



BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

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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.*

Bible Study Monthly

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This journal is published for the promotion of Bible knowledge, maintaining the historical accuracy of the Scriptures and the validity of their miraculous and prophetic content viewed in the light of modern under-

standing. It stands for the pre-millennial Advent of our Lord and his reign of peace and justice on earth. It is supported entirely by the voluntary gifts of its readers and all such gifts are sincerely appreciated.

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BOOK REVIEW

"Myths from Mesopotamia". Stephenie Dalley. 338 pp., paperback, Oxford University Press, 1991. £4.99. ISBN 0-19-281789-2.

This is a new and full translation, incorporating the results of research into all extant tablets and fragments known, up to the present time, of ten of the best-known Akkadian epics, including the Enuma Elish (Creation Epic), Gilgamesh, Atrahasis, Ishtar's Descent, Etana, and so on. The book is essentially one for the student; the rendering is original and many of the "gaps" in the older published renderings have been filled in from later deciphered texts to the advantage of the reader.

There is a description of the history and contents of the various tablets now known, a set of notes and comments on matters of detail following each epic, a 14-page glossary of deities, places and other terms, and a full bibliography. An up-to-date and useful handbook, to be kept alongside anyone's collection of Assyrio-Sumero epics.

Note to U.S.A. and Australian readers. Local booksellers should be able to get this book if given the above ISBN number. In case of difficulty contact Oxford University Press, New York or Melbourne. Not available from Hounslow.

NOTICES

An appeal. One of our readers who has recently come into contact with the "Monthly", has found the general outlook so much in line with his own feelings and understanding that he is keenly desirous of contacting other readers in the Brighton and Hove area with a view to meeting for fellowship and discussion on a more or less regular basis. If any such in that area would be interested in such a project, it will be appreciated if they will advise us and their names and addresses will be passed on to our friend concerned, for him to make contact direct. As is generally known, we do not under any circumstances impart addresses of our readers to any other person without their consent.

Concerning changes of addresses—U.S.A. readers

We have a problem which seems to be unique to the U.S.A. It is probably well realised that the "Monthly" takes seven weeks to reach the American continent and it follows that when advice of a change of address is received here almost inevitably one issue or maybe two are already in transit to the old address. Sometimes the U.S. Post Office affixes a yellow label to the returned envelope giving the new address and sometimes a similar one merely saying "forwarding order expired" but in either case the returned envelope rarely gets back here in less than six months from despatch, by which time several more issues have been sent, eventually finding their way back here. It will be a great help if brethren will advise change of address at the earliest possible date to minimise this problem.

Acknowledgments. It has been our custom to send overseas readers an acknowledgment for donations above five dollars by air mail. Current heavy increases in postal charges have rendered this impracticable; an appreciable portion of the gift is expended on the receipt. Will all overseas readers please note that in future, although our appreciation of the gift, of whatever amount, is undiminished, the continuance of the Monthly will be the indication that your gift has been received, except that an acknowledgment will still be sent for gifts of 25 dollars or more. And even if it is not convenient to send a gift at all, please be sure to return the pink renewal slip, so that we know you still desire to have the Monthly and are receiving it regularly.

Gone from us



Sis. Joyce Bowle (*Milborne Port*)
Sis. Margaret Chapman (*Bexhill-on-Sea*)
Sis. Gladys McEnerlen (*Bournemouth*)



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

GIDEON, MAN OF VALOUR

1. A man for God's purpose

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

when God was with them which has carried that same people to victory against apparently hopeless odds so many times in history. Gideon was that man. Without hesitation he carried out the Lord's injunction.

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

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

The valley of Jezreel—the symbolic site of Armageddon, where all the great battles between Israel, Syria, Egypt and Assyria were fought—lies across the northern half of the land of Israel, from Jordan to the sea. It is about twenty miles long and varies from four to eight miles wide. It forms the natural passage for peoples coming in from the east and heading for Canaan, Judea or Egypt and has been thus used from antiquity. Into this valley came the hosts; as ch. 7.12 says, they *"lay all along the valley like locusts for multitude, and their camels were without number, as the sand by the sea side for multitude"*. Ophrah was about five miles

away up in the hills fringing the south side of the valley, so that it would not be long before the news reached Gideon and his fellows. In past times this had been the signal for the whole population to seek hiding places in the caves and ravines of the highlands (see ch. 6.2) with such food as they could carry, leaving the invaders to plunder their farms and homes of everything movable. But not this time! Gideon too had acquiesced in the general submission in the past; now he was possessed of a new spirit, born of a strength induced by his zeal and courage in the affair of the idols. He had proved himself faithful in a small thing and now the Lord was going to use him in a great thing. And the men who a few hours ago were thirsting for his blood now realised that under his leadership they could strike a blow for freedom which without him they would not have dreamed of attempting.

So *"the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon, and he blew a trumpet, and all Abi-ezer were gathered after him. And he sent messengers throughout all Manasseh, who also was gathered after him; and he sent messengers unto Asher, and unto Zebulun, and unto Naphtali; and they came up to meet them"* (ch. 6.34,35). In next to no time the whole of the countryside for miles around was roused; contingents from four of the tribes of Israel, those most closely affected by the invasion, came marching to join him. Gideon found himself at the head of an army of men numbering more than thirty thousand! It is evident though that he was pinning his hopes for victory not upon the military prowess of his followers but upon the power of God. The first thing he did upon finding himself in command of this force was to ask a sign of God that He would indeed deliver Israel. Some might be inclined to consider this request for a sign to indicate a lack of faith but it was not necessarily so; the sign might be more for the encouragement of the men who had rallied to his side and to confirm in their minds the power of the God of Israel. On the other hand it might have been Gideon's desire for assurance that he had correctly interpreted the new power that had possessed him as being in truth the Spirit of the Lord. Was he doing right in accepting the service of these thousands of Israel and was this moment the critical one in which to sally forth to do battle with the enemy? There is an element of sober caution in his approach to the point where he must put his forces to the test, harmonising well with the inflexible conviction that God was with him when at last he went into battle, which speaks, not of weakness of

faith or of indecisiveness, but of a deep-rooted determination that he should interpret the Divine leading aright, neither lagging behind that leading nor stepping out in front of it. So he suggested the sign that would convince him, and the Lord responded according to his faith. He set out a fleece of wool on the ground and in the morning although the dew was heavy all around, the fleece itself was inexplicably dry; again he set it out and asked for the wonder to be reversed and sure enough in the morning the ground was bone dry and the fleece wringing wet. Simple little signs but they told Gideon all that he wanted to know and without further ado he rallied his men and gave the word to march.

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

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

There were still too many men. Take them down to the waters of Harod, said the Lord, and command them to drink. It must have seemed a risky

business, for the stream ran—and still runs—through the valley itself and the enemy camp was only a short distance away on the other side. Nevertheless Gideon obeyed the order, and before long ten thousand men were gathered along its banks. And here the Lord drew Gideon's attention to a singular circumstance. Despite the close proximity of the enemy camp, by far the majority of the men got down on their knees to drink, oblivious to the disadvantage at which they were placed should the enemy decide to launch a sudden attack. Three hundred men, and three hundred only, drank with their heads up and their eyes fixed upon the distant scene, drawing up water in their hands and lapping as a dog would lap. Instinctively they were ready for an emergency.

By these three hundred will I deliver, said the Lord. Send the rest back! This must have been the moment when Gideon's faith was tested to the uttermost. Three hundred only against that mighty host? Four hundred and fifty Midianites to each Israelite? Was such a miracle even possible? We have to remember that in Gideon's day there was no precedent for this victory. All past conflicts, whether or not the Lord had been concerned, had seen the participation of Israelite warriors in their thousands. The initial invasion of the land under Joshua, the subsequent victories of Othniel over

the Mittanians, of Ehud over the Moabites, and Barak over the Canaanites, all were achieved by large and well-equipped forces of men. Now the Lord told Gideon that he was going to disperse what was in all probability by far the largest force Israel had yet to face with a paltry three hundred men. And as if to challenge his faith the Lord said "*Arise, get thee down unto the host; for I have delivered it into thine hand*".

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

To be continued.

"*Being crafty, I caught you with guile*" 2. Cor. 12. 16.

The words occur in Paul's letter to his Corinthian converts when he is assuring them of the extremes of personal inconvenience to which he would go in labouring for their welfare. The expression does not sound good in the light of English usage; it seems almost as if the Apostle was prepared to resort to "*shady methods*" in the pursuit of his object. This is not borne out by the original; the word rendered "*crafty*" is used in a bad sense as *cunning, knavish, treacherous, deceitful*, and in a good sense as *wise, sagacious, dexterous, and skilful* (compare our English words *craft* and *craftsman* as indicating skill at a trade). Likewise that rendered "*guile*" means to catch with a bait as in fishing, and "*caught*" to receive or take to one's self. Whether a bad or a good sense is intended here depends entirely on the context. Paul is speaking of the money offering that was organised

by the Christian communities in Greece for the benefit of the destitute Christians in Judea. Intermingled with this he reminds them that his own ministry, and that of his co-labourers, by means of which they themselves came to know Christ and were freed from the bondage of paganism, was given to them freely and without cost. He left them to infer the moral. Freely had they received, of the Gospel; now freely might they give, evidencing in a practical manner the extent to which the principles of the Gospel had penetrated their hearts and lives. In that sense the Apostle was sagacious or skilful in the manner he brought the Corinthian Christians to the point where they could not escape the logic of his words, or fail to realise the moral obligation which rested upon them to reciprocate the freely given service of the Apostle by giving freely in return to the necessities of the saints in Judea.

WATERS ABOVE THE FIRMAMENT

4. The Face of the Ground was Dry.

The waters were flowing south, out into the Indian Ocean, doubtless taking with them much of the debris of the destroyed antediluvian world. The Ark was safe, stranded on the flanks of a mountain with the water level slowly sinking and receding from the stationary vessel. That recession of the waters is described in minute detail in the narrative and if Mount Anaran in the Zagros range is indeed the mountain of the Ark this part of the story should fit as does the earlier portion. The narrative is very precise as to the sequence of events and their dates. The Ark grounded "*on the mountains of Ararat*" exactly five months after the onset of the Flood. Apparently the occupants waited, noting only that the decrease in the level of the waters continued until, a little over two months later, for the first time, "*the tops of the mountains were seen*". Another forty days elapsed and then Noah sent out a raven and a dove to explore. After twenty-one days of this it became apparent that the "*waters were abated from off the earth*". Not, apparently, sufficiently so to permit departure from the Ark, for another month of inactivity followed, after which Noah found that "*the waters were dried up from off the earth*" and "*the face of the ground was dry*". Even then, they remained inside another two months before "*the earth was dried*". Only then did they emerge.

What does this rather involved account really imply?

If the Ark was to avoid being swept by the current into the Indian Ocean it obviously had to be arrested by one of the Iranian mountains bordering the eastern side of the plain, and Anaran, jutting out into the plain farther than its fellows, would be most likely. And one indication of the likelihood of this identification must be the fitness of the geographical features of this area to the narrative. In that account there are four distinct phases in the progress of the receding waters to the point at which it is said that, seven months after the Ark landed on the mountain, the "*earth was dried*".

The implication of Gen. 8.1-4 is that after the first forty days, the waters began to be "assuaged", to sink down, but only after the Ark had been stranded something like three months more did the lessening level begin to become marked. The position of the stranded vessel had to be such that the

successive falling levels, enumerated four times in Genesis, could be fully observed. The Ark therefore must have lain on the western side of the mountain overlooking the plain. Behind it, to the east, lay the Iranian range rising to twelve thousand feet. A study of a large scale map shows that alongside the western flank of Anaran there lies a long range of rock terraces some twelve miles long by two miles wide, rising in stages from the plain to about the thousand feet level, from which the mountain itself rises precipitately several thousands of feet more. Just the kind of surface on which the Ark, drifting along at a few miles an hour, could be brought to a stop without undue harm to its contents or its twenty-seven thousand tons loaded weight.

If the mountain looked like an island, as the Sumerian epics assert, the surrounding waters must have been at least a thousand feet above the level of the plain. The epics may not be taken too seriously but other geological considerations point to twelve hundred feet as the probable depth of water at the end of the first forty days. On this basis it could be assumed that the Ark did ground at about the thousand feet level. There it remained, apparently without incident, for another seventy-three days, something over two months, with the water level slowly falling. "*The waters decreased continually until the tenth month; in the tenth month, on the first day of the month, were the tops of the mountains seen*" (ch. 8.5). For the first time something could be observed which previously had been hidden from view.

The word "seen" here is *raah*, which means to lie in wait, to observe or watch diligently, to consider (the latter as in Psa. 8.3 & 45.10; Eccl. 7.13; I Sam. 12.24), and implies the act of intensive observation. By this time the water level would have decreased appreciably. Now although the mountain sides do slope precipitately down to the plain, there are in the immediate vicinity a number of lesser minor peaks rising to six or eight hundred feet. The only view from the Ark was westward across the plain; the higher Iranian mountains to the east were hidden by the mass of the mountain itself. The only peaks which could be seen from the Ark would have to be to the west; as the water level dropped a few hundred feet these peaks began to emerge, one after another, and so began to be

seen. It could be to this that vs. 5 refers.

By now the terraces abutting on the mountain would be clear of water but from there to the horizon was a continuous sheet of water broken only by these peaks in the foreground. It is not surprising therefore that Noah waited another forty days before making a move. So far as he could see, the entire world was still flooded, with the exception of the patch of mountain terrace on which the Ark was resting. His family and his population of animals must still stay inside and rely on his stores for food.

"And it came to pass at the end of forty days, that Noah opened the window of the Ark which he had made. And he sent forth a raven, which went to and fro, until the waters were dried up from off the earth" (vss. 6-7). This word "window" is *challon*, the regular word for such, not the same as the window, *tsohar*, of ch. 6.16, which was a covered opening for ventilation and light running along the top of the Ark. From this window Noah could look out and view his immediate surroundings. The water level could by now be down to something like six hundred feet, well below the level of the Ark. From the contours on modern maps it can be deduced that the water's edge would now be well down the mountainside several miles away with the horizon visible twenty-six miles distant; but it was still all water. Beyond the few peaks in the immediate vicinity, there was no land visible. But by now Noah must have realised that things were mending; there was a prospect of seeing some land in measurable time. So he sent forth the raven. *"Went to and fro"* is *yatsa yatsa*, meaning to go in and out. It is not apparent what useful purpose the raven served, unless it was that it could find food for itself outside and so give evidence that land was appearing somewhere near. At any rate, a week later Noah *"sent forth a dove from him, to see if the waters were abated from off the face of the ground"* (vs. 8). There is a difference in the two expressions. "Dried up" from off the "earth" (*erets*) must signify the mountainous areas now beginning to be visible; "dried up" means to have disappeared completely and that was obviously not the case with the flooded plain. The raven patrolled the mountains surrounding the Ark without bringing any useful information back and continued doing so *"until the waters were dried up"*. The dove, a week later, was sent forth to see if the waters *"were abated from the face of the ground"* where "abated" is *galal*, to be diminished or flow away, and *"the face of the ground"* is *panim adamah*, the

cultivable level ground. The dove was to bring evidence, if evidence there was, that growing trees or plants had survived the Flood. No use thinking of leaving the Ark until that fact had been ascertained. And here again the maps help. Areas of plain at or above the two thousand feet level exist in the immediate vicinity of Anaran, to this day possessing growing crops and fruit trees. Just behind Anaran there is one such valley and another more extensive one forty or so miles away. Several 19th century travellers such as Ker Porter, Claudius Rich, Isabella Bishop, have recorded this fact of this part of Iran, Bishop speaks of *"pasture lands, vine-clad slopes below and tawny grain above"*. Two thousand years before Christ these mountains were thickly forested with cedars and oaks. All this, above the highest water level of the Flood, was ready and waiting for the survivors when the time was ripe. It almost looks as if the Lord had prepared a special place for the landing of the Ark and the start of the new world that was to be.

So the dove, like the raven, was to bring clues to Noah as to the state of the surrounding country. Upon its return from a fruitless flight, he waited a week and then sent the dove out again. This time it came back with an olive leaf in its beak. That was the evidence the patriarch wanted. Somewhere not too far away, up behind the mountains which blocked his view of the east, there was territory untouched by the waters, territory where trees were still growing. The earth had not been entirely destroyed.

No tree, olive or otherwise, could survive twelve months' total submersion in water. The olive grows at any height up to five thousand feet. (The critics sometimes say that the olive does not grow in Iraq and this disproves the accuracy of Genesis, but they are wrong; it grows in most parts of Western Asia. Claudius Rich, who spent most of his short life in the area, found them in Kurdistan at a height of sixteen hundred feet, just about the height where that dove found that olive leaf behind Anaran. Said Rich *"the olive woods before the village were extensive and the trees were fine ones, though seemingly of a great age"* (*Residence in Koordistan* 1836, Vol. 2 p. 68). Somewhere in those mountainous heights, then, there was land with growing plants and fruits where the survivors could settle when they left the Ark. In the meantime they must wait.

It is significant that whereas in vs. 8 Noah sent out the dove to find evidence that the waters some-

where had receded enough to reveal "*the face of the ground*" (*adamah*, the plain), when the dove did come back with the olive leaf it revealed that it was the *earth* (*erets*, the higher ground in the mountains) where there was no water; "*so Noah knew that the waters were abated from off the earth*".

It was now two months since those first peaks had appeared above the surface, four and a half months since the Ark had landed, and the water level had again dropped appreciably, perhaps another three hundred feet. The edge of the water would then be twelve miles away; with the greater vertical distance between the Ark and the water level, the horizon would now be thirty-four miles away, but still there was no land visible in the distance. That barren landscape obviously offered no home for man. Until Noah could see that the Flood really had gone and would not be coming back he was going to stay where he was. He had sent forth the dove again and this time it had not returned so that he knew that somewhere in the mountains behind him living conditions were possible. Perhaps at this point he began to realise that he must await the Divine instruction before he and his should sally forth from the Ark. They had not only themselves but their animal complement to establish in suitable surroundings. (Incidentally this general picture of the landing of the Ark and its location is reinforced by the fact, as shown at length in the article "*Wild Beasts in the Ark*" in BSM for July/August 1985, that, contrary to popular impression, the wild carnivorous animals were not taken into the Ark. They survived in the higher reaches of the mountains above the Flood level. Chapter 9 of Genesis makes this clear.)

In connection with this part of the story it is of interest to note that the Sumerian epics also tell of the sending forth of the birds. In their case it was a raven, a swallow and a dove, in that order, but nothing is said as to the purpose or the outcome of the missions. The fact though does help to establish that both accounts come from a common source even though the Sumerian version, later than Genesis, became a little garbled in later times.

So another month went by, slowly. The next entry in the record is that which appears in ch. 8.13. "*In the six hundredth and first year, in the first month, the first day of the month, the waters were dried up from off the earth*". In verse 11, more than a month earlier, the waters were merely "*abated from off the earth*"—flowing away from the

mountains but still very much in evidence. Now they were "*dried up from off the earth*" which must indicate a much more positive retreat of the waters. But not only this. Noah also "*removed the covering of the Ark, and looked, and, behold, the face of the ground*" (*panim ha-adamah chareb*) "*was dry*". This can only mean that the level plain as distinct from the mountainous area was now also dry, at least in the immediate vicinity. The expression "*removed the covering of the Ark*" most likely refers to some kind of weatherproof covering over the *tsohar*, the ventilating opening running round the upper part of the Ark (the "*window—tsohar—*" of ch. 6.16). By taking up his position at the top of the structure, Noah could well have seen the water's edge, receded across the plain to a point twenty-four miles away and the horizon, as viewed from his vantage point a thousand feet up, something like thirty-five miles away. The immediate ground was dry,—but the water was still there, on the distant horizon. So Noah waited still.

"*And in the second month, on the seven and twentieth day of the month, was the earth dried*" (ch. 8.14). This is a new expression, *erets yabesh*, used for the first time. It means literally to waste away, as seed rotting in the ground, in short, to disappear. It meant that Noah could now see land all the way to the far horizon forty miles away. At last, he could feel that the waters of the Flood really had gone.

It has to be remembered that a flood such as has here been described, twelve hundred feet deep, must have covered something like half — the eastern half—of the present Arabia, in addition to most of Iraq. A rough calculation indicates something like a hundred and fifty thousand cubic miles of water. (The modern recurrent floods in Bangladesh, featured in the daily press, would by comparison account for twenty cubic miles). All this flood water had to flow back into the ocean over some five hundred miles of the southern coastline of Arabia, but as the water level dropped, so the length of coastline low enough to pass the water lessened, until at the end the last of the water could only pass through the present Straits of Hormuz at the mouth of the Gulf, only thirty-five miles wide, consequently the rate of flow became greatly diminished, which of itself could account for the long-drawn-out retreat of the waters towards the end of the process, evident in the narrative. And it cannot possibly be estimated how the world's oceans settled down after this great catastrophe; the outflow of the waters from Iraq must have been

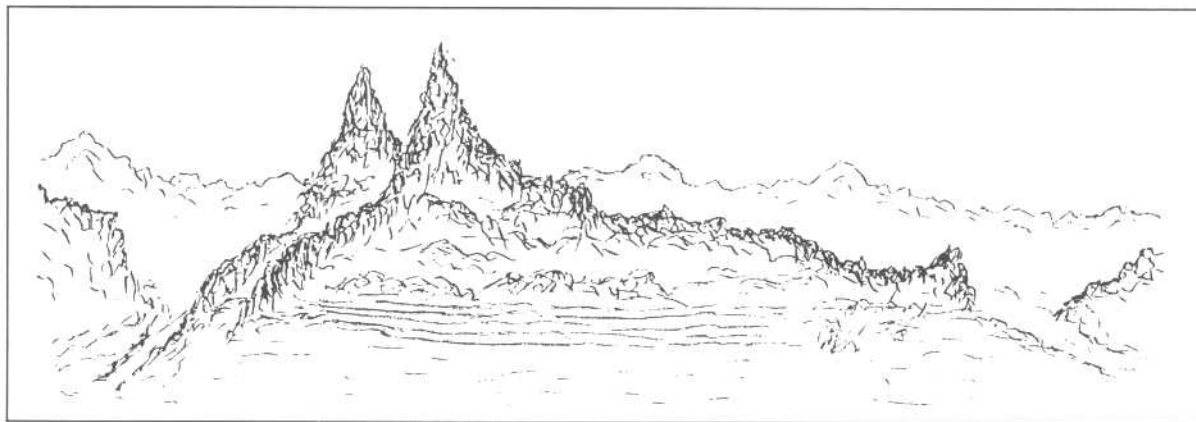
dependent on that. But the general harmony of the Genesis account with the physical features of the area here described may well afford a sound basis for the conclusions drawn.

And now the Lord did speak. "God spake unto Noah, saying, go forth of the Ark, thou, and thy wife, and thy sons, and thy sons' wives with thee.

Bring forth with thee every living thing that is with thee, of all flesh . . . that they may breed abundantly in the earth, and be fruitful, and multiply upon the earth".

And Noah went forth.

The End.



