RSV). It could very reasonably be held that on this basis the sound of the "Last Trump" has been heard upon earth for a number of decades past.

It is against this background that the age-old hope and aim of all Christians—to be translated at the end of earthly life to that celestial condition in which they will find their place of service in God's purposes and be associated with the Lord Christ for evermore—must be set. When the outward evidence becomes conclusive that the voice of the archangel and the trump of God are both sounding in the earth, even although only those who "watch for his appearing" are as yet aware of the fact and the bulk of the sons of men, even if seeing the signs, do not know what they portend, then the implication is that the Advent has commenced even although the returned Lord is not discerned by human sight. The further implication is that the first work of the Advent, the "change" of the Church, is then in progress or is imminent. Until that work is completed there can be no advance in the manifold activities which are to characterise the Advent and eventuate in the replacement of this present world order by that which is to bring peace to the nations and an end to evil and death.

The resurrection of the Church is known in Scripture as the "First Resurrection" (Rev. 20. 4-6; 1 Cor. 15. 23-24; Rom. 8. 19), because it precedes the general resurrection of the remainder of mankind, a process which commences only after the Messianic Kingdom is in operation with Christ and his Church in control. This "First Resurrection" has a dual aspect; at the time of the Advent there is to be, initially, the resurrection of believers who are described as "asleep"—i.e. in the grave, having finished their earthly lives prior to the Advent. After this comes the "change" of those who are still living at the time of the Advent. The net effect is the same; in both cases the individuals concerned close their eyes to the earth, they come to the end of consciousness and existence as experienced through the human organism, which thereafter returns to its dust, and they open their eyes to a new and celestial world in which consciousness and existence is experienced through a new and celestial body, one adapted to that order of life. St. Paul only alludes to the fact in Thessalonians and 1 Corinthians 15. 51-52, where the sleeping ones are "raised" and the living ones are "changed" or "translated". The philosophy of the matter is much more closely set out in 1 Cor. 15. 36-50 and 2 Cor. 5. 1-4 where this whole question of the celestial body and environment of those who thus go "to be with the Lord" is discussed in detail.

This then is the first great event of the Advent. There will be no outward sign and it will not be known to, or suspected by, the general mass of

humankind. This is essentially a preparation for the more spectacular manifestations of a later stage of the Advent when no living creature will be able to dispute the fact. 1 Thess. 4 in particular, and a number of related New Testament passages

in general, afford a wealth of detail as to the nature and manner of this resurrection of the Church, and it is to this aspect of the subject that much Advent truth relates.

(To be continued)

THREE SINS

In the story of Eden it is said of the woman

"When the woman saw that the tree

- (a) *Was good for food*
- (b) *And that it was pleasant to the eyes*
- (c) *And a tree to be desired to make one wise—she took of the fruit thereof"*

Note the correspondence in Ezek. 16.49.

"This was the sin of thy sister Sodom

- (a) *Pride*
- (b) *Fulness of bread*
- (c) *Abundance of idleness.*

Fulness (sufficiency) of bread is not in itself a sin. The sin is gluttony, the immoderate excess of good living corresponding to the beholding of the Tree, that it was good for food; not merely that the tree was satisfying and health-giving, but rather that it could be made conducive to excess. Likewise the "abundance of idleness" of Sodom matches up to the being "pleasant to the eyes"; not that there is any sin in beholding and enjoying beautiful things, but even this can become a means of diversion from one's duty if carried to excess. So that indulgence in that which is pleasant to the eyes can result in abundance of idleness and a forsaking those activities which are good and necessary in life. The "pride" of Sodom which led the Sodomites to become haughty and commit abomination can very well present the ultimate result of being made "wise" without learning wisdom in God's way. The Tree was "one to be desired to make one wise" but it did not bring wisdom in God's way and it was not heavenly wisdom that it brought. The wisdom conferred by the Tree proved to be "earthly, sensual, devilish" (Jas. 3.15) just like the pride and haughtiness of the Sodomites. The three manifestations of sins which the Tree of Knowledge began to reveal are shown in fuller development in the people of Sodom.

John carries the same theme a step further.

"For all that is in the world—

- (a) *The lust of the flesh*
- (b) *And the lust of the eye*
- (c) *And the pride of life—*

is not of the Father, but is of the world."

These are the same three sins, all branded as being not of God but of the world. The desire of the flesh—that which is good for food, appealing to the physical senses, but carried to excess. The desire of the eyes—that which is good for the mind, the soul, appealing to the aesthetic tastes, but car-

ried to excess again. The pride of life—self-sufficiency, selfishness, the banishment of God from the personal life and the serving of self-interest in preference to the service of one's fellows and of mankind at large; the earthly wisdom which says "self first", "I can do it", "I have no need of God", and is as deadening as the pride and haughtiness of the Sodomites and the wisdom Eve gained from the Tree.

It would appear as though these three principles, which have always characterised human life and human affairs throughout the history of "this present evil world", were enshrined in the story of the fatal tree, as a signpost warning all generations of the way they should not take. Most people have taken it; the world today is still governed by these three cardinal sins. Not until the Millennial Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ is set up will there be a new influence abroad in the land nullifying the dire results of the Tree of Knowledge of Evil and overspreading the earth instead with the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of God.

For that must be remembered. It was the Tree of the Knowledge of Good as well as Evil. Men have only tasted of the evil fruit as yet. What of the time when they taste of the good? They ate at the Devil's bidding and have reaped misery and death for many long millenniums of years in consequence. What of when they eat at God's bidding and reap happiness and life instead—and for eternity at that?

In the future ages of glory the Tree will still be good for food, and pleasant to the eyes, and a giver of wisdom, but it will not bring death to those who partake, for then they will partake in harmony with the ways and will of God and not in disobedience to his decree as they did in Eden. God has made the earth for man, and man for the earth, so that men might appreciate and enjoy its good foods and its beautiful sights, and increase in wisdom everlastingly in the knowledge and reverence of God. That still future phase of God's work with man is foreshadowed in the Scriptures under the symbol of a Tree of Life which brings healing and health to the nations. Both Trees, it would appear, offer life and happiness to those who will partake upon the Divine terms; perhaps, rightly understood, there is at the end no essential difference between the Tree of Knowledge and the Tree of Life after all.

PARADISE ON EARTH

*Earth's coming
glory*

11. Into the Divine Likeness

By the time the human race has progressed four or five centuries into the Millennium the world will be a far different place. It is not only that the physical conditions under which men will find themselves living will be vastly improved, but the mental outlook and state of the mind will be immeasurably enhanced. Outwardly, of course, everything will be conducive to human happiness and satisfaction. The waste places of the earth will have long since become productive, the deserts changed to fertile land and forests clothe much of them where only sand and rocks existed before. The climate will have become more equable, largely because of the elimination of desert areas and the growth of new forests. The labours of men will have changed the very face of the earth, producing abundance of crops and an all-sufficiency of food for earth's population. All this will create a world-wide condition of satisfaction and peace which itself cannot but exert its influence upon the minds of men. *"The work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever"* (Isa. 32.17). *"In his days shall the righteous flourish, and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth"* (Psa. 72.7). But in addition to all this, and more important than the effect of the rehabilitation of the earth, will be the changed nature of men's minds. No longer will the old traits of greed, hatred and malice poison their lives and lead them to enmity one with another, with all the dire results which those vices have brought in this present day and age. Selflessness, love and benevolence will be the predominant characteristics, leading to the development of a world society in which every man seeks the welfare of his fellow, and in so doing ensures his own. Almost certainly by this time the vast majority will have accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as their personal Saviour and will have long been walking in his ways. Says the Lord, *"then shall I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the Lord, to serve him with one consent"* (Zeph. 3.9) and again, *"they shall all know me, from the least to the greatest"*. The fact that all men will by then have been brought to a full and accurate knowledge of the character and benevolence and love of God, instead of the miserable caricature of him as a vengeful and punishing God which is all that so many know in this present life, will of itself induce a strong incentive to loyalty and allegiance to him, and when to this is added the realisation of what was achieved for them by the life on earth and the death of Jesus Christ, it is possible perhaps to visualise something of the enthusiasm with which the people will acclaim, as the Psalmist says they

will (Psa. 48.14) *"this God is our God for ever; he will be our guide even unto death"*—except that in that Age they will substitute "unto eternity".

It is perhaps impossible in this life and this world to realise the tremendous force for righteousness and well-doing that will be created by this well-nigh universal acceptance of the ways of God. The effect upon any who by then may remain unregenerate must be powerful to the extreme, an extreme we can by no means comprehend. Just as the almost universal power and practice of evil in this present world is a powerful force leading men into increasingly greater deeds of evil in their own hearts and lives, so the universal power and practice of righteousness in that Age will be a powerful incentive to the unregenerate to repent in their turn and come to the Saviour for healing. There will surely be a great many "miracles of grace" in that day.

But there is another side to the coin. It is certainly true that the Millennial Day is a day of blessing for all who will heed the voice of the Son of God, and turn to him, and repent, and convert, and be healed. But what of the past when some men were guilty of base crimes against their fellows, or have despoiled the earth, which is man's common home, to satisfy their own greed, knowing full well what they were doing. Are they to find that the past is as if it had never been? Is there to be no retribution for the sins of the past life? And if so, of what nature will it consist?

The answer is in Paul's words to the Galatians *"whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap"* (Gal. 6.7). There is no escaping that Divine law. Even though the man has been freed from the Adamic death sentence by reason of the offering of Christ, who died for all without limitation; even though he has been restored to life and given a full knowledge of the grace of God in Christ whereby he may, if he will, advance to full reconciliation with God and so inherit eternal life, he cannot escape the effects of the past. That effect is written into his being and the more he has been steeped in sin and all vices the farther away he is from the Divine standard and the harder he will find it to come back to that standard. Jesus made that clear when He said that the people of Tyre and Sidon, Sodom and Gomorrah, famous for their depravity, would find the Millennial experience *"more tolerable"*—better, more endurable,—than the unbelieving Jews of his own day. They were, despite their vices, nearer to God than these; after all, Jesus did say that if his Gospel had been preached to the people of Sodom and Gomorrah they would

have repented: his own people did not. These references, then (Matt. 10.15; 11.24; Mark 6.11; Luke 10.12) all demonstrate the fact that some will find life harder in the Millennium than will others, and it will be because they were, even if outwardly righteous, farther from God than the others. Says Job (4.8) "*they that plow iniquity, and sow wickedness, reap the same*" like Solomon in Prov. 22.8 "*He that soweth iniquity shall reap iniquity*" ("vanity" in the A.V. really means iniquity). There must therefore be a reaping of retribution for deeds done in the flesh even though that retribution runs parallel to the work of restoration which is bringing the man nearer to God.

It is tempting to surmise how this is going to work out in practice. It has been suggested that the murderer will be sent to seek out and make his peace with the man he murdered. In such case notable conquerors such as Napoleon and Genghis Khan, who were responsible for the deaths of thousands, will have quite a task on their hands. Those who have committed crimes, not against men, but against man's habitat the earth, might easily find that their past will catch up with them. One particular Scripture, Rev. 11.18, indicates as part of the operations of the Lord Christ when He begins his rule in the glory of his Kingdom the fact that He will "*destroy them which destroy the earth*"; the word rendered "destroy" is one which means literally "to change for the worse". Of course these will not be destroyed in the literal sense in a day which is devoted to life and rehabilitation for all. A little thought leads to the realisation that certain men, for purely selfish reasons, chiefly financial gain, have changed the earth for the worse by cutting down its forests, polluting the sea, land and atmosphere, permitting famine in one part which could have been relieved by the plenty existing in another, making and selling armaments for warring peoples, so ensuring death and misery to thousands, and so on. Is it too fanciful to suggest that in the next Age these will find their own condition definitely "changed for the worse" in that instead of enjoying the luxuries of life on the profits of their nefarious actions they will now be required to spend their time in a much more menial capacity planting new forests, cleansing the earth from its pollutants, finding ways and means of countering the effects of famines and wars. Even though the Millennium be a time of peace and security, there will still be a lot of work to be done, and if those who contributed most to the despoiling of the earth in this life find that they are expected to undertake the lion's share of the admittedly drastic work required to restore it in the next, they may perhaps realise the truth of Paul's words, albeit, it is to be hoped, admitting that the position is a just one.

This brings one logically to a consideration of

the day-to-day activities of the restored human race. The new world is not going to mean an eternity of idleness. The whole scheme of Nature teaches us that nothing ever stands still. There must always be activity, development, achievement, "*first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear*" as Jesus said in the parable likening the Kingdom of God to the growth of grain from seed (Mark 4.28). There will be work to be done, work not attended with danger as is so often the case at present, but work nevertheless which will be incumbent upon man to perform. Especially will this be the case during the early centuries of the Age, when so drastic a reversal of the damage man has done throughout the span of history will be necessary. Even after that end has been achieved, that which has been attained must be maintained, for Nature uncontrolled and unchecked can easily turn the fruitful field into a wilderness again. Nevertheless the physical perfection of the human frame will rob labour of much of its burdens; perhaps the difference between daily labour and the pursuits of leisure may not be so great after all. And leisure in those days will mean so much more than it does to-day. One can imagine the development and practice of arts and crafts, of music and sports and travel, to a degree never experienced in this present life. The acquisition of knowledge, the fruits of research, must of necessity go on into the infinite future, for there can be no end to the searchings of the human mind in its passionate reaching out to the unrevealed. And all this, unhindered by the opposing forces of impaired intellect and physique, of poverty and limited opportunity, inseparable from the present, will be open to all men, and so life will go on, full and complete.

One aspect of that life must be the complete restoration of human powers of control over the animal creation, as was the case with the first man in Eden. To some extent limited examples of this can be witnessed to-day, as for example the lion-tamer in his circus, the farmer with his sheep-dog, the swimmer with dolphins, and so on. In that day the Divine ideal as laid down in Genesis will be fully realised, and man will have benevolent "*dominion over the beasts of the field, the fowl of the air*", all exercised benevolently and without hardship to that creation. Perhaps it is in some such fashion that the Old Testament prophets' predictions that the lion shall lay down with the lamb, the leopard eat straw with the bullock, will have their fulfilment. We still do not know enough about Nature's economy with regard to the lower animals to perceive accurately just how all this is going to be possible, but the general picture is there in the Old Testament and it is a picture of universal peace not only amongst mankind but also the entire animal creation which will surely come to pass.

Nearly three thousand years ago Isaiah, the man of God who saw more clearly into those far-future days than any other man, declaimed "For as the new heaven and the new earth which I will make shall remain before me, saith the Lord, so shall your posterity and your name remain. And it shall come to pass, that from one new moon to another, and from one sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before me. For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create . . . and the voice of weeping shall no more be heard, nor the voice of crying . . . they shall not labour in vain nor bring forth for trouble, and it shall come to

pass, that before they call I will answer, and while they are yet speaking, I will hear . . . they shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy kingdom, saith the Lord" (Isa. 65 & 66). Nearly a thousand years later, John the Revelator, having the same inspiration as Isaiah, "heard a great voice out of heaven, saying, Behold, the dwelling of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away. And He that sitteth upon the Throne saith, Behold, I make all things new."

To be concluded.

THE HOLY CITY

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

This is not a vision of Heaven, as so many have supposed. Its essential basis is the coming of Divine government to earth and the presence of God to be with men. It foreshadows the restoration of Edenic conditions upon earth, for the connection of this River and these Trees of Life with the Genesis story is too plain to be ignored. It pictures the time when this rebellious earth has become fully reconciled to God and, to use Paul's words in Rom. 8. 21 "The creation itself shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God". The Church of Christ has already (in the 20th chapter) been exalted to Heaven and eternal association with Christ the Lord; the 21st and 22nd chapters tell of the corresponding completion of the Divine Plan for the earth, a completion which is to be effected during the Millennial Age.

John's introductory synopsis of the vision (chap. 21. 1-8) records the words he heard from heaven "Behold the tabernacle (dwelling place) of God is

with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away". It is sometimes suggested that this chapter records two separate descents of the Holy City to earth; this is not likely. It is more probable that John prefaced his account of the actual vision with a short summary and then in verse 9 addressed himself to the vision in detail.