KUH-I-ANARAN, THE MOUNT OF THE EAST, LANDING-PLACE OF THE ARK
Iranian mountains in background

THE PARABLE OF THE LEAVEN

Matt. 13.33

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

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

Note first the aptness of the allusion. The leaven is added to the meal and is necessary if the meal is

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

But is not leaven employed in the Scriptures as a symbol of sin? It is so employed when in Matt. 16. 6 Jesus warned his disciples to "beware of the leaven of the Pharisees". In this warning He used the same characteristic of leaven to describe the insidious subtlety of those who were like dead men's sepulchres, fair on the outside but inside full of dead men's bones. Again, Paul in 1 Cor. 5. 7, referring to a scandalous affair in the Corinthian

church, urged that church to expel a certain openly profligate offender in the words "*Purge out therefore the old leaven that ye may be . . . unleavened*". Note that in this passage the picture is that of the sinner himself, remaining within the fellowship of the church, being the leaven which will permeate *the entire church with its influence, in this case a baneful influence*. The individual's expulsion from the community was commended in the words "*Purge out therefore the old leaven*".

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

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

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

Is there Scriptural evidence that such a work of preparation is to proceed during this Age? By all means there is. "*Go ye into all the world,*" said Jesus, "*and preach the gospel to the whole creation*" (Mark 16. 15.) "*This gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness*" (Matt. 24. 14). And more personal to each of us "*They may by your good works which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation*" (1 Pet. 2. 12). This last Scripture gives the clue. There is a work to be done by the Church in the flesh, during this Age, which is not to be productive of immediate results, but will have its fruitage in the coming Age. Whilst the chief and foremost business of every Christian is the playing of his or her part in the calling and preparation of those who are

fellow-workers in the body of Christ, there is also this secondary work amongst men in general which is likened to the influence of leaven—its results not immediately discernible, but none the less vitally necessary to the final work of the future.

Jesus himself gave further instructions on this matter. "*Ye are the salt of the earth*" He said (Matt. 5. 13). Salt is a preservative. It must be intimately mingled with that which is to be preserved and it must retain its freshness to be efficacious. If the salt lose its savour, it is henceforth fit for nothing. We are the salt of the earth! It is very unfortunate that the expression has passed into an everyday proverb which implies that the "salt" of the earth are the "choice ones" of the earth, whereas Jesus meant nothing of the kind. His meaning is that by virtue of an intimate mingling with the people of the earth, his disciples by their conduct and teachings would be a preservative and wholesome influence in the world, maintaining a witness and an example of Kingdom standards, which however unheeded at the time, would yet save the world from utter depravity and make it ready in some small way for the coming Day and its standards. Noah and Lot were such preservative influences in their own days, *preachers of righteousness in a world of unrighteousness*.

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

But Jesus has not finished with his disciples yet. A still more tremendous thought comes from his lips. "*A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid*" (Matt. 5. 14). We then are to be as a city set on an hill—impossible for us *not* to be in the public eye. To what extent do we approach to any attempt at fulfilling this ideal? The idea of a city is that of an ordered and regulated way of life; to be set on an hill adds the thought of a Divinely set and ordained way of life. Men, looking upon the Christian community upon earth, are to see it as a city set upon an hill—a compact community proclaiming and living by standards which have been given by Heaven and which are to be manifested to all men. Men may not acknowledge the authority of that city;

they may avoid it in their travels and build their roads to swerve round the hill instead of going up and into the city; but they must always be conscious that the city is there, standing by a system of authority and rulership which one day it will have power to extend over the whole world.

So then, they who by virtue of their position as footstep followers of the Lord Jesus Christ have become as leaven in this world have the duty and privilege of working silently, unobtrusively, until the leavening process is complete and the world stands ready to be introduced to the reign of Christ in power. For two thousand years they will have been manifest to men as the salt of the earth, as the light of the world, as a city on a hill, and then at

length, their work of witness completed, they will come forth in glory and power to fulfil their historic mission of world conversion. It is then that the fruit of the leavening work will be manifest. "*Cast thy bread upon the waters, for thou shalt find it after many days*". (Eccl. 11. 1). It is upon the basis of this "witness" that the greater invitation to the fountain of life will be based and the grand work commence. It is because men will have already heard and known—and seen—something of Kingdom standards that some of them will break out, as the prophet declares they will break out, into the rapturous words "*Lo, this is our God: we have waited for him, and he will save us*" (Isa. 25. 9).

THE TRAGEDY OF BABYLON

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

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

ONE JOT OR TITTLE

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

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

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

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

JOHN TO HIS BRETHREN

John's epistles were written in the serenity of old age. The words run on in easy, undisturbed flow, with no outbursts of ebullient zeal or passionate declamation as might be expected if the pen was being wielded by a younger man. The great days of John's activity were over, and his life now was given up to exhorting his brethren in brotherly love and Christian consistency. The doctrinal disputations and the opposition of false brethren belonged to a bygone time; his letters were addressed, not to immature fledglings in the faith, requiring care and attention lest they be ensnared by the specious teachings of their opponents or drawn away from their profession by the persecutions of civil rulers, but to mature Christians of many years' standing, men and women who had known and laboured with the "beloved disciple" over many decades of years. It is very probable that he composed these gems of thought as his final exhortation before the Lord should call him home.

We do not know exactly when these epistles were composed, but it might have been somewhere round about the year 90 A.D., when John himself was about eighty-five years of age, during a time when the Church had a rest from persecution, for there is no hint of persecution in any part of the epistles and no exhortations such as might be expected if the brethren were undergoing such trials. The time of writing must therefore have been some while after the terrible days of Nero and the destruction of Jerusalem (A.D. 70). Sometime between 80 and 90, therefore, fifty years after the Crucifixion and twenty years after the death of Paul, John, probably by then the only surviving Apostle, sat himself down to write these precious words to the Church.

Where were they written? Again, we cannot be certain. The tradition is that they were written at Ephesus. The New Testament tells us nothing about John's movements after the Council of Jerusalem recorded in Acts 15, which would have been held in or about A.D. 51. He does not seem to have been at Ephesus when Paul took leave of the elders there for the last time, in A.D. 58 (Acts 20). But Ephesus was a notable centre of the Church for a considerable number of years afterwards. Timothy was its elder for a long time. Probably John took up residence there after the destruction of Jerusalem and spent perhaps twenty-five years there in devoted service before he died. He may have even written these epistles in

anticipation of exile or martyrdom, and in such case he would obviously have expected these letters to constitute his final leave-taking of his brethren in the flesh.

Why were they written? That, at any rate, is an easy question to answer. They were for the comfort and admonition of his brethren and for all who should come after them and read his words. They were written in fulfilment of his commission as an Apostle, not only to his own generation and people, but also to all who in every place and in every time should call upon the name of the Lord. They were written that we who live nearly two thousand years later may derive Christian instruction and enlightenment from the Spirit-filled mind of the "beloved disciple". "He being dead, yet speaketh."

"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life . . . that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us" (1 John 1. vs. 1-3, omitting the parenthesis which is verse 2).

"That which was from the beginning"—not only Christ as a Person, but as the glorious Divinity Whom we acknowledge and revere. The use of the term "that" instead of the personal pronoun "He" indicates that John is including all that Christ stood for, all his Gospel, all the treasures of wisdom laid up in him, all his reconciling power and all that his redemptive sacrifice will yet achieve for the sons of men. All of this was provided and foreseen in God's Plan for the "Lamb slain before the foundation of the world" and it is all this that John is going to declare unto us. But the centre of it all is the Person of Christ; the focal point of all that he is going to talk about and to which he is going constantly to point is the Man of Nazareth, Jesus, Who gave himself a Ransom for All and, being resurrected, is drawing all men unto himself (John 12. 32).

The beginning, then, to which John refers must be that beginning when the Son took his place beside the Father and commenced to exercise those mighty powers which have resulted in creation as we know it. *"Without him was not anything made that was made"* (John 1. 3). The "Wisdom" passage of Prov. 8 has its application here. *"The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old, or ever the earth was . . . then I was by him as one brought up with him, and*

I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him" (Prov. 8. 22-30). The Jews of old looked upon this passage as describing the embodiment of the Divine mind and wisdom directed towards this earth, its creation and its affairs. We know that they were right, and that Jesus our Lord is the embodiment of the mind of God so far as this creation in which we live and move and have our being is concerned. In just what way the "*Logos*", as the Jews termed this personification of Divine Wisdom, commenced to exercise the powers that we believe the Logos did exercise from the beginning of creation we do not know. God speaks of him as his "only-begotten Son" and that definition we must accept and there leave the matter. It touches upon mysteries too great for us. But John in his gospel brings it into the realm of understandable things when he says that the "*Logos was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, full of grace and truth*" (John 1. 14).

We may not easily understand just how the *Logos* was, in the beginning, the manifestation of God to his creation, but we do know that in the person of Jesus of Nazareth He appeared to us in form as a man, having laid aside the glory which He had with the Father before the world was (John 17. 5), taking upon himself the bondsman's form for the suffering of death (Phil. 2. 7) and moving amongst us, seen and heard of all. There was a heresy current among the early Christians of John's day called Docetism which claimed that Jesus of Nazareth was not really the Christ at all, that the Christ had entered into a human Jesus at Jordan, inhabited his body, phantom-like, for three and a half years, and departed from it when that body was nailed to the Cross, so that it was only the human Jesus who died. There are many varieties of such "phantom" theories in Christian theology and they are all wrong and dishonouring to God. Jesus himself said plainly "I leave the Father and come into the world; again, I leave the world and go unto the Father" (John 16. 28), and at that the disciples exclaimed "Lo, now speakest thou plainly, and speakest no proverb" (parable). They could understand that; so John here in his epistle is able plainly to say that this very One Who was from the beginning is the very One Who, in the days of his flesh, we saw with our eyes, and heard with our ears, and handled with our hands. Acceptance of that plain Scriptural truth is essential to a right understanding of the Divine Plan of salvation.

"*Of the Word of Life.*" How often it is that the

Scriptures associate the three words—Word (or Logos)—Life—Light! "*In him was life*", says John, "*and the life was the light of men*". That was the true Light, that lighteth every man that cometh into the world. The same "that" which we have here in the beginning of the epistle; the "that" which was from the beginning and was made flesh and appeared unto us. This is really a three-fold definition of Christ's appearing and his message. As the *Word*, or Logos, He came to us from the Father, speaking in the Name of the Father. As the *Light*, He is the Light of the world, enlightening men with the knowledge of his truth and dispelling the darkness of ignorance and superstition and fear. As the *Life*, He is the source of all that men have to hope for in the coming Age, when He himself is to be the everlasting Father (Isa. 9. 6) giving life to the willing and obedient of all mankind. It might truly be said that in these three words is summed up all his great works of three Ages—in the *past*, He was the Word of God, the Logos, by which Word all that has been made was made, the all-sufficient agent of the Father, the personification of the Father's boundless creative energy and activity, of his infinite Wisdom and Power. In the *present*, He is the Light, shining first into our hearts to give knowledge of his glory and grace, and through us to pierce with its streaming rays the darkness of this world's sin and death, bringing comfort and hope to weary souls. In the *future* He will be the Life, calling all men from the grave and the sleep of death, setting their straying feet on the high road that leads to eternal life itself, revivifying with his mighty power not only the dead hearts of men but also the wasted and despoiled earth itself so that the desert may blossom as a rose and the land shall yield its increase. When death shall be no more and the heavenly Jerusalem reign supreme over the peoples, when the River of Water of Life glints its sparkling waters back to the blue sky of God's faithfulness above, and the Trees of Life give their fruit for the sustenance of all men, then indeed will Christ be the Life in which all will move and find their being.

The subject is so entrancing and glorious to John, and he is so anxious to impart his assurance to his readers, that he has to throw in a parenthesis between verses 1 and 2, a parenthesis which does not break his chain of thought but intensifies what he has to say. For, he says, "*the life WAS manifested*, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you, that eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us". He repeats him-

self time and time over in his eagerness to impress his points. The tremendous wonder of the revelation of Christ to the disciples was that they *saw*; they *heard*. To a Jew that must have been a tremendous thing. The nations round about them were accustomed to seeing the images of their gods, but the child of Israel grew up and lived all his life in the teaching that God is invisible and cannot be seen by mortal eyes. Even Moses was permitted but a glimpse of his passing glory, for "there shall no man see me, and live" (Exod. 33. 20). And now God had found a way to reveal himself to His worshippers. The Word, made flesh, could be seen and heard of men, and it was a wonderful thing. Peter was smitten with the same awe when he said "we were eye-witnesses of his majesty . . . and this voice that came from heaven *we heard*, when we were with him in the holy mount" (2 Pet. 1. 18). The Logos was manifested, was seen and heard, and they would never lose sight of that great truth.

From verse six the beloved apostle begins to talk of fellowship. The theme is linked up with his previous words. In the first few verses of the chapter he has shown how the Word, the Logos, was manifested in the earth, that He was Life and the source of life, and then that that Life was the light of the world. Now he passes on to show the connection between that life and that light, and the fellowship which we claim with God and with our brethren, and which, truly entered into, is the hallmark of our acceptance with God. "*We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren*" (1 John 3. 14). But such a fellowship is not easily entered into nor lightly bestowed; and the word itself implies much more than is generally supposed.

"If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not tell the truth. But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin" (vs. 6-7).

What is that fellowship with him?

The word really means communion, and that in turn is the same thing as common union. The bread which we break, asks the Apostle Paul in 1 Cor. 10, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? The same word in the original there, is here rendered "fellowship". "By whom ye were called unto the fellowship—communion—of his Son Jesus our Lord" (1 Cor. 1. 9). This fellowship with God is something much more deep than a mere feeling of oneness arising from our desire to work the works

of God. Abraham was called the Friend of God; David a man after God's own Heart; Daniel one "greatly beloved"; and all of these entered into close converse with God and some considerable measure of understanding and knowledge of him. But none of them—nor any others in Old Testament times—entered into the fellowship with God which John is talking about here. *This fellowship, this communion, is reserved for those who in this Age come to God to be included in that "people for his Name" (Acts 15. 14) which He is taking out from the nations to become his means of world blessing and world conversion in the next Age. And the proof of this lies in the fact that the indispensable foundation of this entering into fellowship is that the blood of Jesus Christ his Son first cleanses us from all sin. We cannot enter into this fellowship with God until that has taken place. "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand" (Rom. 5. 1). None of the heroes of Old Testament times—even although they were justified by faith (Jas. 2. 21)—could know this reconciliation to God by faith in Christ, because Christ had not yet appeared and the Ransom had not yet been given. Even Abraham, and Samuel, and Daniel, must wait until their resurrection into the Messianic Kingdom for that justification.*

John tells us that we cannot walk in darkness and have communion with God at one and the same time, and that if we say we can, we lie, and do not tell the truth. The fact ought to be self-evident; but of course we tend greatly to walk in darkness without admitting or even realising the fact. We are so apt to make the best of both worlds, to reconcile the irreconcilable, to take the standards of God on our lips and by way of profession, and in action to give tacit acceptance, at least to some degree, to the standards of the world. John condemns that. He demands nothing less than absolute sincerity; only thus can we hope to walk in the light. Paul, too, is equally emphatic. "*What fellowship*" he enquires scornfully "*hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? and what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? and what agreement hath the temple of God with idols?"*" (2 Cor. 6. 14-16). There can be no two ways about this; if we would enter fully into communion -fellowship with God then we must renounce all those things which are not of God and give ourselves completely and unreservedly to his

service, faithful to our covenant for the rest of our days. That is consecration.

It is thus that we are enabled to walk in the light, for God is light, and he who walks in fellowship with God cannot help but be walking in the light. "*He that followeth me*" said Jesus, "*shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life*" (John 8. 12). John's Gospel is full of these little sayings of Jesus concerning light and the way of life: it is a theme on which his heart was evidently set. "*If any man walketh in the day, he stumbleth not, but if a man walk in the night, he stumbleth*" (John 11.

9-10), and logically then, "*he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth*" (John 12. 35). To have fellowship with God means to dwell, by faith and in the spirit of the mind, in "the light which no man can approach unto" to be in the presence, again by faith, of him "Whom no man hath seen, nor can see" (1 Tim. 6. 16).

This is the position we must occupy if we would have fellowship with God, and that is why it cannot be that we have fellowship with him if we are still walking in darkness.

THE QUIETNESS OF GOD

"*When he giveth quietness, who then can make trouble?*" (Job 34. 29).

Sorrow and griefs may, and perhaps often will, come in like a flood, but the Lord will be our stay and strength in every experience which he permits. The soul that has never known the discipline of sorrow and trouble has never yet learned the joy and preciousness of the Lord's love and helpfulness. It is in seasons of overwhelming sorrow and grief, when we draw near to the Lord, that he draws especially near to us. So the Psalmist found it, when in his deep affliction he cried to God, saying, "*Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord! Lord, hear my voice; let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications!*" (vs. 1, 2). Feeling his own weaknesses and shortcomings, longing for full deliverance from every imperfection, and prophesying of the bountiful provisions of the Divine plan of salvation through Christ, he adds, "*If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities (imputing them to us) O Lord; who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared (reverenced)*" (vs. 3, 4).

How precious are such assurances when the soul is painfully conscious of its infirmities, of its utter inability to measure up to the perfect law of righteousness! How blessed it is to know that when our hearts are loyal and true, our God does not mark against us the unavoidable blemishes of our earthen vessel! If we come daily to him for cleansing, through the merits of our Redeemer, our failures are not imputed to us, but freely forgiven and washed away. The perfect righteousness of our glorious dress, arrayed in which we may come to

God with humble boldness, courage—even into the presence of the King of Kings and Lord of lords.

In every experience of sorrow and distress, and when the strain of the jarring discords and the stinging vexations and wounds that make the heart bleed, threaten to overwhelm the spirit, let the child of God remember that "he knows, and loves, and cares", and that his ministering angel is ever near to us, and that no trial will be permitted to be too severe. The Master is standing by the crucible, and the furnace heat will never be permitted to grow so intense that the precious gold of our characters shall be destroyed, or even injured. If by his grace the experiences may not work for our good, they will be turned aside. He loves us too well to permit any needless sorrow, any needless suffering.

(Selected)

Again and again have we insisted in protesting against that school of interpretation which would make havoc of the Bible by finding all its meanings exhausted in the letter. Prepared to acknowledge that the letter has its meaning, its load of thought which it discharges and then itself passes on to inutility, we still insist that wherever there is a primrose there is a garden, wherever there is one little note of music there is a great orchestra presently to be revealed, and we shall hear singers who shall sing, and harpers who can harp, and all creation shall vibrate to the march and purpose of Eternity.

Dr. Parker.

When the heart is quiet and the door is shut on the world, we can give thanks to God for sleep, for merriment, for our opportunities to worship

with others, but let us not neglect to give thanks for this same quiet hour when the heart communes with God and is still.

THE ANTIQUITY OF THE BOOKS OF MOSES

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

It was in the year 1670 that Baruch Spinoza, a Dutch-Jewish philosopher of pantheist leanings, originated and published the theory that writing was unknown prior to the 8th century B.C. (roughly the time of Isaiah) and that the early books of the Old Testament could not have been written by Moses and were in fact composed by Ezra after the Exile. Spinoza was followed by Jean Astruc, a French theologian, who in 1753 published a book in which he separated passages in Genesis where the name for “God” is “Jehovah” from those in which it is “Elohim”. He suggested that the compiler of Genesis had two sets of documents or “sources” before him, and these he called the “Jehovistic” and “Elohistic” respectively. These are termed today, in “scholarly” circles, the J. and E. sources. A few years later, Johann Eichhorn, a German historian, produced his *Introduction to the Old and New Testaments and*

Apocrypha” (1787) in which he endorsed Spinoza’s views and invented the term “Higher Criticism”. The seed sown by these three men flowered and bore fruit a few decades later, and the theologians who accepted and developed these views became known as “Higher Critics”.

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

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

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

tion of old traditions and folk-lore, and that many of the kings and notable persons referred to never existed.

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

Firstly, the argument for the late invention of writing was nullified in 1888 by the discovery in Egypt of the Tel-el-Amarna tablets, a large store of official correspondence between Egypt and Canaan, inscribed in cuneiform on clay tablets, written at the time of the Exodus. This took the art of writing back to 1400 B.C. at one bound. In 1905 the famous Egyptologist, Prof. Flinders Petrie, showed that the Serabit inscriptions in Sinai, previously thought to date from early A.D. times, were in fact of the period of the 12th Egyptian dynasty, about the time of Abraham. In 1907 Winckler found the lost records of the Hittite empire in modern Turkey, deciphered in 1919 and found to date at about 1800 B.C. 1923 saw the discovery of records of the Canaanite people, at Ras Shamra near Sidon; date, 1400 B.C. Eclipsing all these are the thousands of tablets found in the ancient cities of Babylon, Assyria and Sumeria, going back at least to 2300 B.C. in cuneiform script, and for several centuries before that in a kind of picture writing. The celebrated Sumerian epic, the *"Enuma Elish"*, sometimes called the "Babylonian story of creation" contains astronomical allusions which show that it was composed when the sun was in the constellation Apries, and that was between 2000 and 2500 B.C. One Sumerian tablet refers to the "writings of the ages that were before the Flood". As far back as any history of man can be traced the art of writing was known. Schultz, in his *"Old Testament Theology"* had said in 1891 *"Of the legendary character of the pre-Mosaic narratives, the time of which they treat is sufficient proof. It was a time prior to all knowledge of writing"*. Similar statements had been made by all the leading critics. The later discoveries have shewn how mistaken and void of value were their conclusions in this field.

But the clever ones never give up. The British scientific journal *"Nature"*, a mouthpiece for the "modern scholarship", commenting in its issue of 12 September 1942 on the impact of the Ras Shamra discoveries, said unctuously *"It would now seem that many of the patriarchal stories of the Old*

Testament were not mere oral traditions collected by authors of the time of Solomon and later, but were part of a written heritage derived from the Canaanite Bronze Age". Anything is better than allowing Moses the credit—but the grudging admission was at least a concession to obvious fact.

Secondly, the idea that polytheism preceded monotheism has been effectually refuted now that so much is known about early civilisations. Prof. Stephen Langdon, one of the leading Assyriologists of this century, said *"The history of the oldest religion of man is a rapid decline from monotheism to extreme polytheism . . . It is in a very true sense the history of the fall of man"*. It has been observed that, of the many Babylonian and Sumerian epic poems which have survived, the farther back they go in time the nearer they are to monotheistic thought. In fact, many of the "gods many and lords many", to use St. Paul's phrase, revered by the ancients, have been found to be deified men, historical characters elevated to divinity after their death. A notable example is the great Babylonian god Marduk or Bel, who is known now to have been a pre-dynastic hero who lived about five hundred years before the rise of the Sumerian city-states, and is mentioned in Genesis under the name of Nimrod. Dr. Frankfort, who excavated Eshnunna in 1930, found evidence that in the third millennium B.C. the gods worshipped under different names were regarded as varying manifestations or aspects of the one God; this is how polytheism developed. No trace of it exists before 2400 B.C. Prior to that time, the only god worshipped to which any reference appears in extant tablets is the Most High God, the God of Heaven.

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

Fourthly, the Levitical ritual of the Pentateuch has since 1932 possessed a companion ritual of very

much the same style, and of about the same date, although framed to suit the worship of the pagan gods of Phoenicia, in some of the tablets discovered at Ras Shamra in that year. While here again there is no connection between the two rituals, the fact that these tablets do exist disposes of the argument that men were not sufficiently developed at that time to devise such rituals.

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

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

In the case of Genesis it has been well established by experts in the ancient languages that the last fourteen chapters of Genesis, which detail the story of Joseph in Egypt, contain a goodly number of Egyptian words, and the first eleven chapters, from creation to the death of Terah, a great

number of Akkadian and Sumerian words and names. (The Akkadians were descendants of Shem and Sumerians descendants of Ham; both races dwelt together in the plains of the Tigris and Euphrates from whence Abraham came). In the first case it is evident that the history of Joseph's life in Egypt and the death there of Jacob was recorded by Joseph or his fellows and these documents, written on papyrus and quite likely in Egyptian, came into Moses' possession. The records of the lives of Abraham, Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau, and the twelve sons of Jacob in Canaan, which might well have been either on goatskins, parchment or clay tablets, all of which were in use in Canaan, would also have been preserved in the archives of one of the heads of the tribes—probably Judah—and so likewise have come to Moses. In the case of the first eleven chapters internal evidences point to their having been compiled, in the form in which they came to Moses, during the period twenty-two to twenty-five centuries before Christ, and therefore considerably earlier than the time of Abraham. Among these evidences are the facts that all the geographical names are those in current use at that period and some of them had passed out of use or been replaced by other names by Abraham's day; the proper names are derived from Akkadian or Sumerian originals and in many cases incorporate the names of their gods; many words of Akkadian or Sumerian origin appear in the text. Thus the geographical names Eden, Havilah, Nod, Hiddekel, in Gen. 2 are the Sumerian Edinu, Khavila, Nadu, Diglat, of the 24th century B.C. Instances such as these shew that Genesis chapters 2 to 4 at least were composed by a dweller on the Euphrates not later than about 2300 B.C.; certain grammatical errors in dealing with some Sumerian words tend to indicate that the compiler was more familiar with the Semitic Akkadian language than the Hamitic Sumerian, and this strengthens the supposition that he was one of the ancestors of Abraham, perhaps Eber. He must, even at this early date, have compiled his narrative from pre-existing records, and almost certainly had two separate accounts of previous times before him, one Semitic and one Hamitic, which he combined into a continuous story.

So the sacred book of the Christian and Jewish faiths had its origin, not in folk-lore and legends of ancient times collected and edited by some priestly dignitary in the 8th B.C. century, but in the painstaking work of men of God who lived in the

dawn of history, setting down their stories in archaic forms of writing which had to be translated and copied time and again in new and different characters, even before Abraham saw them. It has been abundantly demonstrated in this our day that

the stories of the Old Testament are factually true, the work of men who knew the facts and lived within measurable time of the events they recorded.

"YOUR OWN SALVATION"

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

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

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

Our Lord illustrated the important matter of justification by the use of parables. One of these is found in Luke 19. 11-13. "*And he called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds (one to each), and said, Occupy till I come.*" That is, trade with this till I come. All these ten servants received the same amount, a pound, picturing justification by faith. Each one received the same gift, the same quality, the same value; there was no difference shown to any of the servants. That is a clear picture of justification by faith, none can have pre-eminence above another in the sight of God.

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

Seeing then that we are saved from Adamic condemnation through faith, and that this is the gift of God, what did the Apostle Paul mean in our text, that we should "*work out our own salvation*"? He undoubtedly refers to the second step which is essential for everyone who really desires to be a true Christian. The Apostle refers clearly and beautifully to this second step, the step of consecration to God, in Rom. 12. 1. "*I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.*" The words are addressed to those who are not yet "saints", but believers, justified by faith in Christ; no longer sinners and aliens, but members of the household of faith, in fellowship with God but not yet consecrated to walk in the footsteps of Christ. The bodies of these justified brethren are "holy, acceptable to God", which means that they were ransomed, justified and therefore acceptable. They could not appear in the sight of God in their own righteousness, but now they are holy, acceptable to God, in Christ's righteousness, accepted into God's family of sons, looking to the Head,

even Jesus, the Captain of their salvation. This secondary step and wonderful relationship with God is shown in Rom. 5. 2—"By whom (Christ) also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God".

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

A similar exhortation to grasp the privilege of the invitation to walk in the steps of Christ by full consecration is found in 2 Cor. 6. 1, 2. "We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain . . . behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." How often is this Scripture presented with the thought that now is the *only* accepted time, now is the *only* day of salvation. The Apostle is not saying anything of that kind at all. He is saying that you who have now received that favour of God, or justification by faith, can see the privilege now of entering into this salvation for the Heavenly Calling. He does not say it is the only opportunity, but this is a special day, the accepted time wherein God is inviting members to walk in the footsteps of Christ, that they may be with him in his heavenly kingdom, to supervise a further day of salvation for mankind in the Kingdom Age. The exhortation of the Apostle is to appreciate that privilege of justification by faith by going on to consecration, to be a member of this acceptable class now being called out. This is the only day of salvation for the heavenly inheritance; therefore, "see that ye receive not the grace of God in vain".

For all who do accept the Lord's invitation to present themselves living sacrifices through Christ, the Christian warfare begins, and this means fighting the good fight of faith, as Paul tells us in 1 Tim. 6. 12—"Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast

professed a good profession before many witnesses". Here we see the Christian's effort required. It is not just a relaxing condition in the love of God; we have to "lay hold" on eternal life. This again emphasises the working out of our salvation. Our hearts and minds must be devoted to this energetically and fully; to lay hold on anything means to give it our whole attention, to be very earnest about it, for this is eternal life of the highest quality, the heavenly eternal life, "whereunto thou art also called".

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

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

"anointed with the oil of gladness above his fellows". He had a full indwelling of God's Spirit. We need the indwelling of the oil of gladness to take away the harshness that our natural disposition possesses. That will allow God to work in us to will and do his good pleasure.

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

The greatest help in development of the Christian life, in addition to co-operation with the spirit of Christ, is meditation and study of his Word. Paul's advice to Timothy along this line is good instruction to us also. 2 Tim. 3. 14, 15 reads—"Continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; and that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus". What a privilege it is for children to be brought up in the knowledge and nurture of the Lord, to love the Lord and his Word. The importance of handing down good impulses for the Christian life cannot be over-estimated. God takes hold of these trainings and uses them where young hearts are responsive.

Writing to the Romans (13. 11, 12), the Apostle Paul reminds them of the approaching end of their salvation. He says, "Knowing the time, that now it

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

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

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Bread of Life

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

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

“BEHOLD, HE PRAYETH”

“Behold, he prayeth”—is there anything really striking about that? Ought not all lovers of righteousness to pray in times of need and extremity? Ah, yes! but this occasion is different—and extraordinary!

The speaker was the Risen Lord; the hearer, Ananias; the subject, the persecuting Saul; the place Damascus. (Acts 9. 11).

Some few days prior to this episode, Saul had left Jerusalem, armed with Sanhedrin authority, and accompanied by an escort of Temple guards, for Damascus in the far north, to apprehend and conduct in bonds to Jerusalem every follower of the Lord he could lay violent hands upon. Tidings of his coming had preceded him, and the little company of believing saints, knowing what had overtaken brethren in Jerusalem, awaited with dread the arrival of this wolf into their midst, knowing there would be neither clemency nor mercy for any whom he might find of that “way”.

But as he rode on expectantly, exultantly, the thing which a watchful Providence had ordained took place! The blistering mid-day sun turned pale as a heavenly radiance stepped across its path! The very tick of time ordained by Providence had come, and He who angled to take this fish came nigh to sweep up his “catch”! The days for “playing out the line” had expired, and One from the Heavenly Throne had come near to wield the net.

How piercingly penetrating the challenge request, intended for no ear but his own! *“Why persecutest thou Me”*. . . *“Who art thou, Lord”*. . . *“I am Jesus”*. . . Then it was true, unquestionably true, what these men in Jerusalem had said about the Nazarene! Oh, the horror of the situation in which he now found himself; he had separated man and wife; he had violently compelled some to blaspheme; he had consented to send one good man to untimely death. And here, enclothed with more than solar-radiance, was the exalted Lord and Master of the suffering flock!

Gone was the gaiety and self-assurance of the morning hours, as now with blinded eyes and smitten conscience he drags along to make entrance to the city where co-conspirator and victim alike await his coming!

Three days and nights, without food or drink, the inner conflict raged. No former friend or counsellor could be of help in this hour of need. All his past life, particularly the recent past, would rise up before him and taunt him with its futility! Despite

intense zeal, he had missed the objects of his soul’s desire . . . yet Stephen, a man he could not recall to life, had found all the best it had to give.

Back and forth, from the old things to the new, from the authority of Moses to the exaltation of the Christ, his poor struggling mind would pass, as he attempted to weigh up the values each appeared to possess, until at last his wearied frame, faint from lack of food, and spent from its internal strain, sank to its knees, and faltering lips and stammering tongue began to pray!

He had capitulated; the besieging Lord had stormed the fortress of his soul, and was now triumphant there! The battle had been fought and lost . . . and won!

And thus the compassionate and dominating Lord, desirous of assuaging every needless pain, commissions Ananias to *“go to the street called Straight, . . . and enquire . . . for a man of Tarsus called Saul, for behold he prayeth”*. *“Behold he prayeth”*—not in the ancient city of Jerusalem, not with priest or sacrifice attending him, but here, in his darkened room, in this city of Damascus, and with no comfort or help at hand.

What a prayer that must have been, as all the flood-gates of his soul were broken down, and all its bitter contents gushed forth in penitence and remorse! How the angels who had watched the long-drawn conflict must have rejoiced at a sinner so sincerely repenting of his former misguided way! And who can tell, or even attempt to tell, what that prostrated form and penitential prayer meant to the supervising Lord?

Never thenceforward throughout his whole life did the memories of those days and nights fade from recollection—they were not intended so to fade—for, first to himself, and then, through him to countless thousands of a later day, it was intended to teach that *“Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners”* *“of whom I am chief, howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me, as chief, might Jesus Christ show forth all his long-suffering for an example of them which should hereafter believe on him to eternal life”* (1 Tim. 1. 15-16).

Not always has the Lord of life and glory come forth in that majestic way to intercept and turn to himself those who misguidedly sought the “best” along wrong and improper lines, but that He has providentially intercepted them in his own acceptable way is a truth to which thousands could testify.

That there is an act of Providence in the direction of a word, a phrase, a tract, a book, a visit, a journey, or even an illness, is a fact none conversant with his way would dare deny. Thousands on thousands could joyfully say:

"I know not why God's wondrous grace

To me has been made known,

Or why, unworthy as I am,

He claimed me for his own."

It is not given to everyone to plumb the depths of the subteranean experience as did our brother

Paul, for few could withstand the strain. But unnumbered thousands have learned through him, of a Saviour's love and long-suffering, ere, in their own waywardness, they bent in lowly penitence before him and prayed their first untutored prayer.

Paul never ceased, throughout life's little day, to remind himself of that tender love which followed him all those headstrong, wayward days, till at last it broke in upon him and brought him face to face with the stern realities of the situation—and won his heart and soul for ever.

“..... AND PETER”

*A story of the
tenderness of Jesus*

In the grey light of early dawn three women approached timidly to a rock-hewn vault on an errand of love. They had come, as early as the Sabbath laws and the darkness of night allowed, to complete a work performed in haste before the Sabbath day began. When the One they loved and followed had been lowered from the Cross and borne to His quiet resting-place, these ministering souls had enfolded in the winding-sheets some small supply of aromatic spice. The near approach of the day of rest had cut short the embalming work, and the body of the Lord had been laid aside and left until the law permitted this service to the dead to be resumed (Luke 23. 56). With astonishment they found the sealing stone removed; by whom, or how, they did not know. Peering into the dark recess, they thought to see the swathed recumbent form of their beloved Lord, upon which, with busy hands, they hoped at length to complete the needed work. Entering within, they found not the body of the Lord, although the grave-clothes lay in their place. To their surprise a living angel from on high replaced the holy dead, whose radiant form struck wonderment and awe into their hearts.

Sensing their fear, the angel spoke, and told them that their Master was alive again, just as He had told them in earlier days. “Go tell these things to his disciples, and Peter, and tell them He will see them in Galilee.” “..... and Peter! . . .” “To his disciples, and Peter . . .” as though, for his grievous sin, Peter would think he had now no right to esteem himself the Lord's disciple.

These were the angel's words, but they revealed the Master's love. He who told the angel to say that He proposed to meet them in Galilee was He from

whom those two comforting words had come. Jesus did not forget the broken anguished heart which wept so sorely at its fall. Jesus had known his man prior to those searching days. “When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren” said Jesus to his then braggart friend (Luke 22. 32). Jesus knew his man, even though he failed and fell, and knew how to soothe and heal his broken heart.

But the Lord did more than that. Somewhere before that first day was done, the Lord had found Peter alone, and disclosed himself to Peter's tearstained eyes. “*He was seen of Cephas*” (1 Cor. 15. 5). “The Lord is risen indeed *and hath appeared to Simon*”, replied “the eleven” (Luke 24. 34) to the returned ones from Emmaus.

What passed between the Lord and the stricken penitent is veiled in sacred obscurity, but who can doubt that no words of chiding or reproof passed from the Master's lips, but words of soothing tenderness that fell like healing balm on Peter's wounded heart.

“..... and Peter!” Let us write it now “and John! . . . and Mary! . . . and Frank! . . . and Harriet! . . . and . . .!”—every one who in times of strain has failed and fallen to the dust. It needs not to have been Peter's grievous sin, but each one's own particular slip—that rapier word! that chilling glance! that wounding act! that seeming wrong! sad sequence of a moment's lack of thought.

When the chastened heart, in retrospect, looks back upon its hasty fall, let it remember that a watchful eye has seen it all, and in assuring answer to its tears will say again, “..... and Peter” “..... and John” “..... and Harriet” “and . . . and . . .” And so He keeps his “own”, by his own word, in His own way.



BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

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

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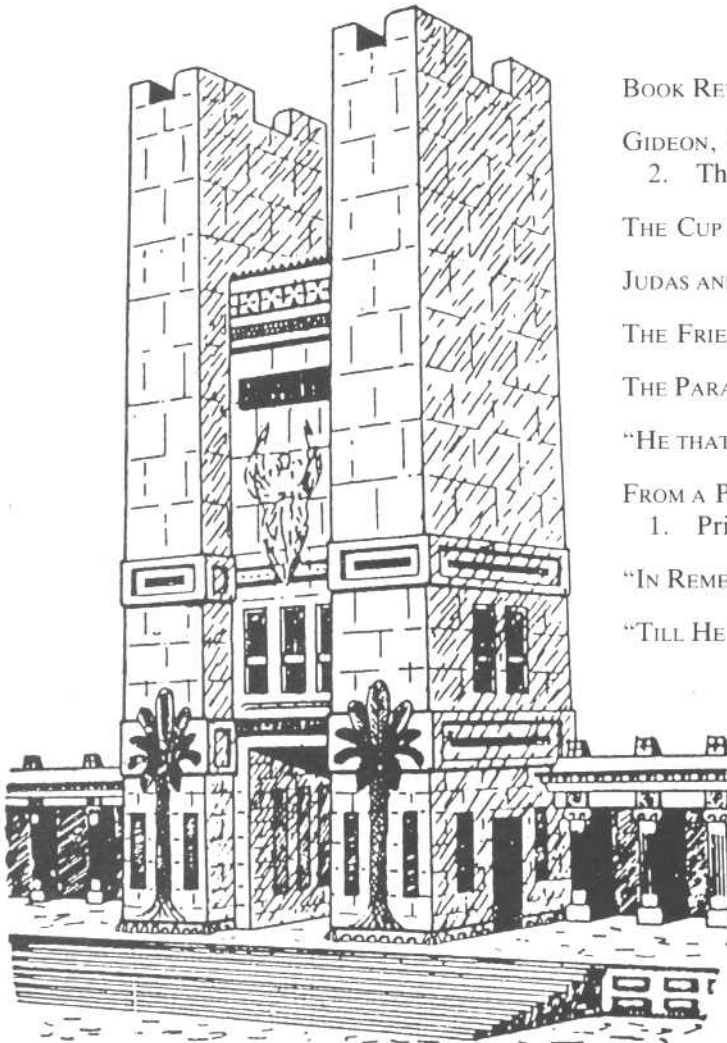
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*Lift up your heads, O ye gates
And be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors,
And the King of glory shall come in.*

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24 January 1992

We regret to say that there will be considerable delay in dealing with all correspondence arriving here since the middle of December due to illness, which has compelled the closing down of our work for the time being. It is thought that it will be several months before we can clear arrears and be back to normal. Some urgent matters will be dealt with in the meantime. We do ask your indulgence with the assurance that all letters will be dealt with eventually.

Bible Study Monthly

FOUNDED 1924

This journal is published for the promotion of Bible knowledge, maintaining the historical accuracy of the Scriptures and the validity of their miraculous and prophetic content viewed in the light of modern under-

standing. It stands for the pre-millennial Advent of our Lord and his reign of peace and justice on earth. It is supported entirely by the voluntary gifts of its readers and all such gifts are sincerely appreciated.

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BOOK REVIEW

"Look for the ancient paths". Beresford King-Smith. 92 pp paperback, 16 maps 16 illustrations. Bethany Enterprises 1991 £4.95 (10 dollars U.S.A.) inclusive of postage. ISBN 1 873961 1 00 8.

An investigation of the route of the Exodus based upon the premise that the events as related are historically true. It recognises that "many men, many minds" have evolved a variety of possible routes from Egypt to Canaan and the author presents the results of his study as the most likely, whilst admitting the difficulties. As to time, he comes down on the side of the modern 20th century view of the 18th dynasty. (There is a misprint on page 14 where, in quoting Dr Adam Rutherford's "Bible Chronology", the entry to Egypt is given as 1883 BC instead of 1853 as in Rutherford, but this is not germane to the theme of the book.

It is perhaps a pity that the 1883-1900 independent researches of Edouard Naville, Prof. G. F. Wright and Sir J. W. Dawson into the geological and historical evidence for an ancient northern extension of the Gulf of Suez to Lake Timsah was not included in his treatment of the site of the Red Sea crossing. Whereas the present level of the area concerned is about thirty feet above sea level they found that in Mosaic times it was about ten feet below, and a shallow sea extended from the present head of the Gulf all the way to Lake Timsah. A canal dating

back to the 5th century BC connected this northern end to the Nile so that ships passed from the Red Sea to the Mediterranean. The Roman seaport of Klysma stood at its Red Sea entrance and in 1883 Naville found, nine miles inland, a Roman milestone in situ, giving nine miles to Klysma, which seems fairly conclusive. The Emperor Hadrian was the last one to deepen this canal against the rising land, after which it was abandoned.

A valid warning is given on p. 44 not to identify a site by its present climatic condition. Climates change. Sinai was well forested in the 15th cent BC which means heavier rainfall. The scanty palmtrees and water supply of Elim to-day would not have lasted long for two or three million Israelites.

The journey to Sinai and thence to the Promised Land is carefully analysed with a great deal of attention to the probable location of each site and an excellent tabular statement setting out the steps of the journey, the time scale, and relevant Scriptural allusions. Altogether a good statement of the arguments pro and con where substantial differences exist, and useful to students of the period.

Available direct from the publishers, Bethany Enterprises, Moorwood Lane, Nuneaton, Warks., CV10 0QH Eng. NOT available from Hounslow.

NOTICES

Chesham One-day Convention. The usual gathering on Sunday, 14 June, at the Malt House, Elgiva Lane, Chesham, Bucks. Programmes and details from F. Binns, 102 Broad Street, Chesham, Bucks., HP5 3ED.

Renewals. Renewal of readership for 1992 is now due for readers in the 3000 and 4100 ranges and a pink renewal slip is inserted in this issue for this purpose except where renewal has already been made, the early return of which will be appreciated.

Acknowledgment of gifts. We are finding it necessary to restrict office work to come within our abilities and in pursuance of this aim would say that we shall not send formal acknowledgment of gifts received under £10. Nevertheless our appreciation of smaller gifts remains unchanged as is also the case whether any gift at all is received provided we are assured of the reader's continued interest.

Office delays. Despite our optimistic forecast in the Jan/Feb issue we are experiencing further reverses in the conduct of the

journal. Both editorial and office routine facilities have been affected by illness and shortage of "manpower" and it is evident that we shall have to ask for your indulgence for a considerable time yet. This issue may prove to be several weeks late in despatch and replies to letters even more. We can only do our best and reflect that, Scripturally, it has always been true that "the harvest is great but the labourers are few".

Gone from us



Bro. Harold Charlton (Milborne Port)
Bro. Charles Sears (Milborne Port)



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

GIDEON, MAN OF VALOUR

2. The Sword of the Lord

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

expected to carry home the spoils of the raid on Israel's land. Now all these things were left behind to be a spoil for Israel. So they pressed on, looking back from time to time only to see those flickering torches and hear those piercing trumpets as the three hundred pursued them through the valley.

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

were slain by the now thoroughly aroused Israelite population.

The significance of this apparent outcome of the debacle lies in the demonstration it affords of Gideon's implicit faith in God's promise that He would deliver. Gideon was so sure he would rout the invaders that he stationed the Ephraimites along the river in advance to ensure that they did not get away. He evidently intended to make certain that the Midianites would never invade again. And they did not. The settled nations, Moab, Ammon, Edom, Syria, do figure in later struggles with Israel but not Midian or the peoples of the East. The victory was complete, and it never needed to be repeated.

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

Such wholesale massacre, however, does involve the question as to what extent the Lord was responsible. Did God in fact command and empower Gideon to embark upon this career of carnage and destruction. The first hasty answer in most minds might well be "yes" on the strength of the angelic visit to Gideon and the Divine assurance that by his instrumentality Israel was to be delivered. A deeper study of the narrative, however, suggests flaws in this conclusion. There were two phases of this conflict; first the putting of the Midianites to flight by the three hundred men, without the use of arms but solely by trumpets, torches and pitchers, and second, the slaughter of the host which was effected, not only by the three hundred but all the other thousands of Israelites who at first had been eliminated from the campaign. It is carefully to be noted that the Lord's instructions were limited entirely to the use of three hundred men with their trumpets and torches, with no mention of other armed force. The remaining thirty-odd thousand were expressly ruled out. These, said the Lord, "*are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel say . . . mine own hand hath saved me*". With the panic flight of the enemy the deliverance was accomplished; had there been no opposing force of

Ephraimites at Berth-barah they would have got clean across Jordan and away. They would not have come back that year at any rate. The Lord would have fulfilled his promise to deliver, and that without the use of weapons of war. It is significant that this is as far as the Lord's instructions went; there is nothing said about bringing back the rejected thirty thousand and in fact He did definitely say that He did not want them to participate in the victory. It might well be therefore that this part of the campaign was not of the Lord's command and measurably heedless of his will. Having got the enemy on the run, Israel could not resist the temptation to finish them off in traditional fashion.