The city as it appeared to John was square in outline, surrounded by a high wall of gleaming green jasper, the golden buildings set in terraces, one above another so that at the centre its height appeared to be as great as the width. This square form symbolised the justice and righteousness of the new Divine government, and its intimate connection with the heavenly powers was shown by its towering up to the skies. The wall rested upon twelve foundations bearing the names of the apostles, and at each of the twelve lofty gateways there was posted a guardian angel. The number twelve had particular significance to the ancients, for they pictured the sun as issuing forth from twelve successive portals in the heavens in turn, as month succeeded month, and this, with the division of the day into twelve hours, invested the number with the idea of earthly or material completeness and universality. Hence the twelve gateways, facing three each to north, south, east and west, symbolised the universal invitation to all peoples of earth to enter the Holy City; "Whosoever will, let him come" (Rev. 22. 17). "In this mountain will the Lord of Hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things." (Isa. 25. 6). The twelve foundations bearing the names of the Apostles stood for the universal appeal of the Gospel upon which the City

is built. The height of the wall, one hundred and forty-four cubits, indicated the full comprehensive nature of the Kingdom, that it will contain all of God's earthly perfected creation; nothing will be left outside.

The first function of the Holy City is to cleanse the nations. God is pictured as dwelling in the centre of the City, seated upon His Throne, the Son beside Him, for the purpose of "wiping away all tears" from the eyes of men (Rev. 21. 4 and 22. 3-5), and bringing healing to all. This work is denoted by the spectacle of a River of Life, seen by John to proceed from the Throne and issue forth from the city to flow through the country outside. The A.V. verse division of chap. 22. 1-2 is unfortunate and obscures the true sense. Rightly expressed, the passage reads *"And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb, in the midst of the street of it (the city). And on either side of the river was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manners of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations"*. The term "street" means a broad highway, and "tree of life" is a generic term referring, not to one single tree, but to the species generally. John saw this broad highway extending outward from the city and the river flowing along its centre, the sides of the river being flanked with trees of life bearing twelve varieties of fruit. This is much like the vision seen by Ezekiel when he saw the river of life issuing from the Millennial Temple and flowing out to the east country, the trees of life on its banks also being for food and healing (Ezek. 47. 1-12). This "street" corresponds to the "Highway of Holiness" spoken of by Isaiah in his 35th chapter *"And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The Way of Holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it (overlook it or miss finding it); for he shall be with them"*. This "Highway of Holiness" is the symbolic road along

which mankind will be invited and exhorted, during the Millennial Age, to travel, toward harmony and reconciliation with God through faith in Jesus Christ and acceptance of Him as Saviour.

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

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

"Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended." (Phil. 3. 13). If any man consider that he has attained a satisfactory spiritual state, from that moment he may date the beginning of his spiritual decline. No present attainments can be satisfactory to a sincere follower of Christ who studiously endeavours to copy the perfect pattern. It is only when we turn our eyes away from Christ that self-complacency can be exercised; for, in full view of the pattern our shortcomings are ever manifest. And if in pride of heart we do lose sight of them ourselves, they only become the more manifest to others. Only in the realisation of a continual growth into the likeness of Christ should the Christian find satisfaction.

"And a highway shall be there, and a way; and it shall be called 'The Way of Holiness.'"

Picture the returning multitudes thronging their way up that symbolic road. Wonderment and incredulity will give place to enthusiastic joy as the evidence becomes overwhelming that the Lord Jesus Christ has without doubt taken the power of his Kingdom and now calls to all men everywhere to learn of him. Many will be the helping hands stretched out to assist the pilgrims; and that immortal phrase "A Ransom for All" will carry its significance deep into every mind. The time of earth's jubilee will have come indeed.

THE OVERTHROW OF SODOM AND GOMORRAH

A historical study in two parts. Part 1.

Second only to the story of the Deluge is that which recounts the overthrow of the Cities of the Plain as an example of Divine judgment upon a community which it were better should die rather than live in increasing depravity. The spectacular nature of this event, the obliteration of an entire countryside with all its inhabitants in a holocaust of fire, imprinted itself so deeply upon the minds of men that its physical nature became a symbol of judgment upon evil to succeeding generations for hundreds of years. It is not always realised that the mediæval doctrine of Hell fire owes its origin to Biblical metaphors which themselves are based upon the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Two thousand years after the catastrophe, John the Revelator framed some of the most picturesque symbols of the Book of Revelation in its light; both the smoke of great Babylon's burning, going up for ever and ever, and the Lake of Fire into which is cast all that is evil for utter destruction, are derived from this story in Genesis. It happened in the dawn of written history, and the narrative which records it is archaic, but the account contains so much of interest and importance for the study of Christian doctrine, that it is well worthy of close examination.

The story goes back to the nineteenth century B.C. when the patriarch Abraham and his nephew Lot, heads of nomadic groups embracing a large number of servants, shepherds and retainers, with extensive flocks and herds, were established in Canaan between Bethel and Ai, about ten miles north of Jerusalem—which at that time was a small village and citadel from which its priest-king Melchisedek ruled the surrounding peoples. The land was inhabited quite sparsely by Amorites and Hittites but it was becoming apparent that the combined flocks of the two patriarchs demanded more than the immediate district could provide and that one of them must move. Abraham gave Lot first choice of territory. The latter *"lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere (before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah) as the garden of the Lord . . . Then Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan, and Lot journeyed east . . . and Lot dwelled in the cities of the plain and pitched his tent toward Sodom"* (Gen. 13. 10-12). So far Lot seemed to have used his opportunity well; he had chosen a land so fertile and productive that it could fitly be compared by the narrator with the "garden of the Lord", i.e., the Garden of Eden. But the story goes on to say that there was something very un-Edenic involved in the choice. *"The men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the Lord exceed-*

ingly" (ch. 13. 13).

More complete details of this beautiful land appear in Gen. ch. 14. It is there called the Vale of Siddim (from the Hebrew "*Sid*"—lime or chalk, abundant in the area) and there were five cities, Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim and Zoar. The term "city" can give a wrong impression; the Hebrew term denotes a walled or enclosed collection of buildings, or even a single building, as against an open hamlet or village. Populations in Canaan were very thin at this period and, despite the popular idea of vast centres of civilisation suffering a cataclysmic overthrow it is certain that the Cities of the Plain were only quite small communities of probably not more than a few hundred inhabitants each. According to Genesis, they were Canaanites, descendants of Ham the youngest son of Noah. The 10th chapter gives the name of another city in the confederacy, Lasha, (ch. 10. 19) which incidentally helps to locate the geographical position of the lost cities, for this name survives in that of the peninsula called Ha-lashan—the Mountain of Lasha—at the southern end of the Dead Sea. There has in the past been some controversy as to whether the site of the catastrophe is to be looked for at the north or the south end of the sea. The topographical details in the story point to the south, and modern research has established on geologic grounds that the site must definitely have been at the south, where the modern Israeli town of Sodom now stands.

Here, in this lovely valley, some fifteen miles wide by twenty-five long, Lot lived for twenty years. On the west rose the highlands of Canaan to a height of four thousand feet and on the east a five thousand foot mountain, affording protection from cold winds but ensuring plentiful rainfall. To this day an abundance of streams flow from those same heights, now bare and rugged but then clothed with trees, into the Dead Sea. But it was not then so much a salt sea as it has become since; much of its present mineral content comes from the seven-mile cliff of solid salt called Mount Sodom at its south-western corner, and the sea did not reach that cliff until later times. So Lot found life easy and exceedingly pleasant in the valley, where the sun shone warmly all day and the nights were scented with the perfumes of tropical flowers and fruits. The New Testament tells us that he was a righteous man and sadly vexed by the ungodliness of the community in which he lived; his vexation was not sufficiently harrowing to induce him to leave that society and find another home where life might be harder but the atmosphere decidedly purer. He evidently did preach the righteousness

of God to his lawless fellow-citizens, for we have their own word for that in Gen. 19. 9, so that we may take at their full value the words of St. Peter when he says of him in 2 Pet. 2. 8 "*that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds*".

The only incident of that twenty years which has been recorded is the invasion of Canaan by four kings from the Euphrates valley, headed by Chedorlaomer of Elam. Genesis 14 tells how the invaders moved down the eastern side of the Dead Sea, struck westward, returned to the western side of the Sea, defeated the Amorites and found themselves confronted by the combined forces of the five Cities of the Plain. The defenders were no match for the invaders and the upshot was that the cities were pillaged, and many captives, among whom was Lot and his household, forced to accompany the victors. Abraham, thirty-five miles away at Hebron, received news of the happening and gave pursuit with a band of armed followers. Overtaking the Elamite forces near Damascus he defeated them and recovered the captives and the spoil. Even this experience did not deter Lot from continuing to dwell in the pleasant valley; he went back to Sodom and dwelt there until its destruction.

So it came about that Abraham, sitting in his tent door at noontime one day, looked up and saw three strangers standing before him. With the traditional courtesy and hospitality of the east he immediately rose and begged them to refresh themselves and rest in the shade, while he had a meal prepared of which they might partake before proceeding upon their way. The simple account in Genesis 18 declares that it was God who thus appeared to Abraham at this time. In theological language this is called a theophany—a manifestation of the Deity in terrestrial form to man. The three men looked like ordinary men and they were dressed like ordinary men of the country and period, but they were in fact visitors from the celestial world. Abraham did not realise the fact at first; he did before they parted.

The meal ended, the men "*rose up from thence, and looked toward Sodom; and Abraham went with them to bring them on the way*". (18. 16). It is unlikely that there was any road or even track between Hebron and the Vale of Siddim; the Amorites and Hittites of the Hebron highlands who were Abraham's neighbours were racially distinct from the Canaanites of the Vale and the two communities could have had nothing in common. The one was composed of hardy, vigorous nomadic stock-raisers labouring for their bread and breathing the pure keen air of the mountains, the other of luxury-loving, indolent town dwellers living on the bounty of their soil and basking in the

enervating hot humidity of the valley and seashore.

From Hebron a traveller would have to make a precipitous descent of four thousand feet over rocky and mountainous country, eventually to debouch on the shore of the Dead Sea. Only two of the men set out; the third remained with Abraham. The patriarch quite likely watched their progress until a bend in the winding gorge hid them from sight, turning then to face his companion. In that moment he knew him to be the Lord. It may have been something in his bearing; it may be in the words He spoke; it may have been Abraham's own intuition, sharpened by many year's communion with God. whatever the reason, the patriarch knew that he was standing in the Divine presence.

The story is narrated as though God himself was standing there in person talking to Abraham. The speaker is consistently denominated "the Lord", the Incommunicable Name (transliterated badly into English as "Jehovah", but printed "LORD" in the A.V.) being employed. That does not mean that the Deity abdicated his Throne in Heaven, or as some may prefer to put it, gave up his eternity and omnipresence to be contained within the physical frame of a human being located on a mountain-side in ancient Canaan. Divine revelation tells us that the only manner in which God, unseeable and imperceptible by human sense, can be manifested to man is through the Son, who in his own Person reveals the Deity. For that reason it is most reasonably considered that the "Word", who was "made flesh" at the time of the First Advent, and moved among men as Jesus of Nazareth, had, in this earlier day also, taken upon himself terrestrial habiliments that he might be seen by, and eat and talk with Abraham. He thus could manifest the Deity to Abraham just as surely as to the disciple Philip at a later time when He told him "*He that hath seen me hath seen the Father*" (John 14. 9).

The ensuing conversation (ch. 18. 17-33) is one of the most remarkable passages in the Bible. It manifests what almost appears to be Divine reluctance to execute judgment on the wicked cities if by any means some extenuating circumstances could be found. "*Because their sin is very grievous*" said the Lord "*I will go down now and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it; and if not, I will know*". In a very human kind of way it is as though He wished to ascertain whether the depravity of these people was really as bad as had been reported. Abraham was under no illusion; he knew that if the Lord really did go down to see for himself how matters stood there could only be one decision—judgment, swift and comprehensive. And he was fearful for the fate of any like Lot who might still be at heart loyal to God. So he made his plea, "*Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked. Peradventure there be fifty righteous within*

the city". He pleaded for the sake of his hypothetical fifty and closed his plea with a word that has become immortal; "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"

The Lord met Abraham's concern for those few righteous with magnanimity far greater. "If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes." The patriarch's plea was accepted and granted in full and abundant measure. Gratified though the old man must have been, he was conscious of a nagging feeling that there probably were not fifty righteous in the city. "Peradventure" he hazarded "there shall lack five of the fifty righteous; will thou destroy all the city for lack of five?" The Lord was no less considerate. "If I find there forty and five, I will not destroy it." Abraham was still doubtful. He came down successively to forty, to thirty, to twenty, and each time the Lord followed him down. "Oh let not the Lord be angry" he pleaded "and I will speak yet but this once. Peradventure ten shall be found there". Who amongst us that knows aught of the love and compassion of God for his erring children can doubt that the eyes of the majestic Figure facing Abraham were dark with sadness and the voice heavy with infinite regret; "I will not destroy it for ten's sake".

The patriarch was silent; he felt within himself that there were probably not even ten, and that the Lord knew it too, and that Sodom was doomed. "And the Lord went his way . . . and Abraham returned unto his place."

The episode was not enacted without purpose. We have in this short account of seventeen verses a perfect exposition of the lengths to which God will go before passing final judgment upon sin. If the presence of a few righteous could be shown to mitigate something of the corruption of the city then God would allow full credit for that and give the inhabitants another chance. It was only when all hope and possibility of reform was extinct that He left them, sorrowfully we may be sure, to their fate. "Behold" He said to guilty Jerusalem through the prophet Ezekiel at a much later date "this was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom, pride, fulness of bread and abundance of idleness was in her . . . and they committed abomination before me; therefore I took them away as I saw good" (Ezek. 16. 49, 50). The remarkable thing is that, in the same chapter, God indicates that their judg-

ment is not irrecoverable; a day will come when the Sodomites and their fellows are to "return to their former estate"—*gadmah*—a term which means the original or pristine state of the subject. The people of the Plain, destroyed in their degradation and sin, are to be restored to the pristine condition which was theirs before the indulgence and corruption of their life of ease had done its fell work,—for even the Sodomites were better men, at one time in their lives' experience, than at the time of their destruction. The worship of God—*El Elyon*, the Most High God—was prevalent in Canaan at this time. And if words mean anything at all this Divine declaration through the prophet Ezekiel can only imply that God in his Wisdom sees the possibility of repentance and reform in these the apparently most degraded of human beings, and will not let go his hold until every avenue of persuasion and conversion has been explored and found unavailing. So the judgment, although penal, will eventually be remedial. Hope, at least, remains. The authority of Jesus stands for the fact that the men of Sodom will come in contact with his message in the Messianic Day of Judgment, and will find that Day "more tolerable" than those of later days who had greater opportunity—for Jesus said plainly that had his mission been directed to Sodom, then Sodom "would have remained until this day" (Matt. 11. 23). That implies they would have repented, had Jesus himself gone to them. And if they repented, they would have been saved. And if there is no provision in the purposes of God whereby the message which would admittedly have saved them, had they been given it, shall at the last be presented to them before the final decision, there is no escape from the terrible question "Why were the words of Christ not preached in their streets and why were his wondrous works not done in their sight?"

The two men disappeared on their way to Sodom; the Lord went his way, and Abraham returned to his tent. The world slept, and as it slept the subterranean rocks far beneath the surface of the lovely valley strained and groaned against the increasing tension which within a few hours more was to bring about the fearful cataclysm that for the moment then subsisting was to become God's agent of judgment.

(To be continued)

The law of God, by the hammer of affliction, or by the smiting of judgment, may break the heart; but our hearts may be bruised and shattered by calamity and yet remain as frigid as an iceberg. It is the work of grace that is just as powerful to break the heart as to heal it.

To be too busy to pray gives religion a Christian burial, it is true, but it kills nevertheless.

(E. M. Bounds)

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

"THE ANOINTED CHERUB THAT COVERETH"

A consideration of Ezek. 28

In the year of Jerusalem's destruction by the armies of Nebuchadnezzar, Ezekiel the priest, far away by the rivers of Assyria, uttered those memorable words of denunciation against the Phoenician city of Tyre which form the burden of the twenty-eighth chapter of his book. The idolatry of Tyre was an offence to every pious Israelite; the Tyrian's satisfaction at the miseries which came upon Israel during the closing years of the latter's national existence induced an antagonism which found comfort only in the thought that one day God himself would intervene to punish the enemies and the traducers of Israel.

In this setting Ezekiel presented his message. The idolatrous Tyrians were to suffer the same fate that had already overtaken Jerusalem. Their trade would be destroyed, their possessions taken from them, their city desolated. But unlike Jerusalem, which by the promise of God was one day to rise from the ruins and recover more than her former glory, Tyre, once overthrown, would remain in oblivion for ever. Never again would she sit as mistress of the seas, her merchants trading with the four corners of the earth.

The prediction came true. Nearly three hundred years later Alexander the great laid siege to Tyre, captured the city and fulfilled Ezekiel's forecast to the letter. From that day to this Tyre has remained in oblivion, even as the ancient seer declared; *"Never shalt thou be any more"*.