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

For when those thousands came back to their own land rejoicing in their victory and began the work of sharing out the spoil gathered from the Midianites' abandoned camp, it is evident they had completely forgotten the part God had played in this whole affair and were crediting the outcome to their own valour and power, just as the Lord had foretold in ch. 7.2. "*Rule thou over us*" they said to Gideon "*both thou and thy son, and thy son's son also; for thou hast delivered us from the hand of Midian*" (ch. 8.22). How evident it is that their success had gone to their heads and they were now dreaming of a nation organised on a basis of military strength and governed by a king like the nations around them. Several centuries later Israel was to ask Samuel to make them a king for the

same reason and it is not always realised that the first attempt of Israel to choose themselves a king was here in the days of Gideon. So soon after their deliverance were they forgetting the basic principle of their nationhood, that the Lord was their king and they themselves all brethren together. So it has been, sadly, so many times with Christian believers through the centuries, the urge to set up visible leaders who will head a group or company gathered around some particular thesis or ideal, which itself takes on such an importance that the headship and guidance of Christ is forgotten and the power of the Holy Spirit in the community becomes submerged under the more immediate appeal of human power and policies. "*Make us gods to go before us*" was the cry of Israel in the wilderness; the cry is still raised and with equally lamentable results.

It is to the honour of Gideon that he flatly declined their offer. "*I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you: the Lord shall rule over you*". He, at least, knew that the survival of the nation depended on their allegiance to God and the Covenant, and he would not be a party to any innovation which denied that basic principle. He was prepared to remain a military leader, a "judge" in the sense of this term in the Book of Judges—the word really means one who stands up to defend the right and deliver the oppressed and was applied to all the deliverers of Israel from enemy oppression in the period preceding the monarchy—and so classed himself with Joshua, Othniel and others who before him had delivered

the nation but accepted no election to high office nor suffered the creation of a hereditary kingly dynasty in Israel. Gideon had been an instrument in the Lord's hands for the deliverance of Israel; he gave all the glory to the Lord and took nothing for himself and with that he was content.

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

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

To be concluded

Fruit of Evil

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

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

THE CUP OF OUR LORD

"The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" (John 18, 11).

The incident that drew this remark from the Lord's lips is a well-remembered one. It was at the time of his arrest in the Garden. The little party was leaving Gethsemane, and in so doing approached and met the party of soliders that was on its way to effect the arrest. Simon Peter, having possession of a sword, and burning with zeal to defend his Master, drew it, and struck the High Priest's servant. He succeeded only in cutting off his ear, whereupon Jesus commanded him to put up his sword, forbidding him to strike further blow in his defence. *"Put up thy sword into the sheath; the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?"* Thus did He indicate that this Cup of which He spoke was an experience which He was called upon to encounter and endure.

The Cup is figurative. Quite a few Scriptures refer to it in this way. To drink of this cup, the cup of our Lord, signifies acceptance of, and willingness to endure, certain experiences as a Christian and as one of his followers. Jesus asked the two sons of Zebedee *"Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptised with the baptism that I am baptised with?"* Quite confidently they answered him *"We are able"* whereupon Jesus rejoined *"Yes shall indeed drink of my cup, and be baptised with the baptism that I am baptised with"* (vs. 23) and in saying that, He was telling them, although they knew it not at the time, that they were to taste of inward affliction and desertion and bear their share of outward affliction with him. That was a typical example of many such little words that Jesus had with his disciples as He tried to prepare their minds for the life of patient endurance that was to be theirs in future days, after He had left them to return to his Father.

It is significant that the shadow of the Cross had fallen upon Jesus as He sat with his little company around the table in that upper room. As we read the accounts of the events that led up to this time we can see something of what Jesus endured, as, for instance, his setting his face "steadfastly" to go to Jerusalem, knowing full well what was before him of shame and injustice and suffering and death. There is the human touch of the suggestion that his brethren and family go on before, so that He could slip into the city unnoticed. Then the public excitement of his later entry in kingly fashion, when riding upon an ass He presented

himself in formal fashion to Israel as their King. *"Hosanna to the Son of David"* they shouted *"Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord!"*—that picture fades, and we have another; the Lord is washing the disciples' feet, a lesson for them and for us. Finally the betrayal, and the arrest, and the denial by Peter, all just as Jesus had foretold it. All these things became part of the Cup which our beloved Lord must needs drain to the end.

It was the concern of Jesus to clarify in the minds of his disciples, as much as possible, the things that He must suffer, and so to prepare them for the worst. They were so slow of heart and mind to receive these things in those carefree days before the event. Like Peter, they all wanted to say "this shall not be unto thee" and dismiss the subject. But Jesus continued to turn their minds to these things. Can we not see him now, sitting there in the upper room with his disciples? Can we not see him performing that symbolic act that gathered up the meaning of what He had been doing and would be doing in pouring out his soul unto death? He took a Cup, and when He had thanked God for it He gave it to them! He made the wine in that Cup a symbol, a symbol that would best symbolise what He was giving to them spiritually.

This then is our participation with him in his experiences—His Cup! The Apostle Paul reminds us of this in 1 Cor. 10, 16 *"The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ?"* In this mystic common-sharing we partake with him of the fruit of the Vine. Into that Cup which He held had gone all the experiences of the mystic Vine in the past—for He is that Vine of which we are the branches (Jno. 15.5) and we can very truthfully say that the soul or life of the Vine was there in the Cup. The essence of its fruitage was there in the Cup. Many things had worked together to produce that fruitage. There was, first of all, the kind of soil in which the Vine grew. Then there was the attention of the husbandman and the oft-times pruning, that it bring forth good fruit. The storms which beat over it, the sunshine and the rain, all had their part to play. Finally there was the crushing of the grapes in the winepress that the rich juice might be extracted and afterward become wine. All these things had gone to determine and enrich the quality of the wine which Jesus now was giving to his disciples. Everything of the past in the growth and development of the Vine or the experi-

ences that befel the Vine had gone into the Cup. Here is a lesson for us! Since we covenanted to be footstep followers of Jesus and branches of the true Vine, all the experiences we encounter, whether on the hilltop or in the valley, whether bitter or sweet, are necessary to the triumphant completion of our calling. All are planned to work out some necessary fruitage of character in our hearts and lives.

At the Memorial Supper Jesus was putting to their lips an invisible cup of which the material cup was but a symbol. Into that invisible cup all of the past experiences of his life had been gathered. All that Jesus had said, and suffered, and prayed, and done, and was, went into the chalice which He was now putting to their lips. Thus they drank of his life. Thus they accepted him and thus they identified themselves with him in that acceptance. No wonder Jesus said, afterwards, as they were walking together to Gethsemane *"I am the true Vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away, and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit"* (Jno. 15. 1). So He came to the great climax *"herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit"*.

In the silent years at Nazareth, when Jesus lived in obscurity, maybe working and helping at the carpenter's bench, his hands rough with toil, we can visualise him dealing with the commonplace things of every day. He must have known the hardship of poverty, the dull and narrow life of a country village, and perhaps the responsibility of supporting a family of younger brothers and sisters after the death of their father. But with the vision of the future all the time in his heart, unuttered though it was, he conquered the commonplace things and prepared himself a way to take the Cup. Many of us, perhaps most of us, have to live out our lives in the same dull obscurity, battling with the business of making a living, toiling in some factory, field, office or home, dealing with the sordid and scarring things. Yet all the time there is a vision of something better and nobler held in the heart unexpressed, the vision of our glorified Lord, and our being together with him. We are captivated with his word. He has put the chalice to our lips and we too drink of his victory over the commonplace.

Now Jesus lays aside the commonplace things of life and goes out to proclaim his message, and to enter more deeply into the soul of the people. It was in this mood that He came *"from Galilee to*

Jordan unto John, to be baptised of him" (Matt. 3. 13). He had been baptised into the world's toil; He was *"tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin"* (Heb. 4. 15). Now He would be baptised into the world's SIN. Isaiah foresaw this, saying *"Surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted"*. (Isa. 53. 4, 5, 6). John is calling a nation to repentance, his throbbing words smiting the hearts of the people, and they come to his stream, the Jordan, for the baptism of repentance. Now Jesus enters that stream. He, with conscience unstained and character untarnished! He, who needed no repentance! He, the holy, the harmless, the undefiled! He, the sinless, enters that line, that queue, waiting for baptism. She may be a harlot standing ahead of him and he a publican who is following behind him; the publicans and the harlots believed John. Jesus became one of them and was baptised into John's baptism of repentance! The identification is complete! He has taken the sinner's place! *"For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."* (2 Cor. 5. 21). All this was a portion in his Cup; especially so is it for us and on our behalf.

There came a reaction to this identification of himself with the sinner. Jesus left men and the habitations of men and continued the struggle in the wilderness. Was *this* the way to complete, absolute, identification? Yes! This was the poured-out Cup that the Father handed to his Son. *"Jesus, being full of the Holy Spirit . . . was led by the Spirit into the wilderness."* (Luke 4. 1). For forty days He faced the issues, and then came hunger, and with it came the first insidious suggestion.

"You need not go back! You are the Son of God; that is enough. Stay out here, feed yourself by miracle, and live as the miraculous Son of God." It was the voice of the Tempter!

The temptation to live apart, to feed oneself on spiritual miracle, is one of the most real temptations of the spiritual life. To hear and receive the approbation of man on account of the things you discover from God is seductive indeed. Jesus brushed the suggestion aside. He would not be content with being the Son of God; He would also be the Son of Man. He would live, not merely by the food the earth brings forth, but by every word that proceeds out of the word of the Father, and that meant, for him, identification with men and the redemption of men at great cost to himself. That was the Cup! *"The Son of Man came . . . to*

give his life a ransom for many." (Matt. 20. 28).

The Tempter suggested another means of proving his authority. If you must go back, why stand down with the people? Why not rise to a pinnacle? Your way is too costly! Why not worship me *and take possession now?*" Says Jesus, "*It is written, thou shalt worship the Lord thy God and him only shalt thou serve.*" He put this suggestion aside also; He knew that the way He had chosen would drive him into a position that would finally mean crucifixion. He had been baptised between two sinners. This choice meant that He would now be crucified between two thieves. But He held to his resolve to be the Son of Man and bear all that men bore, and more.

From this Jesus went straight to the synagogue at Nazareth and announced his programme "*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; . . . to preach the acceptable year of the Lord*" (Luke 4. 16, 21). This is the Son of Man speaking. This announcement of his programme brought surprise and delighted wonder from his fellow-townsmen until He went on and revealed to them how wide his message really was. It was as wide as the human race—God cares as much for the Gentiles as for the Jew. There were many lepers and widows in Israel but even so the prophets went to others, Gentiles, a widow of Sarepta, and Naaman the Syrian. That changed matters! They arose in anger and led him to the brow of the hill with the intention of casting him headlong over the precipice; but He, passing through the midst of them, and in the majesty of his bearing holding them powerless, went his way.

All this went into the Cup. When we, too, are called and commissioned, and the cold prejudices close in and endeavour to quench our spirits, let us drink of *his* calm and courage, and so, passing through the midst of them, go our way. Let us fulfil the heavenly vision no matter at what cost to ourselves. Like the Apostle, let us "press toward the mark for the prize of the High Calling of God in Christ Jesus." (Phil. 3. 14). "*This one thing I do*"—that is the keynote.

But after this there came a season during which Jesus was immensely popular. The multitudes hung upon his words, words that fell like dew upon their thirsty souls. The healed ones went everywhere telling of his power and compassion. And the people found in him a new authority, the authority of REALITY. When they saw him breaking bread to the crowds in the wilderness

they came and tried to make him a king by force. That was how it was that Jesus, perceiving their intention, withdrew himself to the mountains again. He would hold to the high purpose of the Father's Will for him even though it meant crucifixion. The EASY way to power was resolutely put away; He would take the long road to his Calvary. All the decisiveness and completion of consecration went into the Cup when He rejected a throne for a Cross.

When these moments come to us, brethren, when we are offered the easy and dazzling way and we willingly choose the hard way, then we too drink of the chalice into which this trial has gone. Surely it is then that we find we are ready for further trials, with Jesus our Lord. Then it is that we can say with the Apostle, "I (am) determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified." (1 Cor. 2. 2).

There was an occasion when Jesus, beholding the city lying in all its splendour and magnificence before him, paused on the side of the mount and wept over the city. Think of the courage of that hour when He bade them "take these things from my Father's house" and drove them out. All this, too, went into the Cup. As with Jesus, so his followers need a stout heart combined with gentility of disposition. "*Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.*" One writer has said "*I love the Christ of the searching eye, the blessing hand, the tender, terrible prophet pronouncing woes to the city and then weeping over it. I love the Christ that allowed the returning storm to beat upon himself on the Cross so as to complete our redemption*". Let us drink of these qualities and be strong, for we shall need to be bold as a lion albeit as meek as a lamb.

Seated with his disciples in the upper room, and knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, knowing that He himself had come from God and was returning to God, He rose from supper, laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel began to wash the disciples' feet. He was so conscious of greatness that He dared to be humble. Into his Cup had gone majesty of soul linked with lowly service. You, my dear brethren, who share the dignity and honour of Sonship with him, you have need to learn what constitutes true kingliness. It is "the power to bend and serve". As James says (4. 10) "*Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord and he shall lift you up*".

Gethsemane! All the pain, the agony, the spiritual loneliness of that hour go into the Cup. Was He afraid to die? Hardly; it was with that

intention that He came, to lay down his life. Is it surprising that the Redeemer, who in his determination to go on to the end despite what wicked men might do, seemed to be looking in on men at their worst, should ask "if it be possible, let *this* cup pass from me". This is the hardest thing that any reformer or bringer of new ideas has to face; that although his idea is light to those who can receive it, it is darkness to others who are willingly blind. But there is no other way. This is the Cup that is poured. The tragedy and triumph is not in the agony but in the out-come. Calm and collected He stands and says "Arise, let us be going . . . he is at hand that betrayeth me". **ALL THAT WENT INTO THE CUP!** Those of us who meet our lesser Gethsemanes drink from that chalice into which the richness of that hour had gone, and we too can say "Arise, my soul, let us be going to meet our Cross". Having drunk, we meet it with calm.

Standing before Pilate, arrayed in mock royalty, He afforded the Roman soldiers a supreme opportunity to show their contempt for the Jews. Putting a crown of thorns upon his head, a stick in his hand for a sceptre, they hailed him as King of the Jews and then spat in his face. They had often wanted to do that to the Jews, now they would do it to their King. The racial contempt that was directed toward the men who were crying for his blood He bore on their behalf. He was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. All of that went into his Cup.

He heard his words twisted and distorted to other meanings. "*I will destroy this temple that is made with hands and in three days I will build another made without hands.*" He was being crucified on mis-quotation and He was not nervously anxious to explain. He let it go. He could wait. He knew that every lie would break itself on the truth, and He answered not a word. The Governor marvelled! And this went into the Cup. "*Let us consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.*" (Heb. 12. 3). Those of us who have had our words mis-quoted, our best actions misunderstood, our best motives misinterpreted, and have suffered, if we drink of this Cup into which patient triumph has gone, and share with Jesus this poise of heart and resignation to our Father's Will, we shall say "Am I not to drink of the Cup my Father has handed me, with thankfulness?" He is nailed to the Cross! His good name is taken away; He is a malefactor. His dis-

ciples have fled; He is alone in his agony, beaten back, so to speak, into the dark until it seems that God too has gone—for from his lips comes the cry "*My God, My God, Why hast Thou forsaken me?*" Everything seems gone.

But not quite!

Two words remain; "**MY GOD**". They could not snatch *them* from his lips and heart. In quiet confidence He says "*Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.*" Nothing more bitter could have gone into the Cup!

A tomb held Jesus—but not for long. The most glorious fact of human history was yet to go into the Cup. Out of that tomb He arose, laid aside his grave clothes, and came forth triumphant and resplendent. He is risen!

My dear brethren: IF into that Cup has gone everything that life can possibly meet:—

Its commonplaces; its obscurity; its toil; its temptations; its blind prejudices; its bid for compromise; its lonely determination; its Gethsemanes; its hours before unjust judgment seats; its Cross-forsakenness; its death:

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there has also gone into it the most complete triumph that can possibly come. *He arose!* Nothing else now matters. **GOD'S LAST WORD IS RESURRECTION.**

Let life do its best, or worst, this saving truth will be at the end of each one sharing with Jesus in this Cup. The life of Jesus and the Cross of Jesus raises every question about life that can be raised and raises them in the most acute form. The word "**WHY**" upon the lips of Jesus as He hung upon the Cross epitomised all the questions that ever trembled upon the lips of perplexed humanity. **WHY** does God permit evil? **WHY?** If there is a God, **WHY** this, and **WHY** that? The Resurrection answers them all. *God's last word is resurrection.* That is the finale of his work for mankind and it is in the Cup. Jesus prayed "Glorify thou me with the glory which I had with thee before the world WAS". When He had taken the Cup He thanked God for it. He took it all as from the Father's hand. *He thanked him for it, and lo! everything was transformed.* We all have to bear our cross; let us do it thankfully; for only those who have learned triumphantly to thank God for it all, can turn life from a senseless suffering into a sacrament. Let us each and all decide for ourselves "*the Cup which my Father hath given me, SHALL I NOT DRINK IT?*"

JUDAS AND THE POTTER'S FIELD

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

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

Who did purchase the field, Judas or the priests? What was the real origin of its name, "the field of blood", the fact that it was the scene of Judas' tragic death or that it had been purchased with blood money? At first sight it seems that the accounts are contradictory and cannot both be true. As with so many apparently contradictory passages in the Bible, the two accounts can be understood perfectly harmoniously if the entire transaction is reconstructed. The first point to notice is that the priests "covenanted" with Judas for thirty pieces of silver if he would betray Jesus (Matt. 26.14). This implies that he would receive the money when he had fulfilled his obligation. As soon as Jesus was taken into custody and brought to the High Priest's house where the Sanhedrin was assembled, Judas would be calling upon some appointed official who would pay him his money. This would have been between nine and twelve o'clock at night; by six the next morning the illegal trial was over and Jesus on his way to Pilate. Now it is in the highest degree unlikely that Judas, during those few early morning hours, would find anyone willing to negotiate the sale of a piece of land—and on the eve of the Passover to boot! Whenever Judas agreed to buy the land, it was not that night. But before the second trial began before Pilate, Judas was back with the money. It had been in his possession for less than six hours.

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

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

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

What was his purpose in buying the field anyway? The motives of Judas in the whole matter of the betrayal have always been shrouded in obscurity for no real lead is given us in the Gospels. The most reasonable explanation is that he realised full well the supernatural powers possessed by Jesus, was convinced that He was the Messiah, but was sorely perplexed at his hero's refusal to use his powers to dispossess both the Roman occupying authorities and the ecclesiastical powers and establish himself by force as King of Israel, so fulfilling the ancient prophecies. By scheming to put Jesus in a position where He would be compelled to use

his power to avoid condemnation and death, Judas would have precipitated the establishment of the Kingdom and more or less urged his Leader into the kingly position. If this was in fact the motive of the betrayal then this business of buying land might have been connected with some idea of providing a site for some great dream palace suitable for his king, or an arena from which the ceremonious announcement of the Kingdom could be made. No one can know for sure, but that this field was intended for something that had relation to Jesus and his assumption of sovereignty after He had delivered himself in some spectacular fashion from his captors may well be the solution of the enigma.

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

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

rocky ground and was dashed to pieces. Peter recounted what was an accredited fact in all Jerusalem.

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

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

It is when continued trust in the Lord and his many responsive providences in our lives have ripened into precious personal acquaintance and intimacy that we learn to delight in him. It is when heart answers to heart, when pleading prayer brings recognised answers of peace, when the Divine love and care have been clearly seen in the guidance of our way, that we can recognise the abiding presence with us of the Father and the Son.

Then, however dark may be our way, however severe may be the storm that rages about us, the thought of Divine protection is ever with us, so that as the children of the Lord we are never in despair; though cast down, we are not destroyed; though persecuted, we are never forsaken. We know our Father's hand is ever at the helm, that his love and care are sure unfailing.

THE “FISH” ANAGRAM

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

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

The Greek word for fish is IXThYS, these five letters being the initials of the words in the expression:

IESOUS XRISTOS THEOV YIOS SOTER
JESUS CHRIST, SON-OF-GOD, SAVIOUR.

THE FRIENDSHIP OF PAUL AND LUKE

Saul of Tarsus in Cilicia was a Jew of the tribe of Benjamin and a well educated Pharisee (Acts 22. 3; Phil. 3. 5). He rigorously persecuted the Christian Church for a short period and then was dramatically converted to the Christian faith. So important was the 'conversion' that it was recorded three times in the book of the Acts of the Apostles. Paul was in no doubt that God had commissioned him to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles. Reference is made to this in the Lord's instructions to Ananias at Damascus when he said "*Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles.*" (Acts 9. 15). Further evidence of the Church's acceptance of this directive is given in the record of the Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15. When Paul appeared before Festus and Agrippa he spoke of his conversion and told them of his vision of the Lord and his ministry to the Gentiles. Luke, the writer of the Acts, gives no reason why Saul's name was changed to Paul. It has been suggested that it was to distinguish clearly the new apostle's complete change from the Hebrew religion to the Christian faith. Others have thought that the change occurred because he was beginning a preaching ministry among predominantly Greek speaking Gentiles, since the name 'Paul' is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew name 'Saul'. For twenty years until his death in Rome, Paul fulfilled that commission. His dedication to the cause of Christ made him an enemy of the Jewish leaders and almost everywhere he travelled he suffered much for the faith. Although so ardent for the preaching of the Gospel and a great worker in a pastoral role, he was not always popular among the Churches. In addition to persecution, he suffered considerably from ill health. His remark about a 'thorn in the flesh' in 2 Cor. 12. 7 is usually regarded as a reference to a bodily ailment. If he was a semi-invalid, then his long journeys in strange places with frequent changes of food and water must have been troublesome to his physique. Paul's whole life was so completely committed to the establishment and growth of the young churches that personal feelings were excluded and we only catch fleeting glimpses of the sickness and weariness which must have afflicted him.

That Luke was a Gentile is betrayed by his name, and Paul's words in Col. 4. 11 when he wrote of his fellow workers, excluding Luke from the "circumcision". Three verses further on Paul

describes Luke as the "beloved physician". It is this verse more than any other in the New Testament which has provoked interest in the friendship between the two men. Traditionally he was said to be a man of Antioch in Syria and he certainly gives an interesting account of the early days of the church in that city. The anti-Marcionite prologue to some Latin versions of the Third gospel have added weight to this tradition. Eusebius and Jerome confirm it. Other scholars have believed that Luke was a Greek from Philippi, the city of an important Greek school of medicine. Luke appears to have spent several years there between Paul's second and third missionary journeys.

Most early and later scholarship confirms ancient tradition that Luke was the writer of the Third gospel and the Acts of the Apostles. These two books, which form about a quarter of the New Testament, are now regarded as very valuable documents in addition to their great spiritual content. Luke's gospel reveals the love of God shown in Jesus Christ and directed towards all mankind. The 'Acts' demonstrates how "*Christ was for the world, and by the faith and courage of one man above all others.*" Luke did not disclose his own identity in his writings but in the travels of Paul the story is told partly in the third person and partly in the second person. From the use of the words 'we' and 'us' it has been concluded that the writer was actually a participant in the events recorded. Luke may have met Paul first at Antioch during that time of rapid spiritual and numerical growth of the Church just prior to the first missionary journey of Paul and Barnabas as they sallied forth into Cyprus and Asia Minor. This has support from the 'Western text' rendering of Acts 11. 26 'when we were assembled'. The evidence of the more general text is the introduction of the 'we' section as Paul, Silas and Timothy were driven by the Holy Spirit towards Europe (Acts 16. 10) "*immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia concluding that God called us to preach the Gospel to them.*" Men of differing outlook and background and ages, yet it is a picture of unity and co-operation as reflected in the epistles.

After Philippi, the Acts account reverts to the third person and Luke did not rejoin Paul until the apostle was heading back to Jerusalem at the end of the third journey. He seems to have remained fairly close to Paul during the detention at Caesarea and accompanied him to Rome for the trial before

Nero. The description in the second person is retained until almost the end of the Acts record in chapter 28.

Sir William Ramsey in his book *'St. Paul the Traveller'* made the suggestion that Luke was the Macedonian who Paul saw in his dream, calling him to go over to Macedonia to help them (Acts 16). It would certainly be interesting to know how Paul identified the man he saw in his dream for Macedonians are not easily distinguished by clothing but perhaps it was his dialect that betrayed his origin. What was important was that the characteristics of Luke, revealed unconsciously in his works, made him a valuable traveller and friend of Paul as he pioneered westward. Some have deduced that "*the brother who is famous among all the churches for his preaching of the Gospel*" according to Paul (2 Cor. 8. 18) is Luke and that he was being sent with his natural brother Titus. This would necessitate that Luke met Paul before he reached Philippi on the third missionary journey, for according to Conybeare the second letter to Corinth was written in the Autumn of AD 57 and Philippi was reached in AD 58. It is evident that Luke was a man of wide interests and sympathies whose professional activities had given him insight and experience with human nature that would not be so common among Jewish rabbis. Paul's attitude towards women seems to be a little biased against them while Luke's feelings would seem to contrast in the opposite direction.

As a physician Luke would be of special benefit to Paul in his travels. Paul was not a man to make much of his troubles and Luke was not the man to attract praise because of his services to the apostle. But scholars have realised that Luke must have helped Paul to bear the journey to Jerusalem and then to Rome. Experiences like the 'shipwreck' cause brothers in affliction to be drawn together. That Luke was permitted to travel with Paul as a prisoner has occasioned surprise with some commentators and it has been suggested that he (with Aristarchus) may have travelled as Paul's slave. Thus he could serve as Paul's physician, minister comfort and give Christian fellowship. It would also have raised Paul's prestige with the centurion in whose charge he was, and accounted for the unusually kind disposition towards Paul the prisoner. However it came about, Luke furnishes us with a thrilling and detailed account of the voyage, substantiated by recent research, as an accurate record and providing us with a picture of what such travel was like in the first century.

Above all, we have from the pen of these two men, a history of the early Church, in which each is the complement of the other. Paul was a pioneer leader and thinker, working out the philosophy of the Church. His Jewish training coupled with a Greek-Roman background provided just the rich mental environment for the new avenues of understanding which the revelation of the Son of God had given. But Paul had been a bigoted Pharisee and there was more to his widened vision than the memory of the dying Stephen and the terrifying vision of the Damascus road. Long journeys with few companions must have brought Paul and Luke very close in Christian fellowship. As Paul talked with this Gentile of so brilliant intellect who in his gospel was to express vividly the breadth of the love of Jesus, he must have been impressed by the great need of the gospel in a non-Jewish world.

Yet the writings of these two are different. For Paul the faith in Jesus was the linking of the old Hebrew religion to a new leap forward in understanding which Christ had given. He saw that the best which the Law and the Prophets had to offer was a prefigurement and preparation for the entry into the world of the Son of Man. Luke does not set out to be a theologian and philosopher but an historian with scientific accuracy and artistic interest. Possibly writing a decade or so after Paul's death, the burning questions of the Apostle's stormy life had begun to fade in Church interest. A Gentile, writing to a Gentile (or Gentiles) was content to mention simpler aspects of the Hebrew religion. He gave brief explanations rather than expanded arguments about Judaism. However Luke made it quite clear that most of Paul's bitter opposition came from Jews and this is reflected strongly in some of the epistles. Luke was concerned to make a clear case for universal salvation and in Paul was its champion and his hero.

Paul's reference to Luke as the beloved physician has led some to analyse the Luke-Acts accounts for medical terminology. Hobart was a physician himself and he showed that Luke had used many technical words found in the writings of Hippocrates and other ancient medical authors. Rendall Short, a distinguished Bristol surgeon, writing of words peculiar to Luke said "*diagnosis, dysentery, thrombi and syndrome have been taken over from medical Greek into medical English*". He finds (along with several other scholars) very much more language attributable to a medical man in Luke-Acts than he does in Josephus, for example. He also asserts that Luke writes differently of

Jesus' healing from the other evangelists. An article in Encyclopaedia Britannica demonstrates this with reference to Peter's mother-in-law who had a 'great' fever (Luke 4. 38; Matthew and Mark omit 'great'). Further examples of medical language are found in Luke 5. 12 (full of leprosy) and 22. 44 (as it were great drops of blood). Luke provides interesting background descriptions with medical words which came naturally to him.

It is possible to take this idea a stage further. Not only was Luke's vocabulary different from Matthew and Mark, but he had an influence on Paul's vocabulary in his letters. E. H. Plumptre made a comparison between earlier and later letters. The Thessalonian letters were written in 51 or 52 whereas the Corinthian letters were written in 57 or a little earlier. The 'prison' and pastoral letters were all written in 62 and onwards. The last letters to Timothy and Titus could have been as late as 67. One of the criticisms of Paul's authorship of these last letters springs from a change in style from the earlier letters. It is not unusual for a writer's vocabulary to develop with age. Luke wrote some of the finest Greek prose available to us now. Almost certainly constant conversation between two brilliant and devoted disciples of the Lord could bring about an influence upon their respective use of words.

In 1 Timothy 6. 3, 4 'wholesome words' is literally 'healthy language', and 'doting' is 'diseased' (A.V. — Marshall-Nestlé). The word used in 1 Timothy 3.6 and 6.4 and 2 Tim. 3.4 for 'proud and 'high minded' is not a word usually associated with moral defect but a specific form of fever. After Paul's first meeting with the writer of Acts, but before the longer periods of companionship, he wrote the letters to the Corinthian Church and in

the first of these he uses the body as an illustration of the Church (1 Cor. 12). This is not conclusive evidence that Paul was influenced by Luke in his vocabulary; but it could be said to be corroborative evidence. Not all rabbis from Gamaliel's school would have taken such an interest in the human body as Paul took and this at least would have produced a common interest shared by the two friends in their conversation. Such an interest does not agree with the Greek and mediæval view that the physical organism and environment are evil. There is evidence that just prior to meeting Luke at Troas and later on rejoining him at Philippi, Paul was suffering from some physical ailment and was in need of medical attention. The first is mentioned in his letter to Galatia (4. 13-15) when he wrote "*you would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me* (R.S.V.). Scholars agree that Paul was ill as he wrote to Corinth (2 Cor. 4. 12, 16) and he was approaching Philippi on the third journey. Whether by their design or seeming chance, these two became more fully acquainted. Paul and his disciple or Luke and his patient. It is now plain that we have an overall picture of the providence of a caring Heavenly Father. Luke does not mention Paul's letters and may not have been fully aware of them. However, it may be assumed that as Luke built up his records of Christ and the early Church he was greatly helped by Paul as his teacher. Their contrasting characteristics could have caused them to part. They did not. Not all fellow believers found Paul easy to get along with as is seen in the parting from Barnabas and John Mark. The aging apostle is able to write "only Luke is with me". The power of the Spirit operated not only within them but through them to produce some of the most beautiful and influential literature in the world.

THE PARABLE OF THE POUNDS

Luke 19. 12-27

Matt. 25. 14-30

It was immediately following his visit to the house of Zaccheus that Jesus told the story of the nobleman who travelled to a far country leaving his servants to trade for him during his absence. Luke relates the narrative in his 19th chapter, vss. 12-27. The parable was given for a purpose; it was because Jesus knew that his earthly mission approached its close, the people were looking for an immediate establishment of the Messianic kingdom, and He would prepare them for the realisation that a time of waiting and preparation must interpose between his First Advent and the

promised Kingdom which is to be set up at his Second Advent. Those who would sincerely be his servants must discharge with faithfulness and loyalty a commission with which He would entrust them.

There is a considerable degree of similarity between this parable and that related in Matt. 25. 14-30, known as the Parable of the Talents. They both appear at the same time in Jesus' ministry. The one in Luke's account was spoken in the house of Zaccheus not many days before Jesus' death; the setting of the Matthew account is not so easy to

determine and the fact that four parables having to do with the Second Coming—those of the faithful and evil servants, the wise and foolish virgins, the talents, and the sheep and goats—all occur together suggests the possibility that Matthew grouped them for that reason without regard to the time of their utterance. In such case the two parables may be versions of the same incident; at any rate the teaching and application is identical.

The purpose of the parable is stated. It was given *"because he was nigh unto Jerusalem, and because they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear."* (19. 11.) These men gathered at Zaccheus' house were not unbelievers. They may, most of them, have been a bit dubious as to the Messianic authority of the quiet young man in whose honour the feast was being held, but of one thing they were sure; if indeed he was the promised One that should come, then certainly the kingdom of God predicted by the prophets, a kingdom in which Israel would exercise authority over all nations, was at hand and would appear in their own time. That would be the acid test of his claims. And there seems to be no doubt of a prevalent impression that this coming Passover was to be decisive; something in the attitude and sayings of Jesus had convinced many apart from his disciples that this time would be the climax of all that He had been doing and saying for the past three and a half years. Jesus alone knew that the long-awaited kingdom was not to appear then, at least not in the way they expected. Hence this parable, to prepare their minds for the fact that another phase of the Divine Plan must be initiated and run its course before their hopes could be fulfilled.

"A nobleman went into a far country, to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return" (19. 12). It may be true, as scholars have suggested, that Jesus took as the background of his story the journey of certain rulers of his own time to Rome to be formally invested with the dignity of a tributary kingship, and since such occurrences were common in that day the allusion would be clear enough to Jesus' hearers. What was not so clear was the underlying intimation that even Israel's King Messiah must go away to receive his kingdom from higher hands before returning in glory and power to exercise authority. It was all in the 7th chapter of Daniel, had they been sufficiently careful to read aright. *"I saw in the night visions, and one like the Son of Man . . . came to the Ancient of days . . . brought near before him, and there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all*

people, nations, and languages, should serve him; his dominion is as everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away" (Dan. 7. 13-14). The writer to the Hebrews shows that Jesus must first suffer and die as a sacrificing priest after the order of Aaron, ascend on high and enter into the presence of God, then be invested with the authority and power of the kingdom, that he might appear unto men the second time as a kingly priest after the order of Melchisedec, for their salvation (Heb. chaps. 3-4-5, 7. 8-9). The Jews of our Lord's day had no idea that the call of the Christian Church was to follow the ending of their own period of Divine dealings and that not until that Church is complete and ready, together with finally purified Israel, for its work of world conversion, can the Second Coming and the Kingdom of God upon earth become reality.

So the nobleman went away, but before doing so, entrusted his own servants with money with which to trade on his behalf during his absence. There is a difference drawn here between his servants and his citizens. The latter had rejected him as their prospective king and had even sent a message of protest to the distant authority conferring the kingdom. One wonders how many of the Lord's hearers at the feast identified the rebellious citizens with Israel of their own day, and the servants with those who in after years would be the real custodians of their Lord's interests. The parable takes no further notice of the rebellious citizens; it is concerned, not with Israel but the Christian Church between the two Advents. So each servant received a pound wherewith to make profit for his lord.

The "pound" of the parable is the *"mina"* which on the basis of the relative costs of living between the First Advent and to-day was worth the equivalent of four hundred and fifty pounds or eight hundred dollars. The corresponding parable in Matthew gives the servants five, two and one talents respectively and on the same basis the talent, if of silver, had a buying power of six thousand pounds in present-day English money. The precise values and minor differences of detail are not important; the principle illustrated is that each of Jesus' disciples in this Age is awarded opportunities of some kind or other whereby he may advance the cause of the Kingdom. Those opportunities or abilities may be of an outwardly spectacular nature such as the flair for public speaking or writing, of a more unobtrusive kind such as talent for organising or administration, or the very

worth-while gift of a sympathetic and unselfish nature which leads to all manner of services to others in the direction of consolation, encouragement, incitement to faith, and a constant waiting on God in prayer on behalf of others or in the interests of his work. All these things are given to us in their variety that we might use them to the honour and glory of God and in the advancement of his interests in the out-working of his purposes.

The sequel comes, of course, at the Second Advent, when the King returns in all glory and power to take his rightful place as mankind's king and rule "*with judgment and with justice henceforth even for ever*" (Isa. 9. 7). "*We must all appear before the tribunal of Christ*" says Paul "*that every one may receive the things done in the body*" (2 Cor. 5. 10). It is not always noticed that Paul is not speaking of mankind in general in that verse but solely of Christian disciples, the Church, who in the whole of the 5th chapter of 2nd Corinthians are shown as in process of preparation for a "ministry of reconciliation" the members of which are ambassadors for Christ to all who do not believe. This tribunal of Christ is the same thing as the cross-examination of the parable when the returned master takes stock of his servants' success in trading.

There was no servant who was slothful and indifferent. He took the money but did nothing with it, and when called upon for his account returned the money unused. That man had, as we would say, "a chip on his shoulder". He resented the idea of making profit for another man, even though that other man be his lawful employer and provide the money wherewith to make the profit. In his surliness he libelled his master, accusing him of being hard and harsh, claiming the benefits of work he had not himself done. "You gave me one pound; I give you back one pound. We are quits, and you have your rights." And in his self-justification he quite failed to see that in hoarding unused the opportunity his lord had given him he had prevented someone else from making use of it. If he

had no intention of using his lord's money himself he could at least have deposited it with the money-changers in the Temple, the "Stock Exchange" of the time. They would anyway have turned the money to profitable use for the period of deposit and the lord would eventually have received back his capital plus accrued interest. That points a very vital moral. Our own personal failure to rise up to our privileges and opportunities in our Lord's service may have repercussions outside ourselves; the service or work of others may be hindered or thwarted thereby. In this, as in so many things, it is true that "*none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself*" (Rom. 14. 7).

Those who had traded were commended. In one parable they, having been faithful in few things, were made rulers over many things. In the other they were made rulers over cities commensurate with the degree of profit each one had made. If this teaches anything respecting conditions in the spiritual world to which the Church will eventually attain, it must be that there is variety in that world as there is in this and that there will be "*differences of administrations*" (1 Cor. 12) according to the spheres of activity for which each one is best qualified. The predominant truth inherent in the parable is that the future life is not static; it is not just an endless existence in a state of beatitude and contemplation of God. There is work to be done; activities to be undertaken; for all we know heights to be scaled and objects to be achieved. Perhaps creation itself is endless, and long after the work of God through Christ and the Church in the reconciliation of all of mankind who will heed the call to repent is complete, and every creature on earth is bowing the knee to the Name of Christ, those servants who have faithfully traded with their "talents" or their "pounds" now will be serving just as faithfully and just as zealously, upon an immensely enhanced scale, in spheres that we cannot even begin to visualise, in those "ten cities" and "five cities" to which they will have been appointed by their lord.

Men do not care to admit that they are sinners, and especially do they object to admitting that they are helpless sinners, and that only Christ can lift them out of that hopeless state. It is not unusual to see a very small and perhaps obstinate child refuse its father's proffered assistance in its effort to walk,

and insist on taking a few tottering steps by itself. That may be a good thing in the case of a child learning to toddle, but it is not a good thing for a man who needs to walk in absolute righteousness before God.

“HE THAT HATH NO SWORD”

Short study on a
debated text

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

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

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

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

There is no thought of using physical means of defence here.

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

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

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

FROM A PRISON CELL

*Reflections on the
"Prison Epistles"*

I. Prisoner for Christ

The Epistles to the Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians were written by Paul from a prison cell in Rome. Evidently his detention there was of a very mild nature, for, though under arrest, Paul was permitted to dwell in his own hired house alone, save for the presence of his military guard (Acts 28. 16). Pending the hearing of his case at Nero's judicial bar, he was permitted to continue under house-arrest for two whole years, with no greater inconvenience than his chains. During these two years he was permitted to receive all his friends without check, so that he *"received all that came in unto him, preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him"*. (Acts 28. 31). Thus, spared the awful severities of ancient prison cells, his own home became both a sanctum and a cell.

Under conditions such as these the mighty qualities of his master-mind blossomed forth into full flower. To his native in-born genius the operation of the enlightening influence of the Spirit of the Living God gave new and added powers, enabling him to develop and define those deeper things of God which mortal tongue had only once told before. No teacher save the Lord Jesus had trodden that path of truth. Even He had not spoken full and clear, because at that time none else could understand. The "many things" which He had wanted to say, but could not say (John 16. 12) were left for Paul to say, when hearing ears had been opened by the Spirit of truth. Then under the enlightening power of the promised Comforter, Paul was able to develop all those special features of the Lord's good news—now Paul's good news—and set them out in all their force and beauty, both in his conversations with his friends and in these letters to Ephesus, Colosse and Philippi. We have in these three letters the very essence and cream of all extant Christian literature, reaching the loftiest heights of sanctifying expressions of which human language is capable. To such incomparable altitudes of illuminating thought do some of these expressions soar that students are to be found who speak of these things as though they constituted another and better Gospel, distinct and separate from all the teachings of Paul's own earlier days. Distinctions are claimed between the Gospel of the Kingdom and the "fellowship of the Mystery" with suggestions that there is but little (if any) relation-

ship between the two themes. It will be our privilege to investigate both these themes as our studies proceed, and we hope to be able to find that Paul wrote to his friends exactly the same things which he spoke to those who visited his prison home (Acts 28. 31). It is possible to assign other reasons than that of another and better Gospel for the super-excellence of these Epistles without detaching them from earlier writings from the same pen. We have only to call to mind the unresting journeys of his active days, from Asia to Europe, from Europe back again, with scarce a moment's cessation from activity in which to concentrate and reflect. We only need to think of the footsore evangelist harried from place to place by relentless foes intent only on discrediting him, and of gathering to themselves the fruitage of his labours, to realise how impossible it had been for him to sit for long at ease in cool, calm consideration of the deeper points of the Gospel story. He had them in his mind, in germ and bud, and sometimes they flower forth from his pen, but not with the full bloom and beauty of the later ripened truth.

It was only when the rush and turmoil of an overcrowded life gave place to the safe peacefulness of his quiet prison retreat, first for two years in Caesarea, and now again in Rome, that the undeveloped germs and unopened buds of earlier days blossomed forth into stately blooms, delightful to see and hear. Immature and rudimentary thoughts, difficult to express and harder still to pass along, assumed full-grown form and were clothed in words of rare beauty and great power. God cut those restless wanderings short, not only that Paul might testify at the Roman Court, but that he might have time to rest and open wide the portals of God's treasure-house, that all who later came to believe might see set forth the amplitude of their inheritance in Christ. Without that season of enforced rest Paul might have burnt away the wick of life too soon, before even he himself had grasped the full immensity of the mystery of the fellowship in Christ. Had that been so, not his alone would have been the loss, but three score generations since his day would also have been deprived of these deeper, priceless things of God.

Paul was a deep thinker, and that was exactly what the Christian Church needed at the time. All other Apostles were untrained fishermen—men

who had received no special training for their task. The Pharisees classed them as ignorant and unlearned men. Jesus had departed from the world leaving these untrained, untutored men to represent his cause. And while the propagation of truth was not intended to be accomplished by human power and intellectual might, its deeper aspect needed to be comprehended and stated by at least one penetrating well-balanced mind. Paul was a chosen vessel into which and through which Jesus could issue forth the things which He had to leave unsaid. Paul's mind could not leave a theme till he had traced it back to its first cause, nor until he had outlined its fullest sequences. Not enough was it for him to know that Jesus was the Son of God—he must dissect that statement into its compound elements, and know precisely what it meant. Not enough to know that Jesus died for sin. He wanted to know why and how that death could offset sin, and till he understood he deeply probed the records of the Word of God. He had to do among believing men the work which Jesus himself could not do, because men could not understand. Hence Paul had to say the things Jesus could not say. These things became the theme and topic of Paul's enquiring mind and under the Spirit's influence the unsaid things of Jesus were said, in the main, by Paul. His writings, when arranged in chronological order, show that his mind was always getting deeper and still deeper into the things of his Lord: truth, roughly and immaturely stated at first utterance, became developed and complete as years rolled by. With progressive thought, ripeness of expression kept step, giving to the later products of his pen a mellowness rich and mature. Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians and Philemon are the rich ripe fruits of Paul's mellow years. We may well thank God for Paul's restraining chain, even though at times it may have deeply chafed his flesh. It set free his soul to soar up to the heavenly heights to give form and words to lofty thoughts, high as the heavens themselves, and more enduring than eternal hills. Only God himself can estimate the debt which we all of later day owe but cannot pay, to his diminutive giant of a man.

From that little prison cell, the enforced home of a little wandering Christian Jew, set at the heart of the world's metropolis, with all the tawdry trappings of Imperial Majesty on every hand, the soaring mind of Paul swept forth throughout heaven and earth, and told, under the unseeing eyes of Rome's sceptred prince, in language superb and sublime, that God was creating a universal throne

at whose feet even proud Imperial Caesar would have to bow. No bricks nor walls, no chains nor prætorian guard could chain down that Spirit-led mind of Paul and make him mindful only of his little day and his fettered circumstance. Back to times before the world began, forward to better days, when heaven and earth are cleansed from sin, the Spirit led that receptive mind, and as he grasped the great design, he wrote it down in rich superlatives. Ordinary diction was poor and tame; he must spin phrases of his own, phrases which seem meaningless to the profane, but phrases, each of which is a rich coronet clustered with gems to those who know the truth. Here are a few—*"blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ"*; *"chose us in him before the foundation of the world"*; *"holy and without blemish before him"*; *"foreordained us unto adoption as sons . . . unto himself"*; *"the glory of his grace which He bestowed on us freely in the Beloved"*. This and much beside is almost all new coin, never issued from any mint before, but all required to set forth the abundant grace of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Rome may have had her senators and orators, but no Cato or Cicero could speak like this. Rome may give her little men her franchise, and set them in her ranks of free-born men, but she could not make them sons of God! Rome may hoist her chosen Caesar to her throne, but she could not lift her candidate to the heavenly Throne! Within the very shadow of Roman majesty itself the words and thoughts which told of One who could elevate a beggar to joint-heirship in that Throne took shape and form. How near together, therefore, in that little cell came the sordid and the sublime—only a length of chain, which, binding their ambassadors together, separated those two worlds. *Guard and prisoner constituted together a miniature of this present world—one, the emblem of the supreme power of these Gentile Times, one, the token of the persecuted Christ, whose day of power is yet to come.*

From that small spot, abounding with such great contrast, flowed forth doctrine which has changed the world. It has been both food and light to help God's child along his way. It has developed faith and gathered hope, and kindled love in many hearts. There is no contradiction between this and the earlier themes. Ephesians and Colossians are built on the broad foundations laid in Romans and Galatians, but times and conditions were under change. The nation as a whole was drifting to its

doom while the small elect remnant was growing up into Christ. In the early days Paul dwelt much on the First Coming of the Lord as the point towards which the history and destiny of the Hebrew race had long been tending; in his later days it is the Christ Who is Lord of angels and worlds, and to Whose Second Coming the whole array of the universe is moving. In the first days he sought to convince his kith and kin of their opportunity to accept and rally to the Messiah whom God had sent into their midst. Hence, he stressed repentance and justification from sin. But when the nation was bent on plunging to its doom it was to the treasure within the field he paid greatest heed. He dwelt less on the redemptive work of Christ, and more on its Head and constitution; less

on the justification of the repentant sinner and more on the sanctification of the elect saint; but all these later things had been implicit in his Gospel from the first, just as the earlier themes were never wholly absent from the later and more explicit themes. Throughout his ministry the burden of teaching sought to show the union of the believer with his redeeming Lord and for the description of this unity he has coined a whole vocabulary of phrases and illustrations; believers are "in Christ" and Christ in them; they bear relation to him as stones to a foundation, as members to a Head, as a wife to her husband. This unity he shows to be "ideal", for before time began the Divine Father made the destiny of Christ and the destiny of the believer one. *(To be continued)*

"IN REMEMBRANCE OF ME"

*A meditation on
the first anniversary*

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

As they gathered together for the first memorial each would have specially treasured memories of personal contacts with the Lord. Mary, the Lord's mother, would be able to go furthest back. If every mother's mind is richly stored with precious recollections of her first born, how transcendently more

must Mary's have been. Possessing the secret of his birth, with what wonder must she have watched her child's personality unfolding as He grew in wisdom and stature and in favour with God and man. She would recall the wrench when at the age of thirty He left the humble home to take up the work for which He had been born. The parting, however, had been softened by the thought that He had gone to lead the nation, as their Messiah, back to God and to fulfil the angel's words given before his birth. How sorely tried her faith had been by subsequent events. But now she understood the reason for it all and all the wealth of her affection had been transformed into a passion of love as she saw him wounded for her transgressions, bruised for her iniquity and the chastisement of her peace upon him. It was surely with trembling hands and eyes and heart that overflowed that she partook of those sacred emblems of that broken body and shed blood that had meant all the world to her.