Here is afforded a perfect setting for deeper instruction to Christians of after days. The first part of Ezekiel's denunciation clearly refers to the city and its inhabitants and their activities and institutions. Every detail is capable of a strictly literal application and its fulfilment is recorded in history. This part of the description concludes with an account of the woes which would come upon the prince of Tyre, and chapter 28, verses 1-10, tell of the doom awaiting that potentate. At the 11th verse the prophet passes into a new denunciation, which, while addressed ostensibly to the ruler of Tyre, employs language and allusions which cannot be truthfully applicable to any earthly being. The point of correspondency is that as Tyre was to go into oblivion for ever, so will this of whom the prophet now speaks. Addressing the King of Tyre as a symbol, so to speak, of the one he has in mind, the prophet, speaking by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, records a vivid description of the creation and fall of Lucifer, the Prince of Evil.

A verse by verse examination of the passage reveals the aptness of Ezekiel's words.

"Thou seal most accurate, full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty" (Margolis). This reference is to

Babylonian "seals"—little cylinders of baked clay with an intricate design embossed, used by the owner to impress his distinctive mark or signature upon the clay tablets of that time. A "seal most accurate" must indicate a faithful copy of the master seal. By such an expression Lucifer is pictured, like man in later days, created "in the image and likeness of God", like all that God has made, "very good—full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty". The word *"tochnith"* translated "sum" in the A.V., means "pattern" and in its only other occurrence (Ezek. 43. 10) refers to the pattern or arrangement of the Temple buildings. Thus the A.V. rendering conveys the same idea as other translations—the accuracy of this copy of the Divine pattern which was represented in the personality of Lucifer.

"In Eden the garden of God didst thou abide." There seems no reason to doubt that this reference is to the new earthly creation described in Genesis. The story of man's original sinlessness and the introduction of evil is common to many ancient nations, and the early peoples of Mesopotamia had a vivid belief in the original "garden" and the sacred tree, the curse of evil having been introduced by a serpent, thus in large measure confirming the Bible story. Lucifer's special commission had to do with the earth and its inhabitants.

"Every precious stone was thy covering." The word translated "covering" is *mesukkah*, meaning a pavilion or a tabernacle, and the description of a pavilion bearing "every precious stone" brings to mind at once the description of the New Jerusalem in the book of Revelation, the glorious city of which it is said that the foundations were garnished with all manner of precious stones, its gates of pearls and its streets of gold. Remembering that this "New Jerusalem" is to restore to mankind that which was lost in Eden, it is not an unreasonable thing to picture Lucifer enthroned in that early day of man's innocence as the lord of earthly creation for man's guidance and instruction in the ways of God. The contrast between this one who, through ambition, misused a wonderful opportunity, and the Lord Jesus Christ of whom it is said *"he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross"* is then a particularly striking one. This thought of Lucifer's royal state is further borne out by the next clause, *"the service of tabrets and flutes was prepared with thee in the day thou wast created"*. The word translated "workmanship" is *"melakah"*, meaning work or business, referring to the royal music, the "tabrets or flutes" of the text. Musical instruments were an essential adjunct of kingly state, and a similar reference to the "business" or "service" of the king's musicians

occurs in Neh. 11. 22 and 13. 30, and in Dan. 8. 27, affording illustrations of the kingly rank with which Lucifer was invested at his creation.

Next comes a reference to Lucifer's priestly function, this combination of priest and king being particularly striking when one thinks of Melchisedek, a type of Christ, a "priest upon his throne". *"Thou wast a cherub with outspread wings, and I had set thee upon the holy mountain of God as thou wast. Thou hast walked up and down in the midst of the bright shining ones."* This is Leaser's rendering, the majority of other versions being in agreement—the final expression "stones of fire" being a Hebrew synonym for "bright shining ones", i.e., the angels. In that case there is an indication here that this heavenly being was accustomed to consort with the holy angels of God's spiritual creation; but more than that, he held high rank amongst them as an "anointed cherub" (A.V.) one therefore who exercised priestly functions. The general meaning of the entire passage, interpreting the "holy mountain of God" as referring to the perfect earthly creation in Eden, is that Lucifer was "set" to be a Priest and King to the human race, having access at all times to the presence of God in the interests of this new addition to the Divine domains.

Now comes the dark shadow of sin. *"Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day thou wast created, till unrighteousness was found in thee. By the abundance of thy slander thou wast filled to thy centre with violence and thou didst sin."* In this verse the word "merchandise" is from the Hebrew *"rekullah"*—not *"maarab"* (barter) as in Ezekiel 27, nor *"sachar"* (gain) as in many other Scriptures, but from a root which means "to go to and fro" either as a merchant or as a tale bearer or slanderer. Hence it is suggested by students that in determin-

ing the meaning to be attached to this word in harmony with its context the alternative meaning should be adopted, and the fitness of this is evident when it is remembered that one of the descriptions the Bible attaches to Satan is that of "slanderer" or "accuser". How fitting then, is this verse, when one recalls the slander uttered in Eden: *"God doth know . . . your eyes shall be opened"* as though the Creator harboured base designs against his creatures. This verse may well include that great slander and famous lie first told in Eden and repeated century after century through the ages, "Ye shall not surely die".

The nature of Lucifer's sin is not stated here; fuller details are afforded in the fourteenth chapter of Isaiah; but there stands out in all its stark horror the dread declaration that this wonderful being who had commenced a life of such marvellous promise, and had been so signally honoured by his Creator, had proven unfaithful to his trust. Sin had entered, and by the immutable laws of God, unless sin be eradicated, death must inevitably follow. Hence that solemn declaration of the only possible ending to this story, the fundamental truth that sin contains within itself the seeds of its own destruction. *"Therefore brought I forth fire from the midst of thee; this devoured thee, and I changed thee to ashes upon the earth before the eyes of all that saw thee—Thou art as though thou hast not been, and shall not be any more for ever."* Here is the doom of Satan; the fire of his own sin, proceeding from within himself, has severed him for ever from the presence and fellowship of God. Devoured by that fire, and in the end of time cast as ashes upon the earth, he will be as though he had never been "and shall not be any more for ever". A supreme example of the consequences of sin is provided by this story of Lucifer, the fallen archangel.

We should in all our activities and arrangements, our organising and building, remember that these "mighty works", desirable and even necessary as they are today, are not intended to endure for all time, to be jealously guarded and handed down to posterity. They are for the needs of the moment, for the promulgation of the Word of God and the edifying of the Body of Christ—UNTIL we all come, in the unity of the faith, and the knowledge of the Son of God, to the measure of the full stature of the Anointed One.

Take advantage of the quiet time of our daily opportunities that strength may be imparted to us by the only source profitable to man? Nature works in quietness; strength is begotten by admitted methods and formulated habits, thereby accepting God as the "Live Wire" to every fibre of our being. The Upper Room experience of added strength came conditionally, by process of waiting. We are all the time busy at our work; we do not know the sacredness of resting. We know how to toil and how to give, but we do not know how to sit still and how to receive.

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

God will never force his gifts. He always waits for some form of co-operation.

Note on John 4. 24

"God is a spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth" (John 4. 24).

It is unfortunate that the A.V. translators chose to put the indefinite article "a Spirit" here, for it introduces the idea of the Divine personality, which was not what Jesus was talking about. What He really said was *"God is spirit; and they that worship him must worship him in spirit"*. The woman had been talking about the rival claims of Samaria and Jerusalem as the place where men should worship God. Jesus told her that these were but material temples where worship was along lines of ritual with vestments and sacrifices and so on. True worshippers, He said, worship God, in spirit without outward trappings, because God himself is not material, He is spirit. As such, He is incomprehensible to man; we cannot imagine or visualise God except in terms of earthly images but we have two means of contact with God. He is made known to us, revealed or manifested to us, in the Person of the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, through whom alone enduring life comes to us. His power and work is exerted through the Holy Spirit, which is to

us God working in creation and in the hearts of his children. We do not well therefore in trying to differentiate between God the Spirit and the Holy Spirit of God; rather should we say that the Holy Spirit of God is God manifesting his Divine power in active operation in his creation. When the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the abyss in creation (Gen. 1) that was God working powerfully to form the world. When in a future day God pours out his Spirit upon all flesh (Joel 2. 28) that is the power of God working in the hearts of all men to worldwide conversion and salvation. When the Apostle Paul speaks of the Spirit of God dwelling in us, the believers (Rom. 8. 9), that is God working in us to transform our hearts and minds into conformity with himself that we might be partakers of his holiness. Whatever we see of God in action, that is the Holy Spirit in our world or in our lives or in our sight. Whatever is revealed or manifested to us of the character, the love, the goodness of God, all that shows us what God is, that is the Son, the means by which we know the Father and are known of him.

A Glimpse of St. Luke

"Luke the beloved physician and Demas greet you." (Col. 4. 14). This is one of three brief direct references to Luke in the epistles of Paul. As Paul travelled towards Jerusalem for the last time he gathered together those who carried the gifts from the Gentile churches to their Jewish brethren. He mentions this work in his second letter to the Corinthians and some authorities regard the reference to "the brother who is famous among all the churches for his preaching of the Gospel" to be Luke. (2 Cor. 8. 18. R.S.V.). Prior to his voyage to Rome, Paul spent two years at Caesarea and it seems probable that during this period Luke did much of the research for writing the Gospel and first pages of the "Acts". The account of the journey to Rome is very interesting because of the many incidental details which Luke added. Like all his descriptive passages he painted a vivid picture of their adventures in the boat and towards the end it becomes an exciting story. Finally they reached Rome together and shortly afterwards we lose sight of Luke except for two final glimpses of the "beloved physician" through the eyes of his great friend. To Philemon, Paul describes Luke as a fellowworker. At the close of his life, amid much trouble, in which his other brethren left him, Paul wrote to Timothy "Luke alone is with me". So he remained with the invalid apostle to attend his

physical ailments and encourage him through his lonely detention.

As an educated man and a devout follower of the Lord, Paul would rapidly become attached to Luke. Both had forsaken worldly wealth and ambition to become disciples of Jesus and to preach the Gospel. They shared a great thirst for truth and neither spared effort to overthrow popular superstition and outdated tradition. It was for this reason that Luke commenced an orderly and accurate account of *"those things which are most surely believed among us,"* (Luke 1. 1). Although no attempt was made to write a complete biography of the Master, Luke gives a fuller and more balanced picture of the Lord than the three Jewish evangelists. As a Gentile, he saw things in a different light from the other Gospel writers; from a broader, more universal aspect. They were concerned with showing Jesus primarily as the Messiah of Israel, He of whom the Hebrew Scriptures spoke. They looked for the restoration of their national Kingdom. Luke saw Jesus as the Saviour of the world, who could heal suffering mankind. He was interested in the pagan and outcasts as well as the favoured people of God. How much does the third Gospel reflect upon the character of the writer?



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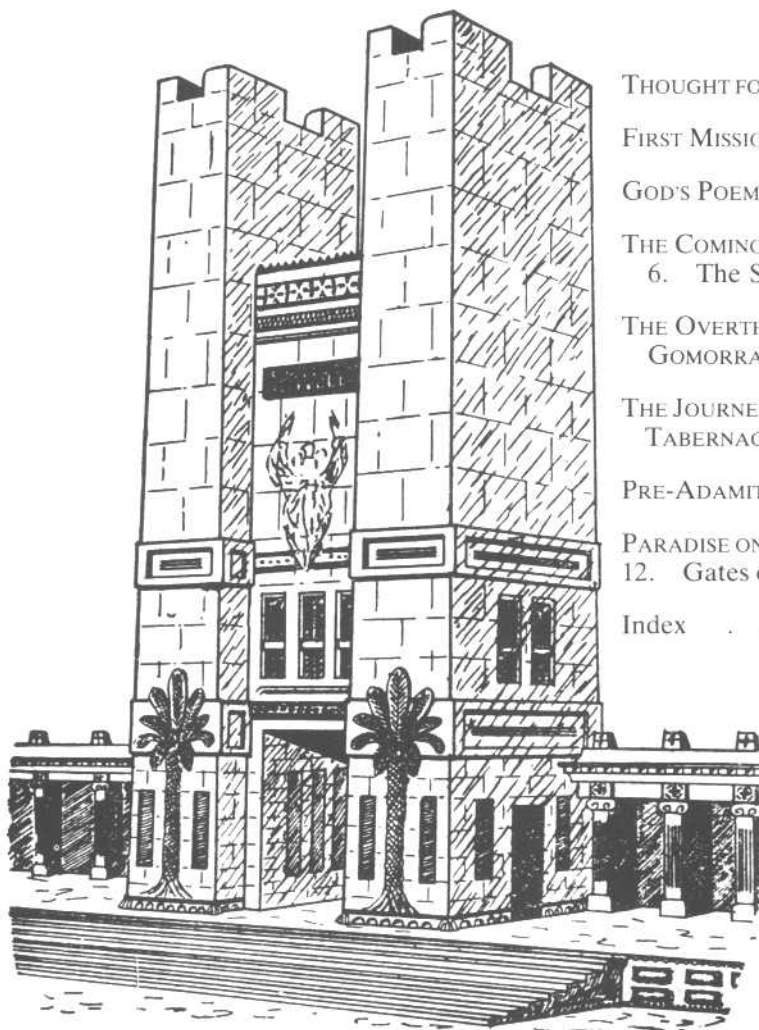
Thou, therefore, endure
hardness as a good
soldier of Jesus Christ

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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

"It is God's gift to men that every one should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil" (Eccl. 3. 13 RSV).

There are of course some who do find pleasure and satisfaction in their daily occupation; a great many, alas, do not. For a considerable proportion of earth's millions the principle enunciated consequent upon man's acceptance of sin "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground" still bears heavily; life is a continuous slavery to the task of getting enough food to survive. In modern industrial society many livelihoods are monotonous and soul-destroying in the extreme. And, of course, there are those who just do not like work and have no intention of working if they can extract enough money from the Welfare State to allow them a life of idleness.

The fact that these things are so, and have been more or less so throughout human history, does not make the Scripture statement of none effect. This is a Divine principle and by the time God has achieved his purpose with the human race it will be true in fact and practice. The prospect before men is not one of eternal idleness but of continuous activity and achievement. The difference will be that every man will have enthusiastically accepted his place as a citizen of creation and find joy and content in carrying out his share of the world's work. "My chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands" said Isaiah. Human labour will produce a sufficiency for all—"They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat the fruit of them". Instead of fighting and distorting the works of Nature, as they do now, men will make an ally of Nature and find in that alliance the complete provision of all their needs. This is what God has planned; it will surely come to pass.

NOTICES

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- 42 The Call and Purpose of the Church

Gone from us



Bro. J. Oakley (Nuneaton)
Sis. Shepherd Sr. (Cardiff)
Sis. K. Smith (Poole, late Cheltenham)



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

THE FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY

*A story of
St. Paul*

The assembly sat in silence, heads bowed in prayer and meditation. The Church at Antioch was a large one; many Jews and many Gentiles had come together to constitute a healthy and active Christian fellowship. Under the wise guidance and instruction of their Elders, Barnabas of Cyprus, Saul of Tarsus, Simeon, Lucius and Manaen, they were making rapid progress in the knowledge and practice of the Christian faith. Already they had implemented one of its main obligations in sending a generous gift of money to their less fortunate brethren in Jerusalem threatened by famine. Barnabas and Saul had been their ambassadors on that occasion and now, that mission accomplished and the messengers returned with their report, the Church was considering what outward activity their Lord would have them next undertake. So they sat, as they had sat for more than a few meetings now, quietly listening as first one and then another rose to expound their views and outline their proposals, and afterward alternately joining in prayer for guidance toward a right decision or silently considering the things which had been said.

The extension of the work of the Gospel was in all their minds; the injunction left by their ascending Lord as a commission binding upon his disciples until the end "*Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to the whole creation*" lay before them, a challenge not to be ignored. Barnabas had told them of his own native country of Cyprus, lying only a hundred miles across the sea opposite their home city, unevangelised, waiting for Christ. Saul had spoken of the wider Roman world, the provinces in Asia and in Greece dotted with cities and towns the homes of God-fearing Jews and pagan Gentiles, a widespread field of missionary endeavour waiting to be harvested. The ordinary occupations of life were forgotten and every other obligation even to the taking of food and rest and sleep was reduced to the minimum in the intensity of their seeking Divine guidance. Thus they fasted, and thus they prayed, until at last the thoughts of the many began to channel into one agreed direction and the light commenced to dawn and they knew that the power of the Holy Spirit of God was at work within them all leading to a clear perception of the Divine Will. So they discerned the voice of the Holy Spirit directing them to commission Barnabas and Saul, their well loved and trusted elders, with John Mark as companion and assistant, to the first missionary enterprise ever to be organised.