Those amongst the disciples who could look farthest back were John and Andrew. At the first memorial they would be recalling that first meeting with the Lord on the banks of the Jordan. It had been a meeting never to be forgotten; what a wonderful evening they had spent together. First impressions are lasting and probably all would recall the circumstances in which they had first met the Lord. There was Nathaniel; he would be thinking of how he had been making it a matter of prayer under the fig tree when the Lord gave him that heart-searching glance, spoke those thought-

penetrating words and that splendid commendation which he should never forget as long as he lived. Nicodemus too would be there. How he would recall the events of that memorable night when the Lord had spoken to him those wonderful words of life. Little had he realised at the time the meaning of the saying addressed to him. "As *Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness even so must the Son of Man be lifted up.*" As he thought of his Lord there on the cross he could now see something of its meaning.

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

As we look forward to another memorial we cannot but recognise a difference between ourselves and these brethren of whom we have been speaking. Unlike them we have no personal recollection of the Lord as He was in the flesh. Our knowledge of the Man Christ Jesus is second hand, books forming the principal source of our knowledge. God caused the New Testament to be written specially for that larger body of his brethren whom our Lord referred to as "those also who shall believe on Me through their word." By its aid we can remember him in those incidents portrayed so simply and beautifully in the Gospels, using our sanctified imagination to make the scenes live. As compensation for our lack of first hand knowledge of the human life of our Lord, we have a much more complete knowledge than those

first disciples of his resurrection life. The epistles written over a long period give evidence of how gradual was the growth into the fuller knowledge of the person and work of Christ. Even Peter refers to Paul's writings as containing some things hard to be understood. The disciples at the first memorial could look back only over the three and a half years of our Lord's earthly ministry; we can look back over nineteen centuries and see the Lord in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks, watching over his people with patient tender care.

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

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

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

The creation of the visible universe is great, but the creation of countless invisible laws is greater still.

“TILL HE COME”

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

That is not all. Our desire for the “gathering unto him” is not—or should not be—dictated by selfish reasons, the hope of personal salvation and deliverance from the distresses of this world. It is only natural that like the few pious ones of Ezekiel's day, those who “*sigh and cry for the abominations*” of man's world should earnestly desire the coming of the better world, the heavenly, “*wherein dwelleth righteousness*”. But we who have been instructed in the principles of the Divine Plan realise that God is not working just for the taking away from an evil world of a small elect of righteous ones that He might leave the world to its evil, but rather the coming of Divine power *to* that evil world that his righteous ones may convert and transform it into an abode of harmony and peace. If we go to be with our Lord Jesus and enter the presence of his Father with exceeding joy it is only that we may be present with him in the great work of restoring to righteousness all the families of the earth. That is why Jesus comes again. That is why the words of hope written aforetime for our comfort are not “*Till we go!*” but “*Till He come!*”

So many in past ages have failed to realise that difference and in consequence have become self-centred, bigoted, concerned only for their own eternal interests and caring little or nothing for those of humanity in general. They forgot that our Lord came “to seek and to save that which was lost”. They did not heed—or perhaps never really understood—the fact that God did not create man upon the earth in vain; that even although He foresaw the fall into sin He had made provision for the recovery of “whosoever will” from that sin and the eventual restoration of the human race to the Divine likeness. Men became so pre-occupied with the theology of the Church's salvation and the golden prospect of the heavenly city that they over-

looked the promise of another salvation and the creation of the green fields and sparkling streams of an earthly paradise. And so, whilst they still paid lip service to the hallowed words “*Till He come*” the thought that was really in their minds was “*Till we go!*”

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

This prayer is not fulfilled when He comes for his saints. That is only one phase of his coming. After that—how long after we do not know—He comes again with his saints for the setting up his Kingdom and the blessing of all the world. It was for this, as much as for the other, that He died. It is this, as much as the other, that is shown forth year by year in the ceremony of bread and wine. It is not until this has taken place that it can be said He has “come” in the sense which Paul intended when he wrote the words.

We can then with perfect propriety continue to breathe the prayer when we come together, quite irrespective of our personal convictions as to the time when our Lord's Second Presence can be said to have become an accomplished fact. Whether his coming for his saints is an event now in progress or still in the near future, it is undisputed that He has not yet “come” in the glory of the Kingdom to rule over the nations, and until that event has also taken place and the world is no longer in ignorance it cannot be said that He has fully “come”. So we may celebrate, still looking for the fruition of all our hopes, still watching for “*his appearing*”, still waiting for him to change the body of our humili-

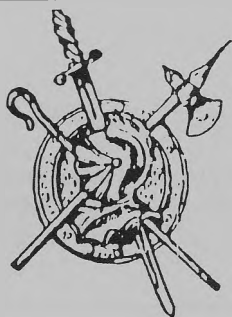
ation into conformity with his glorious body. As we share together in the symbols that tell us of all these things we can still breathe toward heaven the reverent words "*Till He come!*"

There is much that is disappointing and saddening and unsatisfactory in our daily lives and it is easy to let the mind dwell on the future glories that are promised the faithful ones and hope fervently for their speedy coming. But the world also is groaning and travailing in pain together, waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God, and their distress is far greater than ours, for they have not the hope that we have, no knowledge or expectation of future deliverance, nothing but a dull despair that sees no avenue of escape from the oppression of this world's evil. Where we can lift up our hearts to heaven and rejoice, knowing that deliverance draweth nigh, they can only "*look unto the earth, and behold trouble and darkness, dimness of anguish; and they shall be driven to darkness*". So that we ought to take thought for the world more even than for ourselves, and manifest to them something of the hope that fills our hearts, and show them that we really believe it. And one way in which we can all do something toward this is by the manner in which we keep the Memorial of our Lord's death together. It is a witness and a testimony, not only to our own brethren, but to all men, that these things are true and will surely come to pass. As oft as ye do this, said Paul, "*ye do shew forth . . .*" That "shewing forth" extends beyond the circle of the brethren to all who know and see that such things are being done. They will see, and glorify God. It is the day by day conduct of our Christian communion together, which is symbolised for us in the Memorial service, that is the effective witness and of which men will take notice. "*By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.*" It is the manner in which our professed beliefs and our spoken message works and operates within our own fellowship and our dealings with our own brethren that will persuade the world of its truth. No amount of preaching that "God is Love" will impress our hearers if we have not love one toward another. It is of no use expounding John 3. 16 if we ourselves are not also found to be "giving" of our best and dearest that others might be saved, nor of talking about the One Who came to be a servant and serve mankind if we show no disposition to serve them too. Our lives must match our profession and our own fellowship become a miniature,

within present limitations, of what the Divine Kingdom on earth will be in the future Age; and then we can reasonably expect men to listen. We can then say with confidence "See; this is what the Lord's death has done for *us*. It can do the same for *you*".

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

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



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hardness as a good
soldier of Jesus Christ

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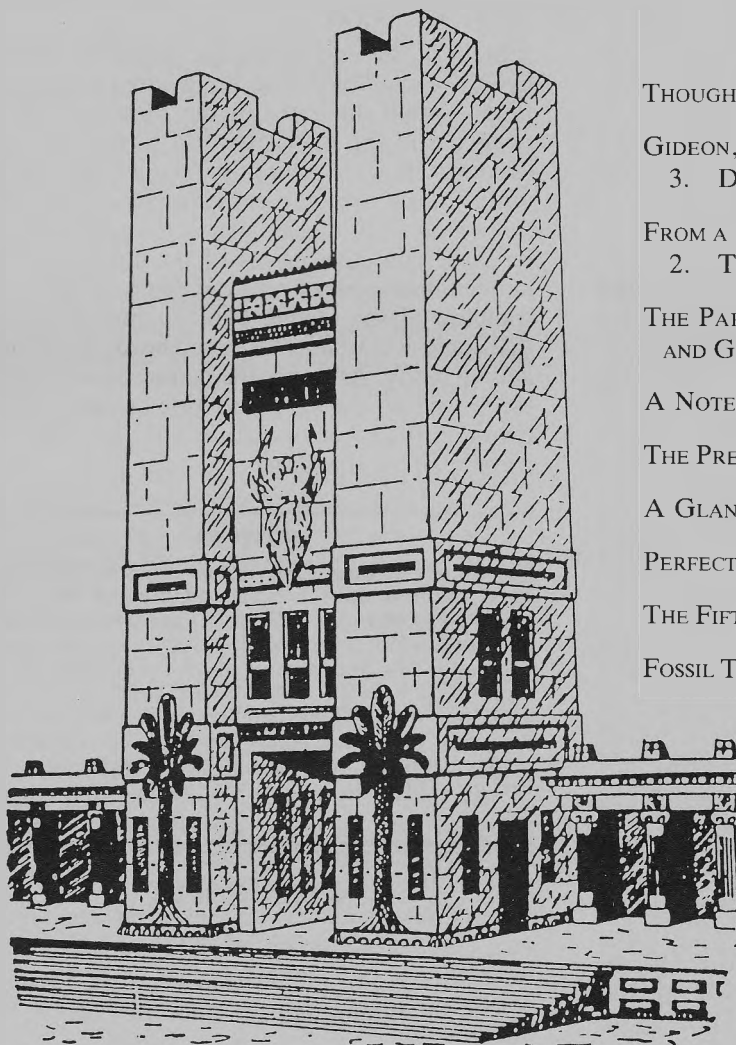
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*Lift up your heads, O ye gates
And be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors,
And the King of glory shall come in.*

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THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH

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

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

We are accustomed to blame First Advent Israel for "*knowing not the time of their visitation*" and failing to measure up to their responsibility and duty when their Age was giving place to the Age of the Gospel. Are we so quick to realise that we in our turn, when this Gospel Age is giving place to the Messianic, have the same responsibility and duty? The gateway is swinging open; before long it will be time to call men to enter. What are we doing in the meantime to gather out the stones and lift up the standard? There are many in the Christian world to-day who look upon the apathy and unbelief of the masses and cry out for revival, but the basis for revival is all too often seen as little more than a profession of belief in the Lord Christ and conversion to a more moral life thereafter. One tends to forget that true revival is powered by the dynamic energy of the Holy Spirit, and that in the

context of this end-of-the-age period in which we live the Holy Spirit is to be "*poured out upon all flesh*"—when the gates of the Messianic era are opened and the work of world conversion really becomes effective. Our mission now, and one that we can neglect only to our own loss, is to do what we can, while those gates are in the act of opening, to gather out the stones of ignorance and misunderstanding concerning the Faith, and lift up the standard of the Divine Plan for man's salvation that some at least may hear, and heed, and believe, and be ready. After all, the commission to preach the Gospel to the whole creation has not yet been revoked. And the popular idea of Christianity is a travesty of the real thing.

NOTICES

Short story feature. At various times in the past we have featured short fictional pictures of life as it is expected to be in the Millennial Age under the rule of our Lord, as inferred from the Scriptures. Quite a few expressions of appreciation have been received from time to time with requests for their continuance. Tennyson wrote "Truth, embedded in a tale, can enter in at lowly doors". A few such further cameos are planned for the near future; the first, entitled "The Prelate's Dilemma", appears in this issue.

Gone from us



Sis. Annie Hill (*Bexhill*)

Sis. Winnie James (*Milborne Port*)



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

GIDEON, MAN OF VALOUR

3. Disaster at the last

The third phase of Gideon's career was marked by his making the ephod, the tragic mistake which blemished the brightness of his spectacular career. As a successful military commander, hero of a notable victory, he was a very different man from the simple farmer pictured in Judges 6. At that time his implicit and obedient faith in God enabled him to carry out the Lord's commands to the letter and in consequence the Midianite hosts had been put to flight and the land delivered, as the Lord had promised. The fact that Gideon went beyond his instructions afterwards and allowed the remainder of Israel to help him destroy the enemy to a man may well be put down to an excess of zeal not justified by the necessity of the case, but his subsequent refusal to allow himself to be made king by his grateful countrymen and his insistence that the Lord must be their only king shows that his heart was still right. But this same zeal, even more unwisely directed, led him into serious trouble in the matter of the ephod.

It all began when Gideon rejected the plea that he become their king. Although he declined the invitation, he did ask of his countrymen one favour, that they would give him an offering of the gold rings taken from the defeated enemy and the ornaments taken from their camels. The request was received with enthusiasm and Gideon found himself possessed of a considerable amount of gold and other valuable regalia taken from the defeated kings. The upshot shows that Gideon did not want this for himself, but for the worship of God and the honour of his native village. Of these golden rings and ornaments and luxurious clothing, we are told, he "*made an ephod, and put it in his city*" (village) "*in Ophrah*". An ephod was a garment intricately constructed of valuable fabrics, precious stones and fine gold, worn by the High Priest of Israel as indication of his sacred office and by virtue of which he could approach to God for counsel and instruction. In later times possession of the ephod became invested with a kind of superstitious reverence and it was believed that any who could gain such possession would thereby be able to command a hearing and a response from God. There were two occasions in the life of David when he took it upon himself to summon the High Priest to his side so that with the aid of the ephod the Lord could be asked to give instructions as to forth-

coming operations. But Gideon had been in close touch with God throughout this whole series of happenings and would hardly be likely to think the possession of an ephod necessary for any further instruction at this juncture. It becomes a valid question therefore: what was his purpose in doing this?

The Tabernacle, which was the centre of Israel's worship and the responsibility of the Aaronic High Priest, at this time stood at Shiloh, having been finally erected there following a few years at Gilgal during the conquest of the Land. Thither the tribes came on the occasions of the great feasts and here the High Priest conducted the annual Day of Atonement ceremonies. But Shiloh was in the territory of the tribe of Ephraim, and there was no love lost between Ephraim and Manasseh, Gideon's own tribe. Jealousy had existed between them from earliest times, when Manasseh the eldest son of Joseph had been passed over by the patriarch and the birthright conferred on Ephraim. Something of that jealousy emerges in this very story when the Ephraimites chided Gideon for not calling them to the battle before he had started the rout; his tactful reply in ch. 8. 1-3 avoided a serious clash but the animosity was there. Chapter 12 of Judges tells of another occasion when Ephraim was involved in fratricidal strife with men of Manasseh. It might well be, therefore, that Gideon had formed the idea that the institution of some kind of a centre for approaching God in the territory of Manasseh might well advance the status of his own tribe relative to the brother tribe and be welcomed by the northern tribes, Ashur, Zebulun and Naphtali, who had assisted him in the campaign. Already, a century or more in the past, a rival priesthood with images and ephod, in honour of Jehovah the God of Israel, had been set up in the extreme north by the tribe of Dan (the story is told in Jud. ch. 18 but chronologically it was long before Gideon's day). That centre of worship had degenerated into flagrant idolatry and the official priesthood at Shiloh had been able to do nothing about it. Perhaps Gideon, in his zeal for the Lord, thought that he could succeed where Shiloh had failed and at least establish a centre of worship more acceptable to the northern tribes than the one in the territory of the universally disliked tribe of Ephraim. If that was in fact his idea, he was

grievously in error in supposing that any deviation from the Divine arrangement, no matter how sincerely undertaken, could be productive of anything but ill. Thus it was in this case: Gideon had in effect set up a rival sanctuary to the legal one in Shiloh and the consequence was that *"all Israel went thither a-whoring after it; which thing became a snare to Gideon, and to his house"*. That expression means that unlawful worship and ceremonial was carried on in Abiezer of Manasseh and the fact that the Deity worshipped was the Ever-Living and not Baal did nothing to mitigate that fact. It is probable that Gideon established some kind of priesthood, and attempted to emulate in some degree the ceremonies which could rightfully only be observed at Shiloh. Thus there were now three places in Israel claiming to represent God before the people, Shiloh in Ephraim, Dan in the far north where a renegade Levitical priesthood functioned, and this at Abiezer. The sad refrain of the Book of Judges comes to the mind *"In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did that which was right in his own eyes"*. The wonder is that the knowledge and service of the God of Israel subsisted at all. Evidently it did in measurable degree, for after Gideon's victory the land had rest for the unusually long period of forty years, and this of itself denotes that there was no general apostasy. The most reasonable conclusion is that under Gideon's leadership the nation remained nominally loyal to God and the Covenant, and the shrines of Baal were destroyed, leaving a form of worship which so far as its ceremonial aspect was concerned represented no more than a pale reflection of what it could have been had the Covenant been zealously observed in all its provisions.

There is another possibility which may explain Gideon's institution of his rival sanctuary, an action so much out of character compared with his earlier scrupulous observance of Divine leading. At some time during the period of the Judges there was a violent disruption in the High Priestly family whereby the ordained succession from Aaron's son Eleazar was broken and the priestly office transferred to the descendants of Aaron's younger son Ithamar. The Scriptures are completely silent as to the details of this affair; it is not so much as mentioned anywhere. Jud. 20.28 indicates that Phinehas, son of Eleazar, was High Priest in his turn and then no more is recorded until, much later on, we find Eli, of the line of Ithamar, as High Priest in the days of Samuel. Josephus has a little more to say although the source of his information

is unknown; he says that after Phinehas, his descendants Abishua, Bukki and Uzzi were High Priests and then the office passed to Eli who was the first High Priest of the line of Ithamar. Now the days of Eli's youth must have coincided fairly well with the time of Gideon. Eli is represented in the Scripture as an indolent and indifferent High Priest and his sons, his destined successors, irreverent and depraved. One wonders if some "power struggle" within the family of Aaron occurred at or just before the time of Gideon which resulted in the legal line of Eleazar being ousted from Shiloh and the junior line substituted by force and illegally. The reputation of Ephraim generally and the character of the inhabitants of its chief towns, Shechem, Bethel, Shiloh, and so on, was such that almost any kind of roguery could take place. Although Shiloh was the place where the Tabernacle stood for over four hundred years the Lord bitterly reproached the people there for their iniquity and predicted that his judgment would come upon it—as it did in the days of Samuel. *"But go ye now to my place which was in Shiloh"* He said to Jeremiah *"and see what I did to it for the wickedness of my people"* (Jer. 7.12). It was in fact the iniquity of the people and priesthood there in Ephraim that caused the Lord to take away the birthright which in Jacob's day had been given to Joseph, and to award it to Judah, so that Judah became the royal tribe. *"He forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh, the tent which he placed among men . . . he refused the tabernacle of Joseph, and rejected the tribe of Ephraim, and chose the tribe of Judah, the mount Zion which he loved . . . he chose David also his servant"* (Ps. 78. 59-71). What great crime was this which took place in the very place of God's sanctuary; what depth of iniquity was there in the lives of those people and priests in Ephraim which drew forth such condemnation from the Most High? The behaviour of Eli's sons during the boyhood of Samuel (1 Sam. 2.22) of Abimelech and the men of Shechem (Jud. 9) of Micah and his graven images in the very vicinity of Shiloh (Jud. 17) are only three incidents which show just how far gone in the ways of evil were these professed men of God.

Is it then possible that Shiloh had in the days of Gideon fallen into the hands of a faction which made Eli, or perhaps his father, High Priest in defiance of the legal rights of the Eleazar line and that the true High Priest—whether Uzzi or one of his successors, Zerariah or Meraioth, all recorded in 1 Chron. 6 as the legal line from Eleazar

although not said to have been High Priests—was compelled to flee into exile? In such case he would most likely cross the border into Manasseh; the enmity between that tribe and Ephraim would assure him of a welcome and safety, and the Manassites would certainly recognise him as the legal holder of the office. Gideon had already erected an altar in his home village and named it Jehovah-shalom; “God will give peace”. Did he now, in the flush of victory, add to his enthusiasm for the abolition of Baal worship a zeal for the service of God in a form which perhaps had not been known at Shiloh for many years past? Did he, in declining the offer of kingship over Israel, dream of a restored legal High Priest of the line of Eleazar, functioning not at Shiloh in Ephraim, but at Ophrah in Manasseh, and is this why he made the ephod?

We do not know. We only know that whatever the motive prompting his establishment of Divine service at the altar he had built, it was doomed to failure. It was not of Divine appointment. Despite all the shortcomings of the sanctuary at Shiloh, it was still the place where the Lord had put his Name. The Ark of the Covenant still reposed within the Most Holy and the mysterious *Shekinah* still illuminated that secret apartment with its supernatural light. It was for God, not Gideon, to say when the order of things was to come to an end. And when it did end, it was to Judah, not Manasseh, that the honour went: at Jerusalem, not Ophrah, where the Lord authorised a sanctuary for his name, and Solomon, not Gideon, who in due time was to restore the priestly office to the rightful line of Eleazar.

It is probable that Gideon's fault was over-enthusiasm for God and failure to realise that enthusiasm itself can be a snare if it is not controlled by a scrupulous adherence to the Divine leading. It is not said of him in the case of the ephod, as it was in the case of the expedition, that he sought signs from God that he was doing the right thing. It might well have been that his righteous indignation at the godlessness of Shiloh convinced him that as virtual ruler of the nation he must strike another blow for God, not against external enemies this time but against internal enemies. He underestimated the extent of irreligion which still existed in Israel. In destroying the altar of Baal at Ophrah and setting up in its place an altar to Jehovah; in doing away with the *asherah* and substituting an ephod, he had merely changed the name of the god and left the basic principle untouched. And so

idolatry was not completely eliminated in Israel; it was merely driven underground to bide its time for its re-emergence. It was going to require the work of Samuel a century or two later to replace the corrupt and godless priesthood at Shiloh by a new and vigorous administration which would bring all Israel back to a real and living faith.

Nevertheless Gideon did much to arrest Israel's decline into apostasy. He lived forty years after his great victory and during all that forty years, under his administration, the land had rest from enemies, sure sign that in the main God was honoured and the Covenant observed. But it was largely a personal loyalty; “*as soon as Gideon was dead, the children of Israel turned again . . . and made Baal-berith their god, and remembered not the Lord who had delivered them out of the hands of all their enemies on every side*”. (ch. 8. 33-39). A new generation arose that knew nothing of the famous deliverance except by the stories told by their grandfathers, and the whole sad experience had to be endured again. So it has been throughout history; no generation seems able to learn from the mistakes of its predecessors; each must learn by actual experience. In their arrogance and self-will, pride in their own abilities and achievements, men will not brook being told what is for their good. They cannot endure the thought that they owe existence and life to a Higher Power and are as yet immature babes, unable to fashion their own lives and steer their own course aright without acceptance of guidance and instruction from on high. The thirtieth chapter of Isaiah presents an eloquent lament on this sad propensity in the hearts of men and its inevitable consequences. The people refuse the word of the Lord and reject his prophets; the Lord intervenes to tell them that in quietness and confidence in him lies their real strength but they will not have him. “*No*” say they “*for we will flee upon horses*” to which the Most High sadly responds “*therefore ye shall indeed flee*”. “*We will ride upon the swift*” they claim exultantly, and again, more sadly still, the response “*therefore shall they that pursue you shall be swift*”. There can be no escape from the consequences of their own folly and short sightedness. At the end of it all there is only utter ruin.

But not for ever. Just because man is an immature babe, and is so to the end of this present earthly life, God will not cast him off for ever. The lessons will be learned, and eventually in a further stage of development men will emerge chastened but better for the experience. So says Isaiah as he

continues his strain "therefore will the Lord wait, that he may be gracious unto you . . . for the Lord is a God of judgment: blessed are all they that wait for him . . . he will be very gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry; when he shall hear it he shall answer thee. And though the Lord give you the bread of affliction and the water of affliction, yet . . . thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it". Just as the Lord delivered Israel in the days of Gideon when they repented and cried unto him, so all who turn from their own ways to seek him in sincerity and submission, whether in this life or the next, whether before death or after resurrection, will experience the truth of that saying "he will be very gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry." There will be, there must be, an end to the day of grace and the opportunity of salvation, a time when those who resolutely and in the face of full knowledge choose Baal instead of the Everliving, choose death which is all that Baal can give instead of life which comes only from the Everliving, but that moment does not come until the immature babe has been

brought to the full stature of a man fully cognisant of the issues between life and death, between good and evil, between righteousness and unrighteousness, and with clear understanding of the principles involved and the effects of his decision makes his choice. Israel in the time of the Judges alternated between the true and the false, between life and death, many times, and Gideon was only one of the many Judges who rose up to deliver and bring them back to the right path. They always slipped back again. The coming Age in which the living and the dead will stand before a Divine Deliverer greater by far than Gideon will face a final crisis greater by far than that incursion of Midianites in that far-off day, for Christ is set to destroy all evil, not for a limited time as then when other nations eventually ravaged the land of Israel again, but for all time. And with the end of evil will come the end of evil-doers: at the end of the Messianic Age it is going to be gloriously true that *"in the name of Jesus every knee shall bow and every tongue confess, that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."*

The End.

Baptism of the Spirit

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

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

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

"Whatsoever things are true . . . think on these things." It is more painful to think about these things than to think about what we know, about what is old in our experience, because immediately we begin to think God's thoughts after him we have to bring concentration to bear, and that takes time and discipline. (Oswald Chambers)

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

FROM A PRISON CELL

Reflections on the
"Prison Epistles"

Part 2. The Good Pleasure of his Will

In the opening verses of his letter to the Ephesians, after the short introductory greeting, Paul piles up statement after statement in an almost bewildering way. The reflective mind is staggered by the immensity of the arguments as feature after feature is brought to view. This succession of amazing arguments presents, in the realm of religious thought, an appearance like a series of mighty mountain peaks towering up into heaven one up against the other, and stretching as far as the eye can see. So closely do the sentences run into each other, it is not easy to separate them one from another in order to take them each singly to analyse and explain them in turn, or in detail. By very careful differentiation, it is possible to divide the section (vs. 3-14) into three smaller sections, each of which seems to have its own outstanding particulars of teaching to impart. These three sub-sections are verses 3-6, verses 7-12, and verses 13-14. The first begins with ascription of praise to God for all his favours in general to the believer through Christ; the second with *"In whom WE have been blessed"* with a part in those favours; the third with *"In whom YE ALSO"* have come to receive a share with those who first hoped (or trusted) in Christ. The first one deals with God's fore-ordination to take to himself a family of heavenly sons; the second shows them as a first instalment resulting from the operation of a plan of reconciliation embracing both heavenly and earthly things; the third places on record the bestowment of a token or pledge of Divine assurance that the full and complete inheritance for these sons of God is sure without fail. Towering high above all these assurances is the assertion that everything forms part of God's unchanging purpose—*"according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own Will"* (vv. 9 and 11). In the words of a later section (Eph. 3. 11) they were *"according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord"*.

Three times the Apostle makes reference to varying aspects of God's Will. First (in v.5), he speaks of the process of adoption as being *"according to the good pleasure of his Will"*, and lastly (v.11) he asserts that the whole scheme of reconciliation is *"according to the counsel of his Will"*. Thus the outworking of God's Will is seen to be in

absolute accordance with the counsel given by unerring Wisdom, and though at its first inception it was in the nature of a God-kept mystery, known only to himself, it has now been revealed, and shown to be in full conformity with God's unfathomed appreciation of all that is holy and true and good. The prompting motive throughout, at every stage, is God's free and unmerited grace—(v.6) *"to the glory of his grace"* (v.7)—*"according to the riches of his grace"*. Wisdom, Love and Power are thus set forth by the Apostle as the attributes behind the whole design, and as operating from before the foundation of the world towards the completion of the universal Plan. At the centre of the whole plan God has set *"One"* upon whom He has placed his own gracious Spirit, and from which *"act of placement"* that One has taken his title and his Name. That honoured *"One"* is called *"The Christ"*. *"The Christ"* is rightly depicted as the recipient of an *"outpouring"*. In Mosaic times this *"out-pouring"* was represented in the anointing oil of the *"chosen"* person as God's High Priest. Hence the Apostle can speak of privileges embodied and residing in Christ as from distant days, but which became available to the follower of the Lord in these special days of grace. Thus we read of spiritual blessings in the heavenlies *"in Christ"*, of God having fore-ordained us unto adoption as sons *"through Jesus Christ"*; of the grace, which He freely bestowed on us *"in the Beloved"*; of God's purpose to sum up all things *"in Christ"*; and that those *"should be unto the praise of his glory"* who had first hoped *"in Christ"*. Thus, in far distant times, God had issued from his own possession and by his own sole authority, a whole galaxy of honours and preferments to and for his Chosen One when time and circumstances should cause that Chosen One to appear. *"In Christ"* the fulness (*"pleroma"*) of Divinity was appointed to dwell (Col. 2. 9).

But more than this, all other beings in heaven and earth, all things visible and invisible, whether thrones, dominions, principalities or powers, were created in relationship to him, for it was God's will for him to hold them together, as a sovereign prince might coordinate and hold together many subordinate thrones. (Col. 1. 17). Their honours and stations were created and conferred to be

ready for them to bear subordinate relationship to more exalted authority when He should reach his lofty throne. All this exalted superiority was vested "in Christ" before the world began and forms part of God's primordial out-pouring for his coming "Chosen One".

Twice the Apostle refers to an enabling power bestowed by God, the possession of which would activate and empower the members of the "Chosen One" to achieve the destiny to which they had been called. "*Blessed us with all spiritual blessings . . . ye were sealed with the Holy Spirit of Promise*" (vv. 3 and 13). The Holy Spirit is God's creative instrument, which can bestow blessing upon such as are in Christ—(spiritual light, spiritual food, and intense spiritual desire)—and at the same time mark or seal them as God's own. This is an outflow of Divine energy from the throne of God, in order to produce in his elect a disposition and character like his own—Divine power creating in the object of his choice a character that can contain and retain for ever attributes of Divinity.

But all save one of this elect company have been subject to the power of sin. Twice Paul speaks of redemption for all such. First, such redemption as is represented by the "*forgiveness of sin*". But that is not the full measure of redemption contemplated. Full redemption belongs to a later day, and will imply much more than forgiveness of sin. There is a Day of redemption provided for—the

year of my redeemed". To redeem them from sin was ordained to cost their Lord and Leader his life. That Leader had to die for them, to procure cleansing for them from their sins, and further to enfold them about with his own spotless righteousness. To each forgiven follower the privilege was ordained for him to win his place in Christ, and be found in him, by partaking of Christ's sufferings—being conformed to Jesus' death. It was thus necessary for the Chosen One—the Logos of creative days—to whom it pleased God to ordain pre-eminence in everything, to stoop down from his lofty place and be found in fashion as a man, and become humbled unto death so that He might redeem the intended sons from sin and death, and then when himself raised from the dead, become their leader—as well as shepherd and bishop of their souls—to lead these many sons up to the ordained heights of glory, honour and immortality.

These, then, are the high peak points of Paul's opening argument in this great letter from a prison cell. Are all these points of doctrine new items of revelation never before enunciated till his prison days? Did Paul say nothing on these great themes in Corinthians, Galatians, and Romans? And had Jesus nothing to say on any of these doctrines?

We shall see!

(To be continued)

A Voice from the Past

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

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

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

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

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

THE PARABLE OF THE SHEEP AND GOATS

Matt. 25. 31-46

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

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

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

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

The basis of the selection, feeding or not feeding the hungry, clothing or failing to clothe the naked, and so on, is an allusion to the very practical ideas held by thinking men in Jesus' day as to what constituted fitness or unfitness for eternal life. Such

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

In the parable the "sheep" are those who manifest the practical Christian virtues toward their fellows—feeding the hungry and thirsty,

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

The question put both by sheep and goats "*When saw we thee an hungred, or athirst . . .*" and so on, is a rhetorical one, put into the mouths of the characters in order to throw into prominence the essential principle of these "good works"; inasmuch as ye did it—or did it not—unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye did it—or did it not—unto me. Our Lord's concern for those He came to seek and to save is such that every service or disservice rendered to them He feels as if rendered to him. More; since He gave his own life, at the cost of great suffering, for the salvation of men, and is to establish his thousand year reign on earth for the purpose of persuading as many as can possibly be persuaded to "turn from sin to serve the living God", it follows that every service or disservice rendered to men in that day is either a help or a hindrance to the execution of the King's plans,

and therefore can be aptly said to be done, or not done, unto him. No one in that Age can escape working, either for or against the purposes of God—and all will be judged accordingly.

"Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, 'Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world'" (vs. 34). This "kingdom" is not the same as the Millennial Kingdom of Christ. That is a kingdom in which all men are under discipline, and all, good and bad alike, are present in that kingdom and must perforce remain so until they have come to a full knowledge of the truth and made their choice between "life and death, good and evil". This is a kingdom entrance into which is granted only to the proved righteous, to those who have passed the test and are in no sense unclean. It thus corresponds to the Holy City of Rev. 21 and 22, into which nothing unclean or that defileth will ever enter. It is the kingdom of the earth *after* the Millennial Age, which men inherit as kings in their own right, living, moving and having their being in God the Father and conducting their own affairs on a basis of equality with each other in harmony with the laws of righteousness.

"Then shall he say also unto them on the left

hand, 'Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels'" (vs. 41). Here we have the antithesis to the Holy City, the lake of fire of Revelation 19 and 20, symbolic of utter destruction. The allusion is, of course, to the valley of Gehenna outside Jerusalem, where perpetual fires destroyed the refuse of the city. Jesus took the illustration from the apocalyptic literature of his day, and his hearers would realise quite naturally what He meant. The final verse of the parable perhaps makes this more clear *"These shall go away into everlasting punishment"*, where "punishment" is *kolasin*, disciplinary restraint, and not *timora*, which is the word that indicates penal infliction in the sense of the English word punishment. *Kolasin*, derived from the verb *kolazo*, which means to lop or prune trees, hence to check, curb or restrain, is very descriptive of the purpose of God with irrecoverable sinners. "They shall be as though they had not been"; they will be "cut off from among the people" and so the expression "everlasting" (or enduring) punishment can be accurately rendered "final cutting-off". That cutting-off is as permanent and everlasting as is the eternal life of the righteous mentioned in the same verse.

A NOTE ON ISA. 53. 2

"For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground." (Isa. 53. 2.)

The word translated "tender plant" comes from "suckling" as in "Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings" in Psa. 8. 2, and refers to the young saplings that grow up from the stump of a tree which has been felled. In our own day such shoots are still referred to as "suckers". This is a picture of the coming of Christ which is similar and yet in marked contrast to Isa. 11. 1. *"There shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots"*. In that chapter the "Branch" comes forth to glory and power, the Spirit of the Lord resting upon him, leading him to judge the poor with righteousness and slay the wicked with the rod of his mouth. Isaiah has passed over the day of humiliation and suffering and sees only the triumphant Kingdom beyond, when Messiah shall reign gloriously and all the nations flock to His banner. In this verse of the 53rd chapter the same "rod of the stem of Jesse" is depicted as a sapling growing out of dry ground to disesteem and spurning. Its growth and develop-

ment is to be under unfavourable circumstances. But it is the same shoot. It will go on growing until it has survived the winter and passed into the light and sunshine of the spring, and it is then that the fully grown tree will spread abroad its branches in invitation to all creatures. Just as the stone which Nebuchadnezzar saw in his vision became a great mountain that filled the whole earth, so here we have the picture of a tender sapling which thrusts its roots into the soil and its leaves into the air until it has filled the whole face of the land, and, like Israel in her own destined times, blossomed and budded and filled the whole world with fruit.

The background of the picture is the allusion in Isa. 10. 34 to the fall of the Davidic kingly rule under the symbol of the cutting down a great cedar in Lebanon by the ruthless invader. The cedars of Lebanon were the mightiest trees known to the ancient world. It was only fitting that these proud monarchs of the forest, standing erect in their towering majesty over all the other trees, should be chosen to picture the royal authority of the house of David, who "sat upon the throne of the Lord" and ruled Israel in the name of God. The apparent

permanence of those cedars told fitly of the throne that was to endure for ever before God. But Isaiah in his day knew that because of faithlessness the throne of David must be overthrown, the upstanding cedar be cut down. That was the theme of his prophecy but he did not end there. The throne of David would one day be re-established, when "*he whose right it is*" appeared to claim his possession. So in verse 34 of chapter 10 the prophet sees the Assyrian and Babylonian invaders ravaging the land and taking the people captive and destroying the kingly power, and he says "*he shall cut down the thickets of the forest with iron, and Lebanon shall fall by a mighty one*". Immediately following, in the first verse of chapter 11, comes the golden sequel "*and there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse . . .*" Like the tree of the Babylonian king's vision, which was cut down until seven times had passed over it, and then was to sprout again, so it is here. The great cedar of Lebanon which was the kingship of David's line was cut down by the oppressors of Israel. Zedekiah was the last king; but a tender sapling out of that cut-down stump would one day arise to grow into a cedar mightier by far than that which had flourished and perished.

So out of the apparent barrenness and failure of God's promises there grows the "root of David". Christ is to be as a root out of dry ground. The learned men of our Lord's day were quite unable to understand how Christ could be both David's son and David's Lord, even though Jesus quoted the Old Testament Scriptures to that effect and they had prided themselves on understanding the Old

Testament Scriptures. This "rod out of the stem of Jesse", this "tender plant" or sapling from the cut-down stump, is also the root itself! "*I am the root and offspring of David, the bright and morning star.*" "*All things were made by him, and without him was not anything made that was made.*" Unless Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, the Lord from heaven, is the root of David as well as his Son, the whole of our faith is founded upon a falsity and we are of all men most miserable. The only possibility of salvation for this fallen race of which we are members lay in the active intervention of God from heaven. "*God, sending his Son in the likeness of sinful flesh . . .*" "*He who was rich, for our sakes became poor . . .*" Without the root there could never have been the tender sapling growing up into maturity to the lasting benefit of mankind.

The "dry ground" is the "dry and thirsty land, where no water is" of Psa. 63. 1. The Psalmist longs and seeks for God but sees no evidence of his presence, until he finds him in the sanctuary and remembers him on his bed, meditating on him in the night watches. Unless we search for God, and finding him, hold him fast, even the promises and plans of God are as dry ground to us, barren and profitless. But for those who will have it, there is a root in that dry ground which contains within itself the springing life that is to burst forth into the light of day, bringing life and immortality to light through the Gospel, and causing, at last, the desire of all nations to come. To we who know these things, the dry ground has indeed become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water.

Prophetic words from the past

"The sword of truth is to smite every evil system and custom—civil, social and ecclesiastical. We can see that the smiting is commenced: freedom of thought, and human rights, civil and religious, long lost sight of under kings and emperors, popes, synods, councils, traditions and creeds, are being appreciated and asserted as never before. The internal conflict is already fomenting: it will break forth as a consuming fire, and human systems and errors, which for centuries have fettered truth and oppressed the groaning creation, must melt before it. Truth—and widespread and increasing knowledge of it—is the sword which is perplexing and wounding the heads over many countries (Psa.

110, 6). Yet in this trouble what a blessing is disguised: It will prepare mankind for a fuller appreciation of righteousness and truth, under the reign of the King of Righteousness.

"As men realise that justice is laid to the line and righteousness to the plummet (Isa. 28. 17), they will learn that the strict rules of justice alone can secure the blessings which all desire. Thoroughly disheartened with their own ways and the miserable fruitage of selfishness, they will welcome the righteous authority which takes the control; thus, as it is written, "The desire of all nations shall come"—the Kingdom of God, under the control of God's Anointed." (C. T. Russell 1890).

THE PRELATE'S DILEMMA

*A story of the
Millennium*

The afternoon sun slanted through the stained glass windows and spilled in shimmering pools of colour over the floor. At the far end of the hall, where the double line of marble columns ended in a lofty portico, the outside landscape showed like a vividly lighted picture framed in the great entrance arch.

Through that arch came the Prelate. A murmured consultation with the attendant in the portico, and he resumed his stately progress towards the solitary figure at the desk far up the hall.

The Prelate had not seen this magnificent edifice before. He viewed its mellow beauty with the appraising gaze of a connoisseur. Its graceful proportions and freedom from ostentatious decoration pleased his æsthetic taste. He could imagine himself preaching in this building to the five or six thousand people it would certainly hold. They had told him that the House of God nearby was even larger—twenty thousand worshippers gathered there every day. He would surely not be permitted to leave the city without being invited to preach at least once to such a congregation. He made a mental note to mention this to the Federal President when at last he did get to see him.

The man at the desk had risen and was approaching him with firm step. What fine-looking fellows they all are, thought the Prelate: like Greek gods come to life. Disconcerting, the way this man looked at one. His eyes seemed to pierce right through. The Prelate felt vaguely uneasy.

"I presume that you are one of the President's staff. I have an appointment with the President," he said pompously.

The shadow of a smile flickered across the other man's face. "I am the President," he replied.

"I BEG your pardon. Your servant's directions were not very clear, and — er — I was left to make my way to you unescorted." The Prelate's tone was mildly reproachful; he was accustomed to a certain amount of deference and ceremony.

"I have no servants. The doorkeeper is my colleague" came the level answer.

The Prelate felt puzzled, and a little flustered. "I must beg your pardon again. I am perhaps a little unaccustomed to your ways in this land. I trust that your — er — colleague will overlook any quite unintentional appearance of condescension I may have manifested just now."

The friendly smile broadened. "Surely we are all brothers, friend. He that would be greatest among you, let him be your servant, you know. Now let us talk. You have a special matter to discuss with me?"

The Prelate took the chair indicated, and smoothed his mind for the tussle of wits which he felt sure lay ahead.

"As I stated in my letter to the Administration, I am—or was—overseer of an important English pastoral charge." He paused to select his words carefully. "A very influential English pastoral charge. Now I have always been a loyal supporter of the Constitution and the Government for the time being in power. You must have read my book 'The Church and the Secular Power in Times of Stress'?" The President inclined his head gravely in sign of assent and the Prelate, gratified, proceeded. "It was very favourably commented upon, especially by the 'Financial Times'. As I was saying, I have always loyally supported the Government. You may judge of my astonishment, sir, therefore, when I say that shortly after the recent change of administration I received an intimation from London to the effect that my appointment as Prelate was terminated forthwith, and that my charge would be controlled in future by the Evangelistic Mission, a body of which I had never even heard. A most monstrous proceeding, sir, and a grave affront to the dignity of the Church—" The Prelate broke off, quivering with indignation.

"And then—?" prompted the President gently.

"Naturally I protested. I went up to London to see my superior. He was sympathetic, but explained that under the new system he had no power to help me and indeed was not at all sure what was going to happen to his own self. I called on my friend Sir Herbert Plumptre—a very good friend to the Church, sir, a very good friend indeed—but he was closely engaged with his auditors and unable to see me. A new firm of auditors, his manservant told me, and Sir Herbert was having a great deal of difficulty with them. Not at all accommodating, and quite unwilling to accept his explanation of various business matters. I went round to see the Home Secretary, but he had gone into the country for a long rest. My journey was quite wasted. Finally I wrote to the new Central Administration here at Jerusalem

asking for the privilege of an interview with you, Mr. President. I felt sure that a little friendly contact between us would easily effect the rectification of this glaring injustice."

The Prelate beamed benevolently. He was beginning to feel himself again. The sound of his own voice always had a reassuring effect upon his own mind. He trusted that this man would be reasonable and concede his point at once.

The President looked at him reflectively. His visitor felt fascinated, in spite of himself. Those eyes were so transparent, sincere, child-like almost. What was that text one of his junior clergy was always so fond of quoting? "Their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in Heaven." Funny he should think of that. Whose angels? What had they to do with children anyway? But there was something else about angels. Who was it, standing his trial on some charge or other, of whom it was said that when the judges looked upon him they beheld his face as it had been the face of an angel? This man had the face of an angel. Whatever was he thinking about: he pulled himself together with a start as the President's voice sounded in his ears.

"The whole question turns upon qualifications, my friend. Are you sure that the National Administration had not good reason for placing your charge in the care of the Evangelistic Mission? You will appreciate, I hope, that the time has come for the universal conversion of the world to Christ, and that fully trained and qualified teachers are absolutely essential."

"Qualifications." The Prelate bridled. "My dear sir, at my time of life and the position to which I have attained in the Church I have no need to think about qualifications. Rugger and rowing blue at Oxford, honours in Oriental languages, M.A. and Doctor of Divinity, Regius Professor of Greek and Latin, founder and first Principal of the College of Ecclesiastical Economics, author of several books on Church history—why, my very name is a household word in the best ecclesiastical circles! Qualifications, indeed!" He relapsed into indignant silence.

"Quite, quite" murmured the President soothingly. "I was thinking, rather, of your qualifications for the Christian ministry. Your knowledge of the Bible, for example."

"The Bible?"

"Yes."

"Oh; er—yes. Of course. The—er—Bible."

"Quite. The Bible."

The Prelate looked a little blank. It seemed a strange question to ask. A little out of his line, too. He wished now that he had brought the Dean with him. He was always ready with a text.