It was perhaps natural that Cyprus should be the first objective. Barnabas was senior of the two in

length of Christian service and possibly of age, and Barnabas would naturally have thought of his native land. Saul was very soon to take the lead, but at this time he was evidently following the other's guidance. The name of Barnabas in the Acts narrative always precedes that of Saul until the incident at Paphos, which now was imminent. So they sailed the hundred miles across the blue sea, forerunner of all those Christian adventurers who in after times were to traverse the seas of the world to bring the Gospel to strange and unknown races of people which heretofore had walked in darkness and sat in the shadow of death.

The work seems to have started on a minor key. Landing at Salamis, the capital city of the island and its chief port, they preached in the synagogues of the Jews. There is no record of the results; perhaps there were no results to record. Old associations die hard, and although their mission was equally to Gentile and Jew it is perhaps only to be expected that they would tend first to associate with those who at least worshipped the same God, and attempt to build upon that common basis. Be that as it may, there is no record of a Christian community being established in Salamis—probably both Jews and Gentiles in that busy port and market of exchange between ships from west and east and south, between Rome and Antioch and Alexandria were too busy making money to pay much heed to the rather inconvenient views of these three travelling preachers with their talk of giving up all for Christ's sake and devoting life to his service. The rest of their ministry in the island is summed up in one sentence in Acts 13. 6 "*And when they had gone through the isle unto Paphos*". That was a land journey of about one hundred miles, the entire extent of Cyprus from east to west, and in all that journey wherever and to whomsoever they preached the Word of Life there seems to have been nothing of sufficient moment for St. Luke to record. It was only upon arrival at their last place of call, the town of Paphos, that they seemed to find a flicker of interest, and that, not from a Jew but from a Gentile.

Sergius Paulus was the Roman pro-consul, or governor, of Cyprus, and therefore the most important political figure, responsible directly to the Emperor for the administration of the country and the preservation of law and order. Nothing is known in history regarding this man although an inscription has been found at Soli in Cyprus giving his name and rank. Luke calls him a "prudent man, meaning that he was a wise and just administrator—Rome did produce such rulers as well as

corrupt ones like Pontius Pilate and Felix. News of the missionaries having reached his ears, the governor invited them to his residence with the object of hearing what they had to say. Upon keeping the appointment Saul found that he was not going to have things all his own way; there was a rival already in the field in the person of Bar-Jesus, a soothsayer, a Jewish renegade. The word "sorcerer" in the Authorised Version is the same as that used for the three wise men in the Nativity story and does not imply the practice of magical arts so much as foreseeing the future and being well versed in "other-worldly" knowledge. It is clear that Sergius Paulus was already to some extent under the influence of this man, and he, having no intention of conceding his position to the newcomer, entered objection to Saul's teaching.

The miracle performed at this time by Saul, the first of many during his life's work, must have profoundly impressed the witnesses. Following his stern denunciation, one in which the would-be magician was openly branded a child of the devil, the unhappy man was smitten with near blindness and reached out for someone to lead him. It is evident that the infliction was of a temporary nature only—Saul's words indicated that—but that fact in no way mitigated the evidence of Divine displeasure. The astute Roman rapidly realised his mistake in giving credence to this charlatan and as quickly professed faith in the teaching brought by one who gave this convincing evidence that he was in truth a messenger of God Most High. But that was all. The pro-consul became a believer, but nothing is said about any general acceptance of the message at Paphos, as is in fact recorded of other places visited. It does not seem as if any decided success attended this visit, despite the impression produced by the miracle. In fact the really noteworthy circumstance associated with Paphos lies not in the realm of conversion at all, but in the change of Saul's name to Paul.

No one knows how or why this change came about. At this point in the narrative, Acts 13. 13, Saul as a name is dropped and never resumed. From now on the Apostle is always referred to as Paul. Why he thus changed his name no one really knows. The Hebrew name Saul is an understandable and obvious one for a child born into the tribe of Benjamin, the tribe which gave Israel its first king. "Paul" in the New Testament is the Roman Paulus, which is said to mean "least", and the Apostle's adoption of the name is suggested to have been a token of his humility. There does not seem to be much substance in that suggestion. Others have surmised that Paulus was his family name, a kind of surname, but there is no evidence whatever to support that hypothesis either. Much more likely is that Saul, realising his life's work was going to take him increasingly into the Gentile

world, and coming into contact here at Paphos with the Roman, Sergius Paulus, formed the impression that this Roman name, so like his own, would be a better one by which he might be known to the Gentiles, and without more ado decided to make the change. The coincidence of its occurrence just at the time he found himself associated with a man named Paulus seems to be too much of a coincidence not to hold some connection.

So Paul "and his company" left Paphos and sailed nearly two hundred miles across the sea to Perga on the mainland, in the Roman province of Pamphylia. It was whilst at this town that John Mark decided to leave them and return to Jerusalem. No reason is given for his action; it is evident that Paul was considerably displeased for it was many years before he was willing to accept Mark as a co-worker again. Had Mark's motive merely been to avoid the continuing and increasing trials of the journey he would most likely have returned to the home church at Antioch. The fact that it was Jerusalem to which his steps were turned makes it more likely that in the rising tide of persecution which was now afflicting the Christians in Judea he felt it his duty to be in a better position to protect his mother Mary and so returned to be with her.

There does not seem to have been any spectacular success at Perga. A little community of Christians was formed, for Paul visited them on his way back, but after Mark's defection there is nothing more said about Perga. Paul and Barnabas were soon on their way again. A long trek of a hundred and twenty miles over the mountains lay before them, and at the end of the trek, a place for which they hoped great things, Antioch of Pisidia. (It is to be noticed that there were two Antiochs, the city of that name in Syria from which Paul and Barnabas had started, and this one in the province of Pisidia which lay many hundreds of miles distant. Both places became the seats of flourishing Christian churches). Up to date this first missionary journey had not yielded any really spectacular result. In no case, either in the various towns of Cyprus, nor yet in Perga, is there any statement of the formation of a Christian church. Small communities must indeed have been left, for later visits were made both by Paul on the mainland and Barnabas in Cyprus. It is probable that all the Apostle had to show for his labours up to this point were small handfuls—maybe only a dozen or so at each place—who were prepared to accept the message he brought them. Perhaps even this very minor achievement was part of the Divine provision for Paul. He was to learn that the work of the Lord flourishes best with small and insignificant beginnings, and that "*not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit*" the purposes of God are executed.

But the dawn was growing brighter. At Antioch

in Pisidia the Apostle to the Gentiles was to meet the first of those searching experiences which combined both acceptance and rejection, the joys of

widespread conversion and the sharpness of bitter opposition, which were to become so much a part of the pattern of his life hereafter.

GOD'S POEM

An inspiring thought is observed in the A.V. rendering of Eph. 2.10. "*For we are his workmanship*". "Workmanship" is used as a translation of the Greek word "*poiema*". It is from this word that the word "poem" is derived. It occurs but twice in the New Testament, the other occasion being in Rom. 1.20, there translated "things that are made". "*Poiema*" is from the basic root "*Poieo*" which occurs many times, and is translated no less than 353 times by the word "do". A variety of other words is also used to translate it, but all contain the same idea as the word "do". According to its general usage, "*poiema*" does not necessarily mean "poem", but the fact that the Greek word has been transferred into our language by the word "poem" and that the English word is definite and precise in its meaning invests its Greek equivalent with an inspiring thought. Very truly "the Christ" is God's workmanship, and as such it must be a sublime and beautiful work. Even to think of God's handiwork as the creation of a Temple, it must be of beautiful workmanship. But there is something exquisitely beautiful in the thought that the Church is "God's Poem"—God's noblest thought couched in its loveliest form.

Among men who use words as the bricks-and-mortar of their creative work the poet uses them with the greatest charm. He is like the man who, taking clay, makes it into exquisite china. Like common earthenware, it is made of baked clay, but the moulding is more chaste and delicate, and the finished product more pleasing to the eye. Every word the poet weaves into his creation is at the disposal of every pen but not all brains are invested with poetic power. It is not the mere knowledge of words, nor the ability to choose appropriate words, that makes the poet. Each word must be the right one, it must be in the right place; word must balance word; line must balance line; stanza must balance stanza; and the whole thing must flow in rhythmic cadence smooth as a limpid stream. The thought which it is intended to express must be distributed evenly throughout, and leave its impression clear and complete until the last word is reached. There is a difference between the technique of the good essayist and the poet. Each in his own way makes the right choice of words to express what he has to say, but it may probably be that more people would respond to a noble thought expressed in beautiful verse than in elegant prose. It is not unusual for the impression-

able individual to find his soul pulsating more rapidly to the rhythm of a graceful and well-proportioned poem than to the cadence of a well-written essay. The rhythm of the poem grips and impels the senses along, somewhat like the marching tap of the drum or the strong accent of the dance.

When the poem has been born of the deep experience of a child of God, it becomes a living thing. It may reveal a Jordan consecration, a Gethsemane-agony, or a Pentecostal-visitation come to life. It may tell of a secret vitalising contact between the Spirit of the living God with the fervent soul which fused together the glowing words. It is a creation of something more than a string of words or of lovely sounds—something more the rhythm or rhyme of cadence or metre. Behind it is a Divine thought—a living expression of the Spirit of God brought down into this realm of time and sense. Pause for a moment to think of some of the lovely gems of thought which have been forged into living things to enrich the hearts of men. Think of blind George Matheson's "*O Love that will not let me go*"; of dying C. F. Lyte's "*Abide with Me, fast falls the eventide*"; of Charles Wesley's "*Rock of Ages, cleft for me*"; of Miss Havergal's "*Take my life and let it be*", and a hundred other kindred expressions of praise and prayer and worship, every one gushing forth as living waters springing up from the deep places of the soul! Here is something deeper and more compelling than words. To recite all these words one by one from the pages of a dictionary would leave no such soul-stirring influence behind. They are all there for any scribe to pick out and assemble as he will. But it requires more than picking and assembling to make them live. Every poem that leaves its mark upon men must be written first in blood—tracings of the heart's blood on the page of experience of every child of God, as he seeks for, and finds, fellowship with the Holiest of all, before it can be wrought into shape for the printer's page. It must be the outcome of agony and suspense, or throb of pleasure and delight in the secret chambers of "the inner Man", before it can take ordered expression for some other's benefit. It must have grown out of a deep spiritual hunger and tell how that hunger was fully satisfied by supplies of grace, before it can feed another hungry soul. There is always a price to pay before the poet's words can live as vehicles of grace for supplying another life's

necessities.

A sublime privilege it is for such gifted singers to become the instruments of Providence. Taking the basic principles of Divine care and Christian experience as stated in the Holy Book, adapting and resetting them to satisfy the modern Christian pilgrim's need so that they serve the ends of Providence in throwing new light on the Way, and distilling new Wine into the Cup for the believer's benefit; all this in the most choice and helpful words which humankind possesses. It is indeed a great honour to be used to express the living thoughts of the Living God to living men. And yet, though the poet sings the sweetest song in the most charming words, there is more behind the words than there is within. The realities are greater far than the phrase which sets them forth, for the contact of the believer with his Father in the sphere of the "higher life" are things that must be "felt, not told" as the Scotsmen say, things that enter not into the natural heart of man. The natural mind may read and sing the poet's words without entering this sanctum of holy experience, or realising that another world—a higher world—lies beyond the range of the poet's song, that only the anointed eye can see and only the spirit begotten mind can understand. Today it is impossible for the natural mind to comprehend the mysteries of the Spirit of God. But in another, better day God intends that men shall understand, in part, if not in full, enough to win and chain his heart to the Throne of God. To that end God is writing the story of his love and travail in the experiences of the Christian Church. He created his greatest work. He is composing a great Poem, every word of which is the right word, a chosen word; every word of which is in its right place; every word of which will tell of the deep passion of his Soul. Every word of this Divine Poem is a living soul, bought out of sin and death at

a great price, chosen by the Creator of Holiness, then balanced and adjusted soul with soul, to rhyme and harmonise with the Divine Poet's thought, so that the whole company shall be perfect in its cadence, spirit, rhythm and metre.

Every child of God is placed "in the Body" today as it has pleased God to place him, but this is only the temporary draft of the poem. The human poet may have need to change or revise his first choice of words, or vary their place in the line or stanza before he is satisfied. The Divine Poet may have need to change his words, or revise their positions before his masterpiece is complete. But He will set them at last in the Body celestial in the position where they will best manifest his thought and purpose. They will together constitute the greatest living manifestation of the Spirit of their Creator, a revelation for all time of the sacrificing love of God during the dark ages while sin reigned supreme, and a gracious Creator worked and waited for the return to righteousness of his erring human sons. This patient, long-suffering Spirit of the Eternal God will be written deep into the very constitution of his Elect, and will tell to the countless myriads of this world, and of other worlds; to come, the deep sense of loss experienced in the heart of God, and of the great things He was constrained and prepared to do to win back the sinner from his evil way. Every soul, therefore, in that exalted Christ—that is, every word in his then finished Poem—must express with emphasis the very truth, all that the Divine Poet has ever felt towards his fallen sons, and toward the destructive and abhorrent principle of sin. Every word must ring true to the intent of the Divine Heart, and say to the wide circles of both heaven and earth, and to many worlds yet unborn, exactly what the deeply-yearning Love of God would have it say.

Things Under the Earth (Phil. 2. 10)

"That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, both in heaven, and in earth, and under the earth." The reference to some who "under the earth" will bow the knee to Jesus sometimes provokes a question. Those in heaven, and those on earth—that is easily understood; but who are those "under the earth?" The Greek word which is translated by these three words is *katachthonios*, which is composed of *kata*, meaning down, *chthonios*, which is defined by Liddell and Scott as having reference to anything in or under the earth but especially to the gods below the earth. These gods in Greek mythology were the Titans, who rebelled

against the gods of heaven and after being defeated were cast out of heaven and imprisoned below the earth. These Titans correspond to the fallen angels, and it would seem that Paul used the word to refer to those fallen angels who are described by Peter as being imprisoned in Tartarus. In other words, when the Divine Plan for man is complete, not only will all in heaven and earth bend the knee, but also those who were "disobedient in the days of Noah" unless of course by wilful and continued opposition to the ways of God they reap the inevitable wages of sin—death.

THE COMING OF THE KING

6. The Sign of the Son of Man

*A series of studies
concerning the
Second Advent*

That the Scriptures frequently speak of judgment and fiery destruction in the world of men as a feature of the Second Advent is a fact and there is no gainsaying that things worthy of judgment and destruction are, at that time, to go down in a manner fitly symbolised by consuming fire, which is so often a feature of Biblical descriptions. This is not a fiery destruction of men as such nor yet the literal passing away of heaven and earth in the manner suggested by some well-known hymns. The judgment of men associated with the Second Advent is one which includes provision for reclamation and reconciliation with God for those who will, and is described in much less sombre tones. The many passages which speak of Christ coming as a destroyer rather than a preserver have to do with the destruction of the evil systems and institutions of this world which have defied God and oppressed man, to the overthrow of the "kingdoms of this world" and their succession by the Divine government of Christ, who will reign as Prince of Peace over a world governed by the principles of truth and righteousness.

This final phase of the ages-long struggle between good and evil is a very real conflict. The powers of evil, of greed, oppression and injustice, have become firmly entrenched during the thousands of years of human history and they will not yield place to the incoming world order of righteousness without protest. The issue is not in doubt; the powers of good will prevail, but vivid pen-pictures in the Bible describe the intensity of the conflict and the magnitude of that final cataclysm which marks the overthrow of the present world order.

There are many Scriptures which speak prophetically of the time when the greed and selfishness and sin of mankind brings the world into its Armageddon, a time of trouble from which there can be no escape except through the coming of Messiah's kingdom. Many of these passages show clearly that the early period of Christ's Advent, besides being devoted to gathering his saints to their heavenly destiny, also sees the beginning of this work of destruction. That this climax to human misrule is the natural and inevitable result of man's own course of conduct since creation does not make any difference to the fact that a higher Power is now intervening to overrule these events for ultimate good.

The first intimation that Divine judgment is in process of coming upon the world is when observers realise the fulfilment of St. Paul's word to the Thessalonian Christians in 2 Thess. 2. 8. This particular community seems to have been specially

concerned over the possible imminence of the Advent and it was to correct their misapprehension that the Apostle devoted so much time to the subject in his epistle. In this second chapter he explained that the Day of Christ would not come until there had first been a great falling away from the faith (which Jesus also foretold in Matt. 24), followed by the development of the "Antichrist", the "man of sin", which development could not commence until "*he that now hindereth*" should be taken out of the way. Finally there would be a revelation of the Antichrist in full power, and only after that could come the time that he would be "*consumed by the spirit of the Lord's mouth and destroyed by the bright shining of his presence*". In this short passage, 2 Thess. 2. 3-8, the Apostle spans the entire Age from his own day to the Second Advent and pictures two powers, that which is against Christ throughout the Age and that which is of Christ at the age's end.

Many and varied suggestions have been made as to the identity of the Antichrist but the plain fact is that the whole edifice of pseudo-Christian institutional power throughout the entire Age, claiming to rule men in the name of God—as Paul here puts it, "*he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God*"—is the Antichrist of 2 Thess. 2. From quite an early period in the Age ambitious men began to introduce secular standards and practices into the Christian society with the view of increasing its standing and influence in the affairs of men. A concept took shape that if the Church was destined to reign over the nations then the sooner there was union with the secular power the better. This end could not be attained during the first three centuries; as St. Paul pointed out to the Thessalonians, "*he that hindereth*" must first be taken out of the way. The "hindering one" was the existing religious-secular system of Pagan Rome, firmly in the saddle in Paul's day and showing no sign of moving. By the Fourth Century, however, Pagan Rome, in its joint religious and political aspects, had passed away. It might be a fair appraisal of the position to say that when the Emperor Constantine in the early years of that century made Christianity the official State religion of the Roman Empire, and the ecclesiastical dignitaries of the day joined forces with him to create the power which in after centuries perpetrated many atrocities in the name of Christianity, Paul's foreview "*he who now hindereth will hinder, until he be taken out of the way, and then shall that Wicked One be revealed*" was fulfilled.

For a period of fifteen hundred years this principle of Church-State union for the rulership of

Christendom, and the rest of the earth so far as European influence extended thereto, claiming so to do in the name of Christ but in reality being completely alien from him, had its day. Now it has almost completely dissolved. During the past century and a half such powers have lost or are fast losing their secular influence. No longer regarded as equal partners by the world's political rulers they become almost nonentities in the world's affairs. The increasing force and scope of democratic and communistic forms of government having little or no interest in religious faith and no intention of sharing functions of rulership with representatives of religion is another factor tending towards the destruction of Antichrist "with the bright shining of his presence". The fact that this dissolution is now manifestly in progress is one of the indications that we now live in that time, in the "*days of the Son of Man*".

This is not the end of Divine judgment upon world evil. Modern as well as ancient paganism may have crumbled into ruins but the political and social institutions of earth remain and these too must give place to the coming King. It is here that visions such as those of Daniel and Joel have their place. The seventh chapter of Daniel pictures the "*Ancient of Days*", the Most High, presiding over the Last Judgment, the while a series of mythological living creatures representing the empires of the world are brought before him for condemnation. One "*like the Son of Man*" comes in the clouds to receive the dominion of earth thus relinquished by those creatures; his kingdom, it is said, is to endure for ever. Here is shown the passing of human rule in a time of disruption and disintegration as by a devouring fire. The prophet Joel (chap. 3) sees the same thing in the guise of a fierce military battle between the kings of the earth and the forces of the Most High; the outcome is the establishment of the Kingdom of God upon earth and a reign of universal peace. Very similar previews are recounted by Ezekiel and by Zechariah, and all of these are brought to a focus in the most spectacular vision of all, that describing the conflict between the combined forces of this world and the Rider upon the White Horse.

This climax to the whole sequence of prophetic imagery is found in Revelation 19, verses 11-21. The seer of Patmos tells how he saw heaven opened and the emergence therefrom of a majestic rider mounted upon a white horse, coming forth to "*judge and make war*". This Rider, John goes on to say, is the King of kings and Lord of lords, his name the Word of God. He wields a sword wherewith to smite the nations and He "*treadeth the winepress of the wrath of Almighty God*". Behind him stream his followers, the armies of heaven.

Now John turns his eyes to the earth and there he sees the kings of the earth and their armies,

drawn up to give battle. With them there are the mystic "beast" and "false prophet", Revelation's symbols of world evil. The opposing forces meet and the powers of Heaven are victorious. The defeat of the coalition is utter and complete and the vultures of the skies are called to feast upon the bodies of the slain. The sequel to this, continuing into the twentieth chapter, is the inauguration of the Millennial reign of Christ, the time of world reconstruction.

There are in the Bible some fifteen detailed descriptions of this aspect of the Second Advent, the direct intervention of the powers of Heaven into human affairs for the purpose of ending the present unsatisfactory rule of man and introducing the Messianic kingdom with its new and better order. All of these are couched in metaphorical language and against the background of current events and the state of society in the days in which they were written. They should not be interpreted in strictly literal fashion as is so often done, for this strikes at the very basis of the prophetic principle. These passages are called "apocalyptic", a term which has been coined to define symbolic literature produced by the ancient writers in deliberately veiled language, using symbols, parables and the like, to describe what they saw of the ultimate end of evil and triumph of righteousness, in such fashion that their message could be received and appreciated by men of any generation familiar with the storehouse of the Old Testament.

In line with this principle, the falling mountains and crashing rocks of so many prophetic utterances stand for the breaking down of political powers, the toppling of kings from their thrones, which is so characteristic of this era. Mountains in this type of literature stand for kingdoms, such as the "stone" of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, which became a "*great mountain which filled the whole earth*", interpreted by Daniel to symbolise the coming Messianic kingdom. This is one of the most obvious "signs of the end" of to-day, the division of erstwhile great powers into increasingly smaller "independent" nations, and the re-composition of these into "blocs" of influence which themselves are unstable and easily disrupted. The stars falling from heaven are symbols of the decline of organised religious interests, coming down from their original high estate more and more to an earthly level at which they not only lose the spiritual leadership which alone gives them Divine authority amongst men, but also lose the esteem and support of men so that they finish up having no power at all. This is true not only of many nominally Christian interests but also of the other great world religions such as Islam and Buddhism. The disease is world-wide and it is another sign of the judgment. The consequence of these developments is an increase of anarchy in world society,

both in organised democracy and communism and in individual contempt for law and order, so that crime reaches unprecedented proportions. In parallel with this there is the cumulative effect of human greed and selfishness, particularly in the commercial world, whereby the physique of the human race is being steadily undermined by unnatural ways of living. Medical science is increasing the average life span but there are more diseases to combat and the cost of maintaining that longer life span becomes steadily greater. The stresses of modern "civilisation" and ways of living give the lie to any pretence of improving physique, physical or mental, and with the despoiling of the earth's natural resources and the poisoning of land and sea by man-made chemical products, reacting upon vegetable and animal life alike, the earth can conceivably be brought to a condition where it will no longer bring forth food for man. The misuse of expanding scientific discovery and the rash experiments men make without knowing what world-wide disastrous effect may be involved, create an ever increasing risk that unless halted by Divine intervention, there might one day be reached the "point of no return" where the planet itself is rendered uninhabitable and the human race extinct. These are not idle fancies, for they have all been foreseen by far-seeing men of the world qualified to speak with authority on things of this nature.

This is how the age comes to its end. Before men do reach that point of no return, and with the ruins of this world crashing around them, Divine intervention takes place. The planet itself will not be destroyed; the mountains will still rear their lofty heads into the upper skies; the alternations of day and night, of summer and winter, of seedtime and harvest, will continue as of yore. the sun will still lift the seas into the atmosphere and send them down over the earth as rain, bringing seed to the sower and bread to the eater. The darkening of the sun and moon, the earthquakes and the fire, all are symbolic imagery to be understood as metaphors. That which is destroyed is the sovereignty and the work of man. This is the purpose of the Second Advent, and men will realise the fact of Christ's presence when they begin to accept that the old order has passed irretrievably into the hands of the new.

There has to be a point in the succession of events constituting the Second Advent at which the fact becomes universally recognised and accepted. "*Lo, he cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him*" is the Revelator's ecstatic outburst (Rev. 1. 7) alluding to the visions of Daniel and Zechariah. The significance of world happenings during the early stages of the Advent is known only to those who have correctly related the contemporary

scene to the principles of the Divine Plan as laid down in the Scriptures; a time comes in the progress of those happenings when the outward signs and evidences are so pronounced and unmistakable that men generally can no longer deny that the powers of Heaven have taken control of affairs on earth. Those signs and evidences will have to be very conclusive to convince this modern sophisticated world—in olden times the visible appearance of the glorified Lord in the sky, descending to earth with attendant angels, would have been enough, and the poetic language of the Bible is written in terms of such an expectation, but this scientific world will demand much more. It is only when the phenomena associated with the Advent cannot be understood or explained by men or affected by weapons of man's devising that, like Pharaoh's magicians of old, they will say "*this is the finger of God*".

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

From this point of view the Messianic prophecy in Isa. 11. 15 is significant in that here also the entry of Messiah into world affairs is described as a sign. "*In that day there shall be a root of Jesse which shall stand for an ensign*" (same word as "sign" in the original) "*of the people; to it shall the nations seek*". "*he shall set up an ensign for the nations and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel . . . from the four corners of the earth*" (Isa. 11. 10-12). The latter quotation is significant in that a final gathering of purified Israel is associated with the "sign", just as in Matt. 24 where, upon the appearance of the sign of the Son of Man, the angels *gather his elect from the four winds*"; comparison with Matt. 24. 22 would seem to identify that elect with Israel. Isa. 66. 19 supports and amplifies Isa. 11. "*I will set a sign among them and I will send those that escape of them unto the nations . . . and they shall declare my glory among the nations.*"

There is really only one prophetic foreview in Scripture which yields sufficient detail to enable some concrete idea of the "sign" to be formulated. The twelfth to fourteenth chapters of Zechariah present a detailed, although highly metaphorical, picture of the events surrounding the transfer of sovereignty from the present earthly holders to the coming powers of Heaven, particularly as they affect regathered and purified Israel in the Holy Land. That particular piece of the earth's surface,

set at the meeting place of three continents, Europe, Asia and Africa, and of the three great divisions of mankind, is peculiarly fitted to be the federal capital of the new order of society which comes in with Christ's Kingdom, especially when it is occupied by a people who will then have achieved their long-promised destiny, a holy nation, a people for a purpose. That has never been the case in the past and is not so at present, but in the twelfth chapter of Zechariah we are translated into the time when it will be true. The people that will then hold the land of Israel will be in process of repudiating the policies and standards of this world and in fair way of becoming an instrument in God's hand. The nations round about will have lost none of their old enmity and are threatening a mass attack. At that critical pass, the governors of the nation announce their faith and the faith of their people in God, that God will deliver. When the attack takes place God does deliver, and that so mightily that in the outcome the Lord alone is recognised as King over all the earth. These "governors of Judah" are to be *"like an hearth of fire among the wood, and like a torch of fire in a sheaf; and they shall devour all the people round about"* (Zech. 12. 6). In other words, they are irresistible, and under their Divinely-inspired leadership the land of Israel will become the nucleus of the Kingdom of God upon earth.

This then, is the "apokalupsis", the revelation of the Lord from heaven to all world. The fact of his assumption of power is declared by events; the visible presence of his human representatives ruling in Jerusalem, the "city of the great King", and the obvious hopelessness of any further resistance to their beneficent authority, is the signal to all men that the old evil world has ended and the *"new heavens and new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness"* (2 Pet. 3. 13) has commenced. This is the time spoken of by Jesus in Matt. 24 when the peoples of the earth shall mourn—the mourning is also alluded to in Zech. 12 where it is shewn to be one of contrition and repentance; the light of the

new Day will reveal to many their heedlessness and unbelief and create in them a desire for better things—and from this moment the reconstruction of the world upon a better and an enduring basis will commence.

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

(The End)

"What Christ is to us we ought, in our human measure, to be to others. Christ came to our world to give his life, to pour divine kindness on weary, needy, perishing human lives. The Christmas spirit in our hearts should send us out on the same errand. There is need everywhere for love's ministry. There are few people whom God calls to do

great things for him, but the best thing any of us can do in this world is to live out a simple, beautiful, strong Christian life in our allotted place. Thus in our little measure we shall repeat the life of the Master himself showing men some feeble reflection of him." (selected)

Putting away Baal is of little use if we keep the calves of Dan and Bethel.

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

FEAR knocked at the door,
FAITH opened it,—
and no one was there!

THE OVERTHROW OF SODOM AND GOMORRAH

A historical study in two parts. Part 2.

The sun hung low in the west. It was "even", the time immediately before sunset and the consequent swift onset of total darkness, when men repaired to their homes and closed doors for the night. Lot was seated in the "gate"—the market place—of Sodom; doubtless was about to make his way into his own house. His eyes lighted upon two strangers coming in from the country. With the same courtliness manifested by his uncle earlier the same day he rose up and invited them to accept the hospitality of his house. They demurred, but he insisted, and presently they were seated at his table.

Chapter 19 says that these two men were angels. The narrative indicates that they were the two whom Abraham had directed on their way earlier that afternoon. The "heat of the day" in ch. 18 at the time of their visit to Abraham is an expression for noon. By the time the fat calf had been selected, slain and dressed, the meal prepared and eaten, the conversation recorded in ch. 19, 9-15 conducted, and the visitors ready to depart, at least three hours must have elapsed. The two men were last seen by Abraham a few miles outside Hebron about 3.0 p.m. or later. "Even" is 5.0 to 6.0 p.m. and at that time the same two men entered the gate of Sodom, thirty-five miles distant across a rugged mountainous terrain, involving a journey that no human being could have completed in less than twelve or fifteen hours! Celestial messengers, these men, possessed of powers surpassing those of terrestrial beings, in contact with this world for the duration of their commission but possessed of powers appertaining to another world!

It was not long before the men of the city were hammering at the door, demanding that the visitors be given up to them. Lot knew what that implied and he remonstrated with his unruly fellow-citizens, declining to betray the hospitality he had extended. His opponents reiterated their demand and began to threaten force; the situation was evidently serious, and Lot had to take steps to defend his guests.

Lot has been severely criticised by modern European Christians for his action at this point in offering to deliver up his two young daughters to the rabble by way of appeasement but the stricture is less than just. Semitic peoples have always held the obligations of hospitality so binding that any conceivable course of action, even to that involved here, was held to be not only honourable, but incumbent, upon a host, if necessary to the defence of his guests. Lot only did what any right thinking man of his race and day would do, and his action was rather to his credit than otherwise, hard as it

might be for those involved, for it demonstrated that he still retained some of the standards of his old upbringing.

The sacrifice was not needed. The angels took a hand. They smote the men outside the house with some impairment of faculties so that despite their endeavours they could no longer find the door. The narrative says "blindness" but it seems to have included some inability to control their movements so as to approach the house. Until this point Lot had thought his visitors to be ordinary travellers but now he must have begun to wonder who they really were. Their next words would most certainly have created a sense of shock, for Lot could not have had any previous intimation that the time of Sodom's judgment had come. "*Hast thou any here besides?*" they asked "*son-in-law, sons, daughters, whatsoever thou hast, bring them out of this place; for we will destroy this place, because the cry of them is waxen great before the face of the Lord, and the Lord hath sent us to destroy it.*" (ch. 19, 12-13).

It must have been a stunning blow for Lot. All that he had accumulated these twenty years past was to vanish in a moment. He was a wealthy man, rich in flocks and herds and retainers, when he settled in the vale of Siddim. To what extent he retained those interests after he became a city-dweller we have no means of knowing, but he was almost certainly still a rich man. Now it was all to go; all he could hope to preserve was his life and his own family. It is rather surprising that none of his servants or employees shared his faith; maybe any who did maintain their loyalty to God had long since left him and gone back to Abraham, and his only servants were natives of the Plain. It is noteworthy, however, that he neither expostulated with the messengers nor disbelieved their message. He accepted fully and without question the truth of what they declared. It is noteworthy also that he did not, as Abraham had done a few hours earlier, plead for a respite on the ground that there might be a few righteous left in Sodom. He evidently knew quite well that there were none such. So without further ado he went out, middle of the night thought it was, to urge his sons-in-law to join him in immediate flight from the doomed city.

These sons-in-law have given students a certain amount of trouble, usually resolved by crediting Lot with four daughters, two married, living elsewhere, and two unmarried, living at home. In fact there were only two daughters and the perplexity is due to confusion between ancient Eastern and modern Western marriage customs. In those early times a woman "given in marriage" was subject to

a marriage contract for a period—usually a year—spent in her father's house prior to the full marriage, but in every respect as binding as the real marriage. The words here rendered "sons-in-law" and "married" are those normally used in the O.T. to denote this position. Literally, they are "those making affinity" who "took his daughters". We may say therefore in our usage that the girls were betrothed and the marriage contracts had been agreed. They lived at home, and thus Lot logically went out that night to the bridegroom's homes to plead with them to flee also. "*But he seemed as one that mocked unto his sons-in-law.*"

Frustrated, Lot returned home. The rest of the night passed uneventfully. "*But when the morning arose*" the angels urged Lot, his wife and his two daughters to flee at once. There could be no further delay. This expression "the morning arose" refers to the moment of sunrise, which in that latitude is always about 6.0 a.m. Even then, Lot "*lingered*", reluctant at the last moment to abandon his worldly goods and possessions, little comprehending the nature of the catastrophe which was impending. So the angels took his hand and those of the womenfolk and hurried them, as it were by main force, out of the city. The rising sun flamed over the eastern mountains and the sky was radiant with light—the light of the last day for the Cities of the Plain.

"*Escape for thy life*" urged the angel. "*Look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed.*" But Lot was fearful. "*I cannot escape to the mountain, lest some evil take me, and I die.*" The repeated reference to "the mountain" is intriguing. It occurs also in Gen. 14 where those who escaped the Elamite invasion fled out of Sodom to "the mountain". The use of the singular shows that this was a particular peak and not far from the city. Sixteen miles or so from where Sodom probably stood, to the east and on the Moabite side of the valley, there is such a prominent mountain, rising five thousand feet above the level of the plain and dominating the countryside. Here, if anywhere, was the obvious refuge from the coming catastrophe, but Lot shrank from the ordeal of the climb. He pleaded instead that he might be allowed to take refuge in the little town of Zoar and that town be spared from destruction. The angel granted his plea with the injunction that he must haste thither because the overthrow could not be executed until he was safely inside. So Lot made his way to Zoar.

"*The sun was risen upon the earth when Lot entered into Zoar*" says the narrative (ch. 19 23). Here again there is a time indication. The expression "risen upon the earth" refers to the sun at the meridian; "*shemesh*"—the sun's orb, not merely sunlight, "*had gone forth*", and this implies that Lot's flight from Sodom to Zoar occupied five or

six hours. The fact that Zoar was not destroyed shows that it was situated at some distance from the other cities; no trace of it has ever been found although there is a legendary site several miles from the present south shore of the Dead Sea. The river Zered flows into the sea near this point from a narrow valley which goes up into the mountains of Moab and it is probable that Zoar was somewhere at the mouth of this valley and so some twelve to sixteen miles from Sodom, thus accounting for Lot's five or six hours journey. In such case Zoar would lie under the flank of the mountain in which Lot and his daughters eventually made their dwelling.

In one moment judgment descended. "*Then the Lord rained upon Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire from God out of heaven; and he overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground . . . and, lo, the smoke of the country went up as the smoke of a furnace.*" Four hundred square miles of fertile park land and four built-up towns were swallowed up in a raging inferno of fire, from which nothing that lived survived.

The timing of the cataclysm was of God; what was the nature of the agency He used? Now that the geology of the district has been thoroughly investigated—largely on behalf of modern commercial interests—the answer is relatively simple.

The Dead Sea lies in a gigantic crevasse in the earth's surface where the underlying rock, under tremendous strain, is unstable and subject to periodic earthquakes. Ages ago the subterranean strata over the entire area became a repository for mineral oil, bitumen, sulphur and natural gas, all of which accumulated under pressure as it does in any of the world's oilfields. Some of this mineral material found its way to the surface and was put to use in historical times. The "slimepits" of Gen. 14 in the Vale of Siddim were bitumen wells worked by the inhabitants, for bitumen was a much used material in building construction. Of such importance were these natural products that in later days the Hebrews had four technical terms to define the varieties, all of which appear in the Old Testament—*zepheth*, liquid petroleum or mineral oil; *chemar*, mineral pitch or bitumen; *kophar*, resinous or bituminous liquid used for painting and varnishing, and *gaphrith*, a general term for sulphur and all bituminous or oil-based substances. The word "brimstone" in the narrative is this "*gaphrith*".

With this accumulation of explosive and combustible material underneath their land the Sodomites were literally living upon a volcano. It only needed something like an earthquake, creating a few fissures in the earth's crust, and a chance igniting of the pent-up gas and oil as it escaped, to send the whole area up in flames. That is what probably

happened. Earthquakes are not uncommon in the Jordan valley and quite a number have been recorded in historical times; several are mentioned in the Old Testament. An earthquake occurred; zig-zag cracks appeared in the ground, the stored-up gas and oil was ejected at high pressure, in which case it would most likely ignite spontaneously as it met the atmosphere, and the entire valley became a roaring furnace.

The conflagration probably lasted for weeks. In modern times, when an oil-well catches fire—a not infrequent happening—steps are taken to extinguish the blaze although the operation is an extremely difficult and dangerous one. In the case of Sodom the fire had to burn itself out and that stage might not have been reached until a considerable proportion of the subterranean deposits had been consumed and the underground pressure reduced considerably. Chapter 19 tells how Abraham made his way early the following morning to his customary place of prayer overlooking the plain; from Hebron he could not see the valley where the cities had stood but above the hills on the skyline he saw the smoke ascending into the heavens *"like the smoke of a furnace"*. The effect of such a conflagration could easily rise to twenty thousand feet and be easily visible at Hebron—it probably darkened the skies all over Canaan.

Lot's wife perished in the catastrophe. She *"looked back from behind him"*—literally, "from following him". The expression implies that although she started out with her husband and daughters she changed her mind half-way and went back towards the doomed city. She may have been a Canaanite, a native of the Plain; her identity is unknown, but evidently her sympathies were with the people of Sodom and she did not really believe there was going to be any destruction. By the time Lot entered Zoar she was well on the way back to Sodom, *"and"* says the narrator laconically *"she became a pillar of salt"*. A feature of the eruption would be the vast quantity of molten mineral matter flung into the air and descending like a burning rain, smothering everything upon which it fell. A similar thing happens in volcanic eruptions. When the buried cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum were excavated the preserved bodies of some of their citizens were found, encrusted with the volcanic pumice dust and lava which had overwhelmed them during the eruption of Vesuvius in A.D. 79. Mingled with the oil and bitumen which destroyed the cities of the Plain were great quantities of mineral salts and it was thus that Lot's wife met her end, buried beneath a mass of semi-molten mud which hardened as it cooled and remained, just one of many such monuments in the ruined valley. Near the modern town of Sodom there is a six hundred foot cliff seven miles long known as the Mount of Sodom of which the upper four hundred

feet or so is composed of limestone conglomerate interspersed with bitumen and sulphur, beneath which lies a hundred and fifty feet of clear solid salt. This cliff represents a "cleavage" in the strata; below the waters of the Dead Sea the same layers of limestone and salt continue. When the Vale of Siddim came to its fiery end, millions of tons of salt must have gone up into the heavens in molten condition and descended over the whole area. To this day pillars and columns of fantastic shapes, composed of this mixture of salt, sulphur and bitumen, abound around the southern shore of the Sea. It must have been to one of these that Josephus the Jewish historian referred when, repeating the story of Lot's wife, he said *"for I have seen it, and it remains at this day"* (Jos. Ant. 1. 12. 4).

It must have been at some later time that the sea invaded and covered the ruined plain. Several references in the O.T. (Deut. 29. 23; 34. 2; Zeph. 2. 9) indicate that it was for many years a desolate waste without any growing thing. By the time of the Exodus, four centuries later, the sea was there and was known as the Sea of the Plain or the Salt Sea. The boundaries of the land allotted to the tribe of Judah in Num. 34 are consistent with the shoreline as it exists at present. Josh. 15. 3 and 18. 9 refer to the north and south tongues of the sea in a fashion which would be meaningless unless the Vale of Siddim had by then been flooded and the site of the cities submerged. Some time during the life-spans of Isaac and Jacob, or whilst Israel was in Egypt, there must have occurred a general sinking of the floor of the valley so that the waters of the Dead Sea came in and covered it. The sinkage need not have been very great; the depth of water over the lost cities at the present time is only about three feet in the summer and thirteen in the winter.

Lot eventually went up into the mountain to dwell, *"for he feared to dwell in Zoar"* (ch. 19. 30). The reason for his fear is not stated. Maybe the spectacle of the continuing fire not many miles away reminded him that Zoar was also in the plain and possibly in danger; perhaps he was apprehensive of his Canaanite neighbours in the city and felt he must get away. At any rate, he and his daughters took refuge in a cave remote from all human habitation, and there he dwelt, bereft of his possessions and reduced to the bare essentials of living. What is really difficult to understand is why Lot did not decide to make his way back to his uncle Abraham at Hebron. It is true that the Sea lay between them, but he had only to descend the mountain and make his way northward, crossing the Jordan more or less where the children of Israel did in later years, and then ascend the Judean hills to Hebron, a journey of not more than a hundred miles. He knew the country—he came to Sodom from that direction when first he parted from Abraham. Whether he was too ashamed to go

back, or the shock he had received forbad his descending to the lowlands again, necessary if he was to get to Hebron, is impossible now to determine. The story leaves Lot, with his daughters, and their baby sons, in that cave high up above the ruined plain and the invading sea, and there, as far as we know, the man who tried to combine his duty to God with his love of the good things of this world, and met disaster in so doing, breathed his last.

The fiery end of the Cities of the Plain was never forgotten; it became a representation of the ultimate judgment of God against evil, and allusions to the event are found throughout the Bible. Typical is the prophecy of Isaiah describing the destruction of world evil immediately prior to the establishment of the Messianic kingdom, in his chapters 34-35. "It is the day of the Lord's vengeance and the year of recompence . . . The streams thereof shall become burning pitch. It shall not be quenched night nor day; the smoke thereof shall go up for ever. From generation to generation it shall lie waste; none shall pass through it for ever and ever." (Isa. 34. 8-11). That description is based on what happened at Sodom. Malachi is another. "The day cometh that shall burn as an oven . . . and all that do wickedly shall be as stubble; and the day that cometh shall burn them up that it shall leave them neither root nor branch. But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings." That reference to the Sun of righteousness may well be derived from the rising sun which gave light to Lot in his flight and when it reached the meridian became the signal for judgment. When St. Peter told the Thessalonians that the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven in flaming fire to inflict everlasting destruction upon the wicked (2 Thess. 1. 7-8) he could very well have taken his metaphor from this same Old Testament story. In the third chapter of his second epistle,

after alluding to the end of the antediluvian world by the agency of water he goes on to speak of the present world as "stored with fire" against the day of judgment which marks the coming of the new world "in which dwelleth righteousness", and the language he employs makes it difficult to resist the conclusion that he is using the circumstances of the overthrow of these cities as the basis for his allusion.

Jude speaks of these ill-fated cities as "suffering the vengeance of eternal fire" (Jude 7). The word *aionian*, used here, does not mean eternal in the sense of perpetual but as ageenduring. Isaiah's use of "*olam*" for "ever" in "*the smoke thereof shall go up for ever*" has the same meaning. The literal fires of the Plain died out long ago but it is true that in a metaphorical sense the smoke goes up for ever in that the memory of this momentous judgment will never perish.

But that does not mean the end of the Sodomites. The arm of God is still stretched out to save, if salvation be possible. Ezek. 16 states plainly that Sodom is to return to her "former estate" and be joined with Israel and Samaria in a new covenant with the Lord. That word "former estate"—*gadmah*—means the original or pristine state of the subject. The people of the Plain, destroyed in their degradation and sin, are to be restored to the pristine condition which was theirs before sin entered and degradation had done its work, for even the Sodomites must have known a stage of childhood innocence. And if this be the intention of God, as He declared to Ezekiel it is his intention, it can only mean that in his supreme wisdom He sees the possibility of repentance and reform in even the most degraded of human beings and will not let go his hold until every possibility of conversion has been explored and found unavailing. Even with the men of Sodom.

"Once in all history we meet a being who never did an injury, and never resented one done to him, never uttered an untruth, never practised a deception, and never lost an opportunity of doing good. Generous in the midst of the selfish, upright in the midst of the sensual, and wise far above the wisest

of earth's sages and prophets, loving and gentle, yet immovable, resolute, and whose illimitable meekness and patience never once forsook him in a vexatious, ungrateful and cruel world—Jesus Christ." (Selected)

"Whence but from heaven could men unskilled in arts,
In various ages born and various parts
Weave such agreeing truths? Or how or why
Should all conspire to cheat us with a lie?
Unasked their plans, ungrateful their advice.
Starving their gains and martyrdom their price."
(Dryden)

It is not given to us, as it was to Isaiah, to see in vision the Temple of God opened in Heaven, and to behold the Lord, high and lifted up, his glory filling the sanctuary. It is given to us to approach and worship him in the beauty of holiness, to draw near in spirit and behold him by the eye of faith.

THE JOURNEYINGS OF THE TABERNACLE

The very full account of the construction of the Tabernacle in the wilderness and the importance of the Tabernacle in Bible symbolism and doctrine, might lead one to expect that a very full history of its relation to Israel's history through the centuries would be given somewhere or other in the Old Testament. Strangely, that is not so; after Israel entered the Promised Land under Joshua almost nothing is known about the structure which was the centre of Israel's worship and sacrifice, the place which more than anywhere else was the place of God's dwelling with his people. The Tabernacle commenced its existence at Mount Sinai in the year after the Exodus; it continued until the fourth year of King Solomon nearly five hundred years later, being superseded by the Temple in Jerusalem. During all that five hundred years virtually all that is known about it has to be pieced together by stray allusions and isolated texts.

The Tabernacle was a transportable building consisting of two apartments, the "Holy" and the "Most Holy", surrounded by a "Court" bounded by white curtains carried on poles about seven feet high. Within its limits the central worship of Israel was conducted, the solemn ceremonies of sacrifice and cleansing, including the all-important annual "Day of Atonement" which in ritual fashion cleansed Israel from sin. The Lord was pictured as dwelling within the "Most Holy", forever hidden from mortal sight. Only the High Priest could enter that sacred apartment, when once a year he went in to make atonement for the people. Wherever the people went, the Tabernacle went with them, taken down and re-erected every time they moved a stage further in their journeyings. When at last they reached the Promised Land, it became the focal centre for meetings of the tribes.

The story starts in chapters 25 to 31 of Exodus, where Moses, alone on the Mount with God, received the two Tables of the Law and at the same time detailed instructions for the construction of the Tabernacle, the institution of the Priesthood, and the ceremonial which was to be observed. Chapters 35 to 40 of the same book record the execution of the work and at its completion, says the chronicler, "*the glory of the Lord filled the Tabernacle*". With its central building "*overlaid with gold*", (gold leaf), the altar in the Court of burnished copper, the gold and silver ornaments, jewels and gorgeously coloured tapestries, this place of Israel's worship presented a magnificent sight. But its true glory was of another world. That glory was symbolised by the "Ark of the Covenant" which reposed inside the Most Holy. A kind of coffer about four feet long, gold covered within

and without, surmounted by two solid gold figures of winged cherubim, this was the place where the High Priest met with God.

The unknown history of the Tabernacle commences at Jordan, where the children of Israel crossed into the Promised Land and their forty years of wilderness wanderings were over. Their first thought was to re-erect the Tabernacle in what they hoped would be its permanent location, although that hope was not destined to be fulfilled. A site undefiled by death had to be found, to be clean in the eyes of the Lord (Num. 19. 16). Such a site was found near Jericho, a level uninhabited plain, and here the limits of Israel's camp was marked out with twelve boundary monoliths and the Tabernacle erected in the centre. They named the place Gilgal, meaning a great circle (Josh. 4. 19-20).

The Tabernacle remained at Gilgal only about seven years, whilst the Israelitish warriors were conquering the land. It soon became apparent that Gilgal was not a good choice, right on the eastern boundary of the land and not at all conveniently placed for the gatherings of the tribes. A near central location was needed, somewhere in the natural centre of the land. Another virgin spot, undefiled by human habitation, was found in the territory of the tribe of Ephraim in a locality which was as near to the geographical centre of the land as could be wished, just about midway between Dan in the north and Beer-sheba in the south, Gilgal in the east and Joppa in the west. A complete circle of hills creating a plain about ten miles across in the centre of which a slightly elevated area was probably the site of the sacred structure. They named the place Shiloh, and here the entire nation gathered to see the Tabernacle erected and to make this their national place of meeting for conference and decisions (Josh. 18. 1). It was here that the will of the Lord respecting the respective territories each tribe was to occupy was sought, by the casting of lots (Josh. 18). Here the Tabernacle remained until the disastrous time of Eli the High Priest in the days of Samuel, something like three hundred and fifty years. Around it there grew, as the years passed by, a settlement of priests and Levites, attendant on the sanctuary, which developed at length into a sizable town. It could have been a holy town, a place memorable for the devotion of its inhabitants to Israel's God, but unhappily it speedily became the reverse, and its immorality and debauchery became proverbial in Israel, until the Lord allowed it to be destroyed by the enemies of Israel and not inhabited again. Even now, only a few years after the death of Joshua and while

Phinehas the grandson of Aaron was still High Priest, it figured in a scandalous proceeding which showed how quickly and how far Israel had fallen from the high ideals of their covenant with the Lord. The story is recounted in Jud. chaps. 19-21. A certain Levite of Mount Ephraim, a few miles from Shiloh—probably one of the Levites in attendance at the Tabernacle—whilst passing through Gibeah of Benjamin with his concubine had her seized, maltreated and killed by some unruly Benjamites. The outcome was a punitive expedition against the people of Gibeah which developed into a war of revenge by all the other tribes against Benjamin. Phinehas went into the Tabernacle to ask the Lord if they should continue this war to the death and the Lord told him to do so and He would deliver the Benjamites into their hands. At least that is what Phinehas told his compatriots. The consequence was that the war was pursued with such zeal and fury that the entire tribe of Benjamin, some fifty thousand and probably as many children, were wiped out with the exception of six hundred men. With a swift reversal of sentiment the victors then came to the Tabernacle and bemoaned to God the fact that a tribe had been lost out of Israel, and that because of a great oath they had sworn before God to the effect that none of them would ever give his daughter in marriage to a Benjamite they were precluded from doing anything to rebuild the tribe. In this extremity the elders of Israel evolved a stratagem to overcome the difficulty (Jud. 21. 17-24). There was to be a feast at Shiloh in which the “daughters of Shiloh” came out and danced. The men of Benjamin were to lie in wait, abduct the girls and retreat to their home town and nothing would be done by their erstwhile enemies in war. Thus the terms of the oath would be circumvented. Not made apparent in the story as it appears in “*Judges*” is the fact that these “daughters of Shiloh” were the young attendants in the Tabernacle, their lives consecrated to sacred service, and inviolate, as were Jephthah’s daughter and Samuel in much later days. The fact that without any compunction the elders of Israel should recommend and the priests in charge sanction so gross a contempt of the Tabernacle service and worship is a measure of the extent to which, in less than a couple of generations, Israel had fallen short of its own high ideals. Perhaps this is why the historians of the Old Testament did not record the names of any High Priest after Phinehas; Josephus does assert that he was followed by Abishua, Bukki and Uzzi as High Priests at Shiloh but all the O.T. does is to include their names in the genealogies. The glory of the Tabernacle began to depart almost as soon as it was erected at Shiloh.

For more than two centuries after this the story of the Tabernacle is a blank; nothing is known of its history. This is the period of the oppression of Israel by the Moabites, the Syrians and the Philis-

tines which of itself indicates that Israel had largely turned away from God and so earned the penalty of the violated Covenant. If, as Josephus asserts, Abishua, Bukki and Uzzi did indeed serve as High Priests, this would be the time of their service but it is doubtful if there was any real adherence to the ordained Tabernacle ritual and sacrifices. It is of this period that the writer of “*Judges*” says “*In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did that which was right in his own eyes*”. It was a time of anarchy in which a few remained faithful to Israel’s God and the rest were indifferent. Towards the end of the period came the upheaval in the Priesthood which resulted in the line of Eleazar being deposed and priests of the line of Ithamar, Aaron’s younger son, seizing the duties of office. So when the child Samuel was brought to the Tabernacle by his mother to be devoted to Divine service, Eli of the line of Ithamar was the serving High Priest. The account in 1 Sam. 2. shows how decadent the priesthood had become.

Twenty years later came the crowning tragedy. The warriors of Israel, worsted in conflict with their hereditary enemies the Philistines, decided to take the sacred symbol of the Divine presence with them, the Ark of the Covenant, out of its place in the Most Holy of the Tabernacle, and carry it into battle before them, in the belief that God would never allow it to fall into the hands of the uncircumcised, and so victory would be assured. This act of sacrilege met with due retribution. The Lord did allow the sacred Ark to fall into the hands of the Philistines and the Israelites were soundly defeated once again. The High Priest Eli, when news of the Ark’s capture was brought to him, fell off his seat and died.

This was not only the end of Shiloh; it also marked a turning-point in the Lord’s dealings with Israel. At the first Joseph had received the birthright from his father Jacob and passed it on to his son Ephraim. But now the tribe of Ephraim, in whose territory Shiloh stood, had become the leading idolatrous tribe in Israel. This supreme example of their godlessness moved the Lord to reject Ephraim and pass the birthright to Judah, as represented in his descendant David, soon then to be born. Psalm 78 records the sad circumstances of that fatal battle, the loss of the Ark and the Lord’s consequent action. “*The children of Ephraim, being armed, and carrying bows, turned back in the day of battle. They kept not the covenant of God and refused to walk in his law . . . they provoked him to anger with their high places, and moved him to jealousy with their graven images. When God heard this, he was wroth, and greatly abhorred Israel, so that he forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh, the tent which he placed among men; and delivered his strength into captivity and his glory into the enemy’s hand . . . the fire consumed their young men; their priests fell by the sword . . . he refused*

men; their priests fell by the sword . . . he refused the tabernacle of Joseph, and chose not the tribe of Ephraim, but chose the tribe of Judah, the Mount Zion which he loved". (Psa. 78. 9-70). It was at this point that Judah became the royal tribe of Israel, destined to produce Israel's kings.

Shiloh was destroyed. The Old Testament gives no hint of what happened to the priestly settlement surrounding the Tabernacle, but there can be no doubt that the Philistines, flushed with their victory and capture of the Ark, soon covered the forty miles from Beth-Shemesh where the battle was fought, and carried fire and sword through the little town. It never recovered; Shiloh was rased from the face of the earth. Five hundred years later the Lord said to Israel through the prophet Jeremiah, reproving them for their apostasy *"Go ye now to my place which was in Shiloh, where I set my name at the first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of my people Israel. And now, because ye have done all these works . . . and I called unto you, and ye answered not, therefore will I do unto this house"* (the Temple at Jerusalem) *"which I gave unto you and your fathers, as I have done to Shiloh"* (Jer. 7. 12-14).

The Tabernacle escaped. It is probable that before the Philistines reached the spot, Samuel and those with him succeeded in dismantling the structure and transporting it out of harm's way. With the death of Eli, Samuel remained the only person of authority in Israel and he probably assumed control. He re-erected the Tabernacle on its original site at Gilgal—without the Ark of the Covenant—and there it remained for something like fifty years into the reign of Saul. It was at Gilgal that Samuel offered the sacrifices connected with Saul's appointment as king and at Gilgal that Saul was formally crowned king over Israel (I Sam. 10. 8; 11. 15). The High Priesthood was restored to the legal line of Eleazar in the person of Ahitub, father of the Zadok of David's time, but because in the absence of the Ark the Day of Atonement ritual could not be performed he was merely given the courtesy title of "Ruler of the House of God" (I Chron. 9. 15; Neh. 11. 11).

By this time Saul had become king. After his breach with Samuel he took matters into his own hands, dismissed Ahitub and moved the Tabernacle to Nob, on the north side of Jerusalem—then known as Jebus. He appointed as High Priest Ahimelech, son of another Ahitub, a grandson of Eli, who as a child had survived the massacre at Shiloh. This Ahimelech had sided with Saul in the troublous period of his early kingship and acted as a kind of personal priest to him (I Sam. 14.3). This arrangement did not last long; Saul, suspecting Ahimelech of treasonable communication with David, then on the run from Saul, sent men and

massacred the entire priesthood of Nod, Abiathar son of Ahimelech alone escaping, and removed the Tabernacle to his own home town of Gibeon (I Sam. 22. 9-23). This fact is known only by inference. When, later on, David became king of all Israel, the Tabernacle, complete with the altar of burnt-offering but without the Ark, was standing at Gibeon and Zadok, of the line of Eleazar, was its priest (I Chron. 16. 39; 21. 29). This must have been done by Saul after his slaughter of the priesthood at Nob. Here it stood throughout the reign of David and until the accession of Solomon (I Kings 3. 4; 2 Chron. 1. 3-15).

Now Saul was dead and David king over all Israel. Somewhere about the twelfth year of his reign he decided to bring the Ark of the Covenant, which had laid in the house of Obed-Edom at Kirjath-Jearim in Judah for about eighty years, to Jerusalem. He erected what was evidently a replica of the Tabernacle Most Holy and Holy, with an altar for offerings, and eventually installed the Ark in its proper place, to the rejoicing of all Israel. He did not, however, interfere with the true Tabernacle, with its Brazen Altar made by Moses, at Gibeon. Thus for another thirty years there were two Tabernacles in Israel, and two High Priests. The original Tabernacle was at Gibeon with Zadok of the legal line of Eleazar as serving High Priest, but the Levitical sacrifices could not be performed there because it did not possess the Ark of the Covenant. The new Tabernacle at Jerusalem had the Ark and a new altar of burnt offering but the High Priest was Abiathar of the condemned line of Ithamar. At neither place could the full ceremonies demanded by the Law be carried out and it is probable that the annual Day of Atonement sacrifice had long since become obsolete.

It was left to Solomon to regularise this state of affairs. As soon as the Temple was completed and dedicated in the fourth year of his reign he had the Ark of the Covenant brought into it (2 Chron. 5. 5) and instituted a grand opening ceremony. Zadok was appointed High Priest, this fulfilling the condemnation passed upon Eli and his posterity a century earlier. Although nothing is said about the fate of the original Tabernacle at Gibeon, it is evident that the service conducted there, as well as that connected with David's Tabernacle in Jerusalem, were terminated, and from now on the Day of Atonement ritual celebrated in the new Temple.

So the meeting-place between God and men, made by Bezaleel under Moses' direction at the time of the Exodus, which had been the centre of Israel's worship for five hundred years, came to its end, giving place to a greater and more permanent Temple, destined, as Solomon said in his dedication, to be *"a house of prayer for all nations"*.

PRE-ADAMITE MAN *An enquiry*

A thesis which is several centuries old holds the view that before the beginning of human history as recounted in the Genesis story of Adam and the Garden of Eden there was a prior creation of human beings who fell into sin so grievous that God not only destroyed them but made the earth itself a complete ruin and desolation. The six days of Genesis and the creation of Adam constitute, it is claimed, a second creative work of God. This is generally called the "disruption"; it is based upon a variation in the understanding of Gen. 1. 2 "*and the earth was without form, and void*". It is sometimes said, perhaps too hastily, that no important Christian doctrine is involved, but this can be open to question. The central belief of the Faith, the Ransom for All, is based upon the fact, as plainly stated by St. Paul, that "*By one man sin entered the world, and death by sin, for that all have sinned*"; that man, in Paul's theology, was Adam, and before Adam there could have been no men and no sin on earth. On this account the Scriptural position is worth examination.

"*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, and the earth was without form, and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters, and God said, Let there be light, and there was light*". (Gen. 1. 1-3). On the face of it, this seems to be a perfectly straightforward account of primeval creation. Man has always been conscious of two spheres, two abodes of life, heaven and earth. The Bible opens with the simple statement that God created both. But at the time indicated by the narrative the earth was chaotic and shapeless, enshrouded in darkness, no fit home for man. The first action of God was to bring light upon the cloud-enshrouded earth—not sunlight; that came later, but light sufficient for plants to grow. And so on. On this basis there would seem no need to attach other than the evident meaning of the words to the account.

Not quite so, say the advocates of the thesis. The word "was" in verse 2 should be understood in the sense of "became". God created the earth, but it later "became" waste and void and covered with darkness. God had created a race of men to inhabit the world and they had all been destroyed. Then He started again with new seas and land, new plants and animals, and finally Adam.

The origin of the idea, like so many incursions into the past, is "wrapped in mystery". An Anglo-Saxon monk at Whitby Abbey in the 7th century, Caedman, known sometimes as the "father of English poetry", advanced something like it in a paraphrase of Genesis, although it is just possible

concerned over the possible imminence of the Advent and it was to correct their misapprehension that the Apostle devoted so much time to the subject in his epistle. In this second chapter he explained that the Day of Christ would not come until there had first been a great falling away from the faith (which Jesus also foretold in Matt. 24), followed by the development of the "Antichrist", the "man of sin", which development could not commence until "*he that now hindereth*" should be taken out of the way. Finally there would be a revelation of the Antichrist in full power, and only after that could come the time that he would be "*consumed by the spirit of the Lord's mouth and destroyed by the bright shining of his presence*". In this short passage, 2 Thess. 2. 3-8, the Apostle spans the entire Age from his own day to the Second Advent and pictures two powers, that which is against Christ throughout the Age and that which is of Christ at the age's end.

Many and varied suggestions have been made as to the identity of the Antichrist but the plain fact is that the whole edifice of pseudo-Christian institutional power throughout the entire Age, claiming to rule men in the name of God—as Paul here puts it, "*he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God*"—is the Antichrist of 2 Thess. 2. From quite an early period in the Age ambitious men began to introduce secular standards and practices into the Christian society with the view of increasing its standing and influence in the affairs of men. A concept took shape that if the Church was destined to reign over the nations then the sooner there was union with the secular power the better. This end could not be attained during the first three centuries; as St. Paul pointed out to the Thessalonians, "he that hindereth" must first be taken out of the way. The "hinderer" was the existing religious-secular system of Pagan Rome, firmly in the saddle in Paul's day and showing no sign of moving. By the Fourth Century, however, Pagan Rome, in its joint religious and political aspects, had passed away. It might be a fair appraisal of the position to say that when the Emperor Constantine in the early years of that century made Christianity the official State religion of the Roman Empire, and the ecclesiastical dignitaries of the day joined forces with him to create the power which in after centuries perpetrated many atrocities in the name of Christianity, Paul's foreview "*he who now hindereth will hinder, until he be taken out of the way, and then shall that Wicked One be revealed*" was fulfilled.

For a period of fifteen hundred years this principle of Church-State union for the rulership of

former race—since at this time belief in the immortality of the soul was well-nigh universal—being deprived by death of their fleshly bodies, were condemned to wander in the earth as “disembodied spirits”, and became the “demons” of the Old and New Testaments and the forces behind modern Spiritualism.

That this wealth of varying theories should have been derived from nothing more than the word “was” in Gen. 1. 2. is a tribute to the ingenuity of men’s minds; it is not thereby necessarily justified. Even the proponents of the claim admit that it rests on a flimsy basis, as witness the words of Pember in “*Earth’s Earliest Ages*”; “we have no records left to us; the numerous remains in primeval rocks are only those of the lower forms of creation. Yet, as we peer hopelessly into the night, a faint and unsteady gleam seems to emanate from the Scriptures in our hand, a very different light than that which they pour on other subjects, scarcely more than sufficient to make darkness visible . . . let us consider the scanty light which the Bible seems to offer in regard to this great mystery”. Is it fair to suggest that one would expect such important matters as the nature of man’s appearance on earth, the cause of the introduction of sin, the relation of all this to the coming and death of our Lord, to rest upon something more positive than “scanty hints”, and shed more than “a faint and unsteady gleam” upon the pathway of the man of God who would be thoroughly instructed unto all good works (2 Tim. 3. 17)?

Now to the facts. The word “was” in “and the earth was without form and void” (“*hayah*” masculine and “*haythah*” feminine) is derived from the verb “to be”. When speaking of a past event or condition the meaning is “was” in the ordinary English sense of that word and as implied by the reading of Gen. 1. 2. When the Lord, having already created the earth (vs. 1) began to prepare it for human habitation, the “six days” of Gen. 1, the planet existed in a state described as being without form and void, chaotic and empty. There is no way in which the word “was” here can be rendered “had become” as required by the Disruption thesis. To bear this meaning the word has to be followed by the preposition *le*, meaning to or toward, and in this case it is not. (see Davidson’s Analytical Hebrew Lexicon, Gesenius Hebrew Lexicon, and F. F. Bruce in “*Trans. Vic. Inst.*”) There are many instances in the Old Testament illustrating this difference, as for instance:—

Gen. 3.1 “The serpent was (*hayah*) more subtil than any beast of the field.”

Job 1.1 “There was (*hayah*) a man in the land of Uz.”

Jonah 3.3 “Now Nineveh was (*haythah*) an exceeding great city”.

In the context of these texts, it is clear that “had

become” is inadmissible. In each of these instances the condition implied is that which existed at the time indicated in the narrative.

An example of the use of the word to mean “to become” with the preposition *le*, occurs in Gen. 2. 7: “and-was (*vav-Bayah*) the-man (*ha-adam*) to (*le*) a-soul-living”; “man became a living soul”.

There is one instance where the A. V. translators went astray in rendering *hayah*. Gen. 3.22, recording the expulsion from Eden, has the Lord saying “the man is become (*hayah*) as one of us” (*ha-adam hayah cha-khad min-men-na*). The preposition *le* does not appear here and the correct rendering is “the man was as one of us” (i.e. sinless). (A full explanation of this verse appeared in BSM July/August 1982 P79 but in brief a literal rendering is “the man was like one of us to know good and evil, but now, this being so” (sin having intervened) “he shall not put forth his hand and take of the tree of life” . . . etc.

The expression “without form and void” occurs once elsewhere. Jeremiah (4. 23-26), seeing in vision the coming desolation of the land by the Babylonians, says, “I beheld the earth, and lo, it was without form, and void, and the heavens, and they had no light”. This whole passage is descriptive of the complete wastage of the land which he knew must come. There is one instance, Isa. 34.11, similarly descriptive of the desolation of the world at the end of this present Age when the godlessness of man brings about the collapse of the present social order; “he shall stretch out upon it the line of confusion and the stones of emptiness” and this of course does not refer to the literal planet but the institutions of the present order which man has created. Neither of these allusions has any connection with or similarity to Gen. 1.2.

Dr. Young’s Literal Translation has it “In the beginning of God’s preparing the heavens and the earth, the earth then has existed waste and void”; in his “*Critical Comments*” he says of this passage “Existed—this rendering is perhaps preferable to that of the Common Version “was”; the Hebrew verb is not simply the logical nexus “is” “was”, etc. but the verb of existence. The thought is, that at the beginning here referred to, (in Gen. 1.1), the earth was, and had been existing, in a certain state described as waste and void . . . utterly void of light and life”.

The use of the word “*katabole*” in the New Testament (about ten times) is sometimes brought in to support the thesis. “*Katabole*”, usually translated “foundation”, means literally to cast down, lay down, or throw down. In nearly every case it refers to the foundation or beginning of the world (*kosmos*—not the literal planet, but the “world of man” the order of things existing on the earth). The argument is that it should be rendered “the casting down of the world” referring to this pro-

pounded ruin and desolation of the planet itself. In fact it refers to the laying down of a foundation, whether of a building or anything else (in 2 Macc. 2.29 it is definitely referred to a building) and hence the beginning of a work, not its destruction. The Book of Life was envisaged from the foundation, beginning, of the world (Rev. 13. 8; 17. 8); so was the prospective Millennial Kingdom (Matt. 25. 34); righteous blood was shed from that point, starting from Abel (Luke 11.50); The Father loved the Son before the foundation, beginning, of the world (Jno. 17.24); Matthew in Matt. 13.25 quotes Psa. 78.2 regarding "*parables kept secret from the foundation of the world*," where the Greek Septuagint of that Psalm has "*arche*" meaning beginning. Most definite of all, Heb. 11.11 tells us that Sarah received strength to "conceive" (*katabole*) seed; instead of using the word for "conceive" the writer chose "*katabole*" which here should be read

as "laying down" seed, i.e., founding a genealogical line or "dynasty" as we would say. No one could argue that Sarah received strength to "disrupt" seed.

It would appear that the whole theology of human creation, the Fall, the redemption in Christ, the Ransom and its application to man, must rest upon the understanding that Adam was the first man and none preceded him. If man capable of sin, and who did sin, lived prior to Adam then the entire Plan of salvation is itself disrupted. Harmony with that Plan would seem to demand that the first chapter of Genesis is an orderly account of creation, the earth emerging from an original chaotic and formless condition, developing by steady steps until, replete with plants and animals, it received its crowning glory, man. From that point history really commenced.

Water Lilies

"How lovely are the lilies which grow in the water! They never pine with thirst; for their root is in the stream, their leaves float upon it, and their flowers peep forth from it. They are fit emblems of those believers who dwell in God, who are not occasional seekers of Divine fellowship, but abide in Christ Jesus. Their roots are by the rivers of water, and therefore their leaf shall not wither. A Christian minister once said to an aged Christian, "I pray the Lord often to visit you in his love," "Visit me!" cried the beloved saint. "Why say visit me? He lives here. Jesus dwells in me." To that abiding fellowship, we ought each one of us attain. "Blessed are they that dwell in thy house, they will still be praising thee." This is going to heaven in a Pullman car, riding luxuriously as well as travelling swiftly. In this style of religion there are no doubts and fears; abundant grace drowns all mistrust. A little grace will save but it will not make us sure of our safety. The fulness of the blessing can alone secure us the joy of it.

"The longer I live, the more sure do I become

that our happiness in life, our comfort in trouble and strength for service, all depend upon our living near to God, nay dwelling in God, as the lilies in the water. To grow on the bank of the river of the water of life is good but to grow in the stream is far better. God's lilies need to be in him who is their life. With all earnestness of my soul, I would entreat all whom I love to cultivate continual communion with the Lord. It may require great watchfulness, but it will well repay the believer for all his care. This river hath golden sands. Fellowship with God is a land which floweth with milk and honey. I would rather spend an hour in the presence of the Lord than a century in prosperity without him. There are secrets of unknown delight, which can never be known to us till we rise above the outward and worldly, and come into the life of God, which is the life of heaven. By faith this is to be enjoyed even now. The faith which brought us life at the first, is the same by which we attain to life more abundantly."

C. H. Spurgeon.

"Sir Francis Drake, being in a dangerous storm in the Thames, was heard to say, "Must I, who have escaped the rage of the ocean, be drowned in a ditch!" Will you, experienced saints, who have passed through a world of tribulation, lie down and die of despair, or give up your profession because you are at the present moment passing through some light affliction? Let your past preservation inspire you with courage and constrain you to brave all storms for Jesus' sake."

Have you a difficult temperament? Well, if you have you will require more grace; but the answer is, "*He giveth more grace*" You will not exhaust the reserves and resources of grace. *God never yet made a temperament which He could not sanctify.* God never yet saved one of his children whom He could not fill with the power of the Holy Spirit and make sweet and gracious and lovable and attractive.

PARADISE ON EARTH

12. Gates of Eternity

*Earth's coming
glory*

At the last, the Millennium will come to an end. For a thousand years mankind will have lived under the beneficent rule of Christ and his Church, administering the affairs of this world from their exalted state in the heavens above. During this whole period evil will have been progressively eliminated, men's hearts turning more and more to the living God, loyalty and devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ the hallmark of the human society. Men will be capable of living that loyal and devoted life without fear of falling away or introducing sin or evil again, for all will have been so thoroughly apprised of the evil results of sin and the good that comes from righteousness that no more will they be induced to turn away from the right path. The lessons of the past life and the grievous history of the world of sin and death will remain with them, an everlasting incentive to rectitude. The human race will have attained the ideal God set himself at the beginning, a community of beings, physically and mentally perfect, imbued with Divine life coming to them through Christ the channel of life, in perpetual communion with God the Father and Creator of all. The long sad story of sin and evil, of suffering and death, which man brought upon himself of his own volition, will be in the past, never to return. As the prophet, looking forward to that glad some day, intoned, *"they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away"*.

Now why is it that the scripture insists that eternal life only comes through Christ? There is no doubt about it. *"He that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son hath not life"* (1 Jno. 5.12) *"He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life, but he that believeth not on the Son shall not see life"* (Jno. 3.36). This is not a question of the Son conferring life upon those who please him by acknowledging him, and refusing it to all others. There is a vital principle involved here which takes us back to the consideration of what life is and from whence it comes.

Life is a phenomenon manifested in the ability of certain groups of atoms to form themselves into cells which are self-reproductive and eventually possess perceptive powers, reasoning powers and creative powers. But just as those cells must have had an origin greater than themselves, so must the life which animates them have a source greater than itself. That source is God, God the incomprehensible but undoubtedly all-powerful. The source of all life is God, and therefore the sustaining of all life is God. Because the Son is the manifestation of the Father to men, the only medium by which men can approach or discern the Father,

it follows that the Divine life by which the Father sustains his creation can only come to that creation through the Son. And the atoms which form the cells which are the repositories of life must also have originated in God—as indeed Genesis tells us. *"The Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground"* (the atoms) *"and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul"* (Gen. 2.7). So because everything that makes the man what he is originates in God and is from God, the living being can only continue indefinitely, everlastingly, if he is in complete harmony and unity with God. That is why sin, continued and unrepented of, must inevitably end in death; there is no possible alternative. *"In the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die"* was the word given to Adam in the story, and in the upshot he did die. so it follows that at the end, when the purpose of God in creating man has achieved its object, there can be none but the willingly righteous remaining, for all that is of sin will have vanished from Divine creation. In the Eden story there was a Tree of Life, symbol of life that comes to man through Christ, from which man was cut off by reason of sin. But at the end of the Bible story, at the close of the Book of Revelation, the Tree of Life is there again, and all men partake of it, because all men have come into living union with the Father, through the Son.

This provokes an obvious question. Will there, at the last, be any who, after the wonderful work of the Millennial Age, prove impervious to the love of God and the drawing power of the Lord Christ? Must it be that some go into the void at the last because they steadfastly resist the call to repudiate sin and must therefore incur sin's penalty? There is a school of Christian thought which insists that such cannot be, that when Christ says He will draw all men unto himself the "all" means totality without exception. But the reasoning of Universalism, as it is called, going back to the second century, is open to some criticism. To say that because God allowed man to fall into sin He is morally bound to recover man from that sin does not fully represent God, neither does it allow for the vitally human attribute of man's free-will, implanted in him by God. There is a difference between the instigation of evil and the permission of evil. Says the Wise Man in Ecclesiastes (Eccl. 7.29 Fenton) *"God hath made man upright, but they have sought out many villainies"*. It is a basic Bible truth that man was created mentally, morally and physically perfect, fully able to live a right life and go on doing so eternally the while he maintained his relationship with, and his loyalty to, his Maker. Man is endowed with free-will so that his relationship and loyalty is a

matter of choice; he can if he so elects go the wrong way. At the beginning man did so choose, hence evil came into the world, not by overt action of God, but by the will of man, and although it is the wish and endeavour of the Lord to win the allegiance of the man who has turned away, He will not compel him. And if the man will not accept life at the hands of his Creator, and there is no other possible source of life, he deliberately and of set intent bars himself from entering the golden land.

Whether there will or will not be any such at the end it is impossible for any man to say; the issues have yet to be faced for all men and the whole of the Millennial Age is set apart for that process. What can be asserted with confidence is that none can be lost until the Lord has done everything that can be done, short of compulsion. And the Lord cannot compel a man to choose the right way in sincerity and honesty, even as in our own everyday affairs there is a saying that we cannot make a man good by Act of Parliament.

It has to be admitted that there are Scripture texts which seem to imply that there will in fact be some such. Isaiah says at the end of his description of the Millennium that at the end the redeemed of men "*will go forth and look on the carcasses of the men that have transgressed against me, for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched, and they shall be an abhorring to all flesh.*" (Isa. 66. 24). Such statements should be taken as metaphors; no one would seriously suggest that the redeemed would take pleasure and spend time in the consideration of dead bodies covered with immortal worms and ever-burning fire. The expression could mean that the memory of those who perished in their sins would remain for ever; it could be that it pictures the death of the sin rather than that of the sinner. What we do know with certainty is that the time will come when there will be no sin in all of God's creation and all who live will be the Lords. At the name of Jesus every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2. 10-11).

There is one rather obscure statement, unsupported by any other Scripture text, in the Book of Revelation (Rev. 20. 7-10) which pictures the Devil being freed from his restraints at the end of the Millennium and going out to deceive the nations again; he is unsuccessful and with his followers is destroyed by fire from heaven. The purpose of his release is not stated, neither is any indication of the extent to which he succeeds in deceiving the nations. One would hardly think there could be much success; after a thousand years of Divine rule with the benefits it will have brought to the children of men it would seem that there could be little possibility of deception. It is on the strength of statements like these—and there are

quite a few such scattered through the Scriptures—that it has been suggested the foreknowledge of the Most High does perceive that some will fail to make use of the grace of God in Christ, and, preferring evil rather than good, and steeling themselves against every endeavour of the Lord to win them, they reap the consequences of their decision. Remembering the story of the shepherd who could not rest until he had found and brought back the one wandering sheep of his hundred, we can but hope.

How will the glorified Church of Christ, changed to celestial conditions, citizens of the celestial world, no longer human flesh, communicate with men upon earth. If, as is plainly stated in the New Testament, they are to be "Ministers of reconciliation" who will during the thousand years call men to repentance and conversion and bring them to Christ, there must be personal, so to speak face-to-face, communication. In Old Testament times visitants from the celestial world appeared to men in human bodies, formed and adopted for the occasion. One can imagine Divine power being employed to fabricate a body of flesh from the earthly atoms around, in much the same way as the Eden story pictures the creation of Adam. On one noteworthy occasion three men, travellers, appeared to Abraham. Only later did he realise they were angels, heavenly messengers. One appeared to Joshua in the guise of a soldier, drawn sword in his hand; the Lord himself, after his resurrection, in the attire of a gardener. There seems no reason why individuals who have "made their calling and election sure" to the higher, celestial, life should not appear to and commune with men upon earth in the same way, and in fact every reason why they should. A well-known Christian journalist of half a century ago, Newman Watts, writing under the pseudonym of "A London Journalist" has in one of his books a fictional account of life in the Millennium in which he tells of an unbelieving man attempting to scale a precipitous mountain and finding himself in a position in which he could go neither forward nor backward. In his terror and distress he called upon God for help. Suddenly there was a man behind him who had not been there a moment before; a strong hand held him and he was guided to safety. He turned to thank his rescuer, and with a kindly word the rescuer disappeared. In the story that man renounced his unbelief and became a true disciple. That kind of thing might become a commonplace in the Age to come. It has also to be remembered that for each one who is taken to be with Christ there will be loved ones, family, relatives, friends, who themselves have not attained that destiny. To be everlastingly separated from such is unthinkable; one of the glories of the next Age will be the reunion of those who have been parted by death and unless that is pos-

sible in some real manner there would be an element of sadness and loss in the heavenly salvation which is altogether out of keeping with the promise of One who says that sorrow and sighing shall flee away. A logical view of the relationship between the celestial and terrestrial orders of life to all eternity must include free and natural communication between them.

This is where the restored and perfected human race passes into eternity. Men have attained the Divine purpose and ideal and there is no more sin. Consequently there is no more sadness or unhappiness, no disease and no death. The earth brings forth enough for all and every member of the human race accepts willingly his or her share of the world's work. At long last, men can be trusted to govern themselves on the principles of justice and

love. As the prophet Isaiah said long ago, "*The work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever*" (Isa. 32.17). This is where the One who has reigned in righteousness, albeit with firm hand, for a thousand years, stands aside, as it were, and presents the redeemed and restored world of man to his Father, a world fully loyal to God and never again to be sullied with sin. "*Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father . . . that God may be all in all*" (1. Cor. 15. 24-28). Of old time the Lord made a solemn promise to mankind, a promise which will surely be fulfilled: "*As truly as I live, the whole earth shall be filled with my glory*".

The End.

HOLINESS AND THE NATURAL BODY

Have we not at times been lifted, by an effort of thought and will, or in the fellowship of the saints, into the Holiest of all, and speedily felt that the flesh had entered there too? It was because we entered not by the new way, the way through death to life.

* * *

It is out of the grave of the flesh and the will of self that the spirit of holiness breaks out in resurrection power.

* * *

Christ came to reveal what true holiness would be in the conditions of human life and weakness.

* * *

There is no law in the natural and the spiritual world more simple than that two bodies cannot at the same moment occupy the same space . . . in man, self has possession and self-will the mastery, and there is no room for God.

* * *

Jesus came to teach us that it was possible to be a man and yet to have the life of God dwelling in us . . . Jesus proved the perfect adaptation and suitability of human nature for showing forth that which is the essential glory of Deity.

* * *

Liberty is the power to carry out unhindered the impulse of our nature. In Christ the child of God is free from every power that could hinder his acting out the law of his new nature. We are not made free that we may do our own will. No, but made free to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit. "Where the Spirit is, there is liberty".

We cannot note too carefully that it was the question of eating to satisfy hunger, which was the battleground on which the Redeemer's first encounter with Satan took place. To have every appetite of the body under the rule and regulation of the Holy Spirit appears to some to be needless, to others too difficult. And yet . . . the first approaches of sin are made through the body. In the body the complete victory will be gained. "If through the Spirit we do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live".

* * *

The Holy Spirit must not only exercise a restraining and regulating influence on the appetites of the body and their gratification, so that they be in moderation and temperance—this is only the negative side—but there must be a positive spiritual element, making the exercise of natural functions a service of holy joy and liberty to the glory of God. "Let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God". (2 Corinthians 7: 1).

* * *

As the source of all defilement of the flesh is self-gratification, so self-seeking is at the foot of all defilement of the spirit. In relation to God, it manifests itself in idolatry, be it in the worship of other gods after our own heart, the love of the world more than God, or the doing of our own will rather than His. In relation to our fellow-men it shows itself in envy, hatred and want of love, cold neglect or harsh judging of others. In relation to ourselves it is seen as pride, ambition, or envy, the disposition that makes self the centre.

(Andrew Murray, 19th Cent.)

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