"Of course, my dear President, you must understand that a Prelate's life is a very busy one. In my student days, of course . . ." His voice trailed away uncertainly.

The President broke the silence. "In your student days . . .?"

"I remember reading a paper on the Book of Jonah before my fellow-students, showing that Jonah never really lived and that the story of the great fish was taken from Babylonian mythology. Chiefly based on Driver, you know . . . of course I was young then." He smiled self-deprecatingly.

"Jonah would be interested to hear that" remarked the President. "He was in here yesterday."

"I beg your pardon?" The Prelate sat up suddenly. Once again that vague misgiving possessed his mind. Who were these fellows anyway? Of course he did not give credence for one moment to the popular belief, that they were the old prophets of Israel, returned from the dead. The man was an impostor, obviously. A clever impostor, to have attained world Presidency in so short a time and completely without military force, but nothing more. Yet he seemed so sure of himself. Perhaps it was that which gave him his power. Personality, with a dash of hypnotism . . . those keen eyes; that was it! He must go very carefully with him; there was that matter of preaching in the House of God to think about. He gave close attention to the President, who was speaking again.

"As I was saying, Jonah was in here yesterday. He is preaching in the House of God this evening, and leaving next week for China to initiate the work of the Eastern Asia Evangelistic Mission."

The Prelate resolved to get things straight. He leaned forward.

"You mean to tell me that this Jonah, who was reputed to have lived and died about three thousand years ago, is alive again and in this city?"

An almost imperceptible nod gave assent.

"And you expect me to believe that?"

Those calm eyes looked long into his own. There was a strange sadness in their depths.

"No, my friend. I do not expect you to believe it . . . yet. 'If they believe not Moses and the prophets, neither shall they believe though one rose from the dead.' Do you remember who said that?"

The Prelate preened himself. He felt a little more comfortable when it came to the New Testament. "Of course. The story of the raising of Lazarus from the dead."

"Hardly. Those words were spoken in conclusion to the parable of the rich man in hell."

The Prelate bit his lip with annoyance. To be corrected by a layman was intolerable. He wished more than ever that he had brought the Dean. And the conversation was not going according to his liking. He must steer it into more practical channels.

"Of course, my dear President, these academic questions must give place in a busy life like mine to the more immediate calls of my pastoral charge. As a Prelate I am responsible for the spiritual interests of nearly half-a-million souls."

"A heavy responsibility indeed" agreed the President. "And what was the general feeling among those half-a-million souls at the news of your dismissal?"

"There was universal condemnation at the high-handed action of the Administration." The Prelate allowed himself to be a little unctuous. "Lady Taylor-Towers was disgusted, and Colonel Blenkinsop declared that the country was going to the dogs."

"And what did the ordinary people have to say about it?" probed the President gently.

"The ordinary people? I don't know. I am not one to pamper the rank and file. They have their own interests and fads. Just now they have gone after some fanatical revivalist who has been busy in the country—no clerical ordination, of course, but a plausible tongue."

"Have you been to hear him yourself?" asked the President unexpectedly.

"My dear President, you surely don't expect me to go and listen to a man who eats and drinks with the multitude, finds his friends among the outcasts and the criminals, and promises the Kingdom of Heaven to all and sundry. A man like that is a positive menace to every established custom and ordinance." The Prelate bristled. He really must get his point of view across to the President. Obviously a public school man—breeding in every line of him; but singularly obtuse in some things.

"A man gluttonous and a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners!" the President was saying, as if to himself. The euphony of the expression pleased the Prelate; he repeated the words himself. "A fine phrase" he said. "You must be a student of the classics. Plato, I should think. Or is it Homer?"

"Neither" said the President, that unfathomable sadness back in his eyes. "Jesus of Nazareth."

Something snapped in the Prelate's brain. Those eyes held him spell-bound. He thought of his own church, his clergy's pastoral meetings; they seemed to be receding into unreality. Lady Taylor-Towers and the Colonel were almost like recollections of beings from another world. He himself was a Prelate no longer; he was a small boy facing his headmaster at school and feeling badly frightened.

"Tell me," he heard himself saying. "What does it all mean? Who are you? Are you man—or God? Tell me!"

As from a great distance he heard the reply. "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness. 'Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God; for every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain; and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together; for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it'."

The echoes rang back from the end of the hall. The man at the desk had risen and was standing where the sunlight, glancing down, surrounded him with a halo of glory. The Prelate buried his face in his hands. He was trembling.

"Who are you? Who are you?" he pleaded.

He knew the answer before it came. Tender, compassionate, yet compelling in its command.

"My son, I am John the Baptist."

How long he sat there he never knew. He lifted his face at length, his eyes fearing, yet drawn, to seek those of the man before him. He said brokenly.

"How can these things be?"

John looked down upon him. "Art thou a master in Israel, and knowest not these things?"

The Prelate was silent.

"Did you never read in the Scriptures 'Ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the Kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out?'"

The Prelate said nothing.

The keen eyes had become very soft. "It is said that there is joy in Heaven over one sinner that repenteth."

The Prelate stood up suddenly. His voice was low.

"You said that Jonah was to preach in the House of God this evening."

"I did."

"I think—I should like—to hear him".

"You shall accompany me, my friend".

"Is he likely to touch on his—er—recorded adventures?"

"I should think it very likely". The President

looked down at his guest meditatively. "That might not be a bad point at which to re-commence your training."

"Perhaps you are right" said the Prelate.

A GLANCE AT THE LIFE OF JOSEPH

The record concerning Joseph in the Book of Genesis is more than a true story. It gives to us an example of how God works in the lives of faithful men. The experiences of Joseph did not come to him by chance but were in the outworking of the Divine Purpose. His brothers hated him because of his father's great love for him. They hated him still more when he made known to them his dreams which indicated that he was to have dominion over them. Even Jacob rebuked him concerning the dream which implied that his parents as well as his brothers would come to bow down before him.

When Jacob sent Joseph to see if all was well with his brethren and their flocks it gave them the opportunity to put him out of the way and so put an end, as they thought, to all that was meant in his dreams. First they intended to put him to death. Reuben had other thoughts and Joseph was put into an empty pit after being stripped of the special coat given to him by his father. Later, instead of putting him to death his brothers sold him to a band of Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver. Taking Joseph's coat they dipped it in the blood of one of the goats and took it to their father. Jacob was sure that some animal had devoured him and mourned his death.

Joseph was taken down to Egypt and sold as a slave to Potiphar an officer of Pharaoh's army. This appeared to be the end of Joseph's prospects, but not so, for we read "*the Lord was with Joseph*". Divine providence was at work in a wonderful way. "*The Lord made all that he did to prosper in his hand*". Observing this Potiphar gave Joseph complete oversight of his household and property. Further, the Lord blessed Potiphar's house for Joseph's sake. This is not the only time that an employer has been blessed by a godly servant.

Because of a lying accusation by his master's wife Joseph was cast into prison. But again we read "*the Lord was with Joseph*" and blessed him there. He was given charge of all the prisoners. The prison keeper left all things in his hands. Even now the prospect of Joseph's dreams ever being fulfilled seemed very remote. But God was working in a remarkable way. Two of Pharaoh's officers,

the butler and the baker, who had been put into prison had dreams. These Joseph interpreted correctly. The butler was freed and restored to his office, the baker was put to death. This was preparing the way for greater things. Next it was Pharaoh's turn to dream. He saw seven well fed, fat kine in the meadow, then seven lean kine came after them and ate them up. In a second dream he saw good healthy ears of corn which were devoured by seven thin blasted ones. He called for all his magicians and wise men but none could interpret the dreams. It was then that the butler remembered Joseph and how he had correctly interpreted his dream in prison. He made this known to Pharaoh who sent for Joseph. Shaved and properly dressed Joseph appeared before Pharaoh. "*I have dreamed a dream*" said Pharaoh, "*and there is none that can interpret it: and I have heard say of thee that thou canst understand a dream and interpret it*". Joseph at once disclaimed any honour for himself in answering Pharaoh. "*It is not in me*" he said, "*God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace*". After Pharaoh had related his dreams Joseph said "*God hath shewed Pharaoh what he is about to do*". Joseph did not say that God had shewn what was about to happen but **WHAT HE WAS ABOUT TO DO. GOD WAS WORKING** in the events which were happening. Seven years of plenty were to be followed by seven years of famine. "*The thing is established by God*" said Joseph, "*God will shortly bring it to pass*".

Joseph advised Pharaoh to appoint officers to prepare during the seven years of plenty for the seven years of famine which were to follow. This was a good proposition in the eyes of Pharaoh and his servants. Being sure that there was no one more fitted for the work than Joseph, whose God had revealed these things, Pharaoh made him ruler over all Egypt, next only to himself on the throne.

The power and authority of Joseph is expressed in the words "*without thee shall no man lift up his hand or foot in all the land of Egypt*". So, under Joseph, Egypt during seven years of abundance prepared for the famine that was coming. The famine extended to the countries round about and

they sent to Joseph in Egypt to buy corn.

The famine was felt in Canaan and Jacob sent ten of his sons to buy corn "*that we may live and not die*". The brothers of Joseph came and "*bowed themselves before him*". Joseph recognised his brothers and would notice that Benjamin was not with them. He would no doubt remember his dreams as they bowed down before him. He dealt "*roughly*" with them and accused them of being spies. Then they declared that they were twelve brothers; the youngest was at home with their father and one, they said, is not. Joseph would indeed be glad to know that his father and Benjamin were alive and without doubt longed to see them at once. But first he would learn something concerning his brothers. His dealings with them as recorded in chapters 42 to 44 may seem to be "rough" but by this means he "proved" them. He found that they were really good at heart and had a great love and respect for their father. Further, he saw that they had come to feel guilty because of what they had done to him when they sold him into slavery. He felt no hatred for them nor any revenge in his heart, but only love for these who had treated him so badly. Unable to restrain himself any longer he made himself known to his brothers. What a dramatic situation! Having ordered that all others must leave, he wept aloud and declared "*I AM JOSEPH*". His brothers were speechless and troubled, no doubt wondering what he was about to do to them. He soon assured them with gracious words "*Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for GOD DID SEND ME BEFORE YOU TO*

PRESERVE YOU A POSTERITY IN THE EARTH and to save your lives by a grand deliverance". The purpose of God was working out through Jacob and his family. *They must be preserved*. The promised one to bless "all the families of the earth", one greater than Joseph, had to come through Israel, the natural seed of Abraham. God's hand was in the affairs of Egypt looking forward to the coming of Messiah the Saviour of Israel and the world. Joseph, a faithful man was wonderfully used by God in the chain of events leading on to that great day. Indeed God was with Joseph and working out his own purpose. Truly God does work in a mysterious way.

Having made himself known to his brothers and comforting them, Joseph sent them laden with corn back to their father to tell him the good news of Joseph's position in Egypt. Joseph was still alive and "*lord of all Egypt*"! What wonderful news for Jacob! So he and all belonging to him came down to Joseph and dwell in the land of Goshen, there to enjoy the good things of Egypt. Centuries later, after a long period of affliction, they came out of Egypt by the hand of Moses, another faithful man mightily used of God in the unfolding of his great purpose. In this deliverance from Egypt the Lord fulfilled a promise made to Abraham (Gen. 15. 13-16). His word never fails. He keeps faithful to every promise.

In the many lessons which may be learned from God's dealings with Joseph one is: "*All things work together for good to them that love God, to them that are the called according to his purpose*".

Bible Emphasis

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

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

The proportion of page space thus given is: History 60%; Doctrine 15%; Prophecy 25%.

This does not mean that doctrine is to be regarded as of minor importance; there is much in the historical and prophetic books that is vital doctrinal teaching. What perhaps is a desirable conclusion to draw is this: the amount of space

given to historical accounts would seem to indicate that our consideration of the lives and actions of those who served God, or rejected God, in past days is very necessary in the ordering of our own Christian lives. The greatest lessons of life can perhaps best be learned by the study of things that happened in times gone by.

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

PERFECTING HOLINESS

"... let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God." (2 Cor. 7. 1 (NIV.))

These words appear in a letter sent to a church in a city which was notoriously the most corrupt town in the Roman Empire. The very name Corinth was synonymous with depravity of the worst sort. In his first letter Paul had taken this church to task for having allowed something of the sinful condition of their pagan neighbours to enter their fellowship. But that letter, which had caused so much pain to writer and recipients, also contained some wonderful teaching about the Christian life. That could not have been discussed by the apostle unless there had been some spiritual growth. The second letter shows a marked improvement in the Church's standing in Christ. Yet woven together into the fabric of this letter are revelations about God, and criticism of the believers' behaviour.

Paul reminds the Corinthian church of the kind of behaviour which as God's people they must avoid. They are a 'new creation' and therefore must make a clean break with the 'old creation'. They must not imitate the world around them. Yet they could not, nor should they try, to ignore unbelievers. To do so would prevent them from giving a clear witness concerning the love of God.

As part of God's Church, believers should reach up to the standards of his holiness. If they hoped to live with God, then they must share his freedom from sin and his love of righteousness. So wrote the 'writer to the Hebrews' (12. 14) "*Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.*" which has supporting verses in the Sermon on the Mount "*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God*". All disciples of Jesus have been called to be saints (holy ones) but that is not a calling to a monastic life. The problem is living in the world of sinners, frequently contaminated with evil, and at the same time becoming holy.

The solution lies in the word 'perfecting'. It is not a completed state. What is required is a process towards completion and maturity. There is a sense in both the Old and New Testaments in which sanctification, (cleansing from sin), is completed and finished in the work of Christ. Before God we stand justified from sin through faith. The damage done by the rebellion of the human race against God has been atoned for in Christ. We need, however, to go back to the rebellion in the beginning.

The human race began in a condition of sinlessness as created by God. Disobedience spoiled that work of God and ruptured the relationship between God and man. God's holiness demanded that there should be separation between himself and sin. While his wrath has to be shown against everything that is wrong He is intensely concerned to reconcile sinners to himself. This is demonstrated by Jesus in the parable of the Prodigal Son, where the Father is ready and waiting for the son who has gone astray.

There is very little detail of how reconciliation was being achieved in the first eleven chapters of Genesis, but it is clear that from Abraham onwards God was taking the initiative to re-establish a right relationship with humanity. Various sacrifices were offered up and there was active obedience when Isaac was placed on the altar. The main ideas for the redemption of man were not given until Israel became a nation and they had their priesthood in place. God had been preparing for this in his promises to Abraham and in the making of a covenant.

The word 'holy' hardly occurs in Genesis. There are some interesting studies in practical morality in the lives of the patriarchs. Whether what those ancient men did or did not do was wrong is not always clear from the historical text. More is to be gleaned from the New Testament. Slowly what emerges is God's expression of love towards them because of their willingness to trust him.

The first direct mention of holiness is given in the record of Moses at the Burning Bush. Moses was told to remove his sandals because he was standing on holy ground. This is in Exodus 3. 5 and the same situation arises when Joshua faces the angel of the Lord recorded in Joshua 5. 15. It was customary among many Middle Eastern countries of that time to show their deference for Deity by removing their shoes in his presence. It appears that the High Priest entered the very presence of God in the Most Holy of the Tabernacle without anything on his feet. Sandals were worn while treading on ordinary common soil. The soil which Moses and Joshua were standing on in these incidents had become holy by the presence of God—either actual or represented by an angel.

The institution of a High Priest to mediate between God and his people, which required him to stand in the presence of God, brought into clearer focus the need of holy things. In Genesis 2.

3 the Sabbath is said to have been sanctified or made holy—that is, it was separated from other days or set apart (for worship and rest). Feasts and fasts were also regarded as holy. Clothing and fields could be in a similar category. The ‘sanctuary’ and its furniture and fittings were all to be holy and needed to be consecrated to the Lord. When the people of Israel came to Mount Sinai they too were made holy so that they could be brought close to him in a covenant relationship. The earliest details of their covenant referred to Israel as “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation”. God could now draw near to Israel and they could live in his presence. No other nation in the world throughout history was given that privilege. They removed themselves from that position of favour by their disobedience and were allowed to be made slaves and exiles. It was God who took the initiative to redeem them and bring them back to their own land.

In Romans 11 Paul says that “*God has bound all men over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all*”. In this first chapter of that letter Paul wrote three times that God gave them (all humanity) over to their own wicked ways, because of their immorality. The patriarchs and later Israel were brought into friendship with God and were therefore counted before him as holy. As the history of Israel unfolded it was shown to be a process of ‘sanctification’ in which God progressively revealed himself. Some in Israel came closer to him. God also had dealings with some people outside the commonwealth of Israel, for example Melchizedek and Cyrus. Nor did the Scripture “You only have I known of all the peoples of the Earth”, referring to Israel, prevent God from co-opting Gentiles into his purpose. As one people and nation they had the opportunity of knowing the great Creator intimately. They missed that opportunity of knowing the great Creator intimately. They missed that opportunity as a nation but a remnant did enjoy God’s friendship.

Among the people of Israel there were quite definite groups who drew closer to God than the remainder. The priest, kings and prophets enjoyed a greater degree of fellowship with God if they were faithful to their calling. Such were anointed and consecrated and given a special revelation of God and his message. They went through a particular ceremony of ritual which marked them out for God’s holy service.

When a member of the Israelite community sinned against God they had to make a sacrifice to

cleanse them from what they had done wrong. To worship God also required ritual, and Israel was careful to obey accurately the demands of the Law. After the exile, as some returned to their land they began to pay more attention to the minute details of the Law. Many tiny aspects of the Law became vitally important to them and consequently the spirit of the Law was lost. Legally correct they may have been, but they lacked the fruitfulness of character which really could have given them friendship with God. Hence when Jesus came they could not understand why He did not obey detailed interpretation of the Law. His refusal to observe the traditional methods for keeping the Law caused them to believe that He was an unholy man.

The Sabbath was holy yet Jesus did not keep it according to their custom. Many people in Israel, suffering some defect, were not holy by the standards of the religious leaders. Those with leprosy, the woman who ‘touched Jesus’ clothing, the woman of Phoenicia, were all unclean. Jesus had no inhibitions about touching them, talking to them and healing them. Thus he showed the Jewish people that holiness before God was not a matter of their ritual and customs.

There is a record of an incident in Mark 7 (perhaps it was a series of incidents) concerning the way in which Jesus thought about holy things. He set a pattern of behaviour for the Early Church and the historical Church which was to follow. Jesus had already been teaching for more than two years and his popularity had begun to wane. The religious leaders were beginning to warm up the opposition. During this incident the Pharisees and Lawyers were getting together around him to see if they could find some fault with his work and teaching. While they were eating their hands touched the food. Those hands had been also touching all kinds of objects between meals. Therefore all Jews were careful to wash their hands before touching food. It was not just a quick rinse under the tap. It was a ceremony which had to be done according to prescribed details. It was not a matter of hygiene but a religious ritual. To fail to observe this ceremony was not a matter of catching some nasty infection but of disobedience of Divine law. The defector was therefore unclean and unholy. The Pharisees noticed that Jesus’ disciples ate with unwashed hands. To them, his permission so to eat, marked out Jesus as an unholy person.

They tackled Jesus on this legal point and wanted to know why his disciples did not obey the tradition of the elders. These ‘elders’ were great

teachers of the past who had sought to discover what the Law meant. After their death, their teaching had become venerated to the extent that to ignore it was to place oneself outside the Jewish community, thus making oneself unholy and unclean. Jesus quoted to them the prophet Isaiah, who had said that Israel were more concerned about the teachings of men than about the Word of God. While they busied themselves with ideas which amounted to nothing in God's work and revelation, they were paying no attention to the really important issues of the spiritual life.

The fundamental principles of how to live in a godly way and please the Creator of the Universe are clear and straightforward. They always have been. They do not require the lengthy explanations of scholars. This is not a criticism of scholarship which is valuable and interesting. But to become a servant of God, an Israelite indeed and a real follower of the Lord Jesus, does not require the ability to prepare complex doctrinal theses. Religious attitudes have not changed over the centuries. There are still those who believe that detailed explanations of men and women are more important than reading the simple Word of God and obeying its commandments.

Is there a means by which we can distinguish valuable 'explanations and treatises' compared with those which are not. Firstly, any commentary on the Word of God, however good and spiritual and learned, loses its value when placed above the Word itself. This is how sectarianism has been created.

Secondly, the commentary or treatise must itself place God's Word before its own explanations.

Thirdly, such writings about the Word of God must promote among its readers a 'holy life'. A holy life in the New Testament sense is not only one that has been cleansed from sin and evil, but positively makes the love of Christ come to life in

the world of today.

The first letter of John states clearly that "God is love". The first letter of Paul to the Corinthians clearly states that love is the greatest gift of the Spirit. The apostle then proceeds simply to explain what he means by love. During the history of the Christian Church there have been able exponents of the Scriptures whose works have been used to cause conflict and division. This is not holiness.

Jesus went on to teach the crowd around him (recorded in Mark 7) what really made a person unclean and unholy. It is not the food that goes into our mouths which makes any difference to our characters but what we say, because that has come from our hearts and betrays what kind of person we are. Jesus is saying that food is not the most important thing in life. He is not saying it does not matter at all. Like all God's gifts it is to be received with thankfulness. But it is only part of this life. That which goes on in our brains or minds is part of eternity and therefore it is more important. It is on the expressions which come out of our minds that we shall be judged; expressions in writing as well as what is spoken with our mouths. In fact we shall be judged by what is going on inside our minds—our thinking.

In Mark 7, 21 Jesus gives us a list of some of the things which "make a man unholy". Again he is saying that it is not the type of food that we eat or the quality of our washing before eating it that gives us a label 'holy' or 'unholy'. It is the kind of thinking that goes on in our minds which makes us fit for the presence of God. Jesus does not list 'academic or abstract ideas' in Mark 7. Jesus is concerned with immorality in our hearts which is the driving force of our words and actions.

"O the bliss of the man whose motives are absolutely pure, for that man will some day be able to see God!"

(Matthew 5, 8; Barclay's commentary).

Every man is not a proper champion for the truth, nor fit to take up the gauntlet in the cause of verity. Many, from an inconsiderate zeal unto the truth, have too rashly charged the troops of error and remain as trophies to the enemies of truth.

Sir T. Browne

"I do not believe that a Christian who wishes to make his faith real needs anything except Christ's understanding of God, a mind that is not afraid to think, and a love of the brethren which comes from his knowledge of how he himself needs a Saviour."

Dick Sheppard

THE FIFTIETH PSALM

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

joy of the whole earth?" (Lam. 2. 15) but the fire of that judgment and the light of that knowledge will yet reach all men and all will be compelled to acknowledge that truly there is a God that judgeth in the earth. This shining forth of God from Zion, from Jerusalem, of verse 2, then, well depicts the gradual manifestation of God to men during this Gospel Age, from Pentecost until now. During all that time He has been manifest to the Church by the medium of his Holy Spirit which illuminates and leads and has been manifest to the world through the medium of his Church, his "witnesses" in the earth. The extent to which God has shined into the hearts of the unsanctified during this Age, both for enlightenment and for judgment, is dependent upon the faithfulness of his own sanctified ones in their privilege and responsibility of ambassadorship for Christ. "Now then" says Paul "we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech by us: we pray, in Christ's stead, 'be ye reconciled to God'" (2 Cor. 5. 10).

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

This is Armageddon, the rising up of God at the end of the Age to "avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth" (Rev. 6. 10), and to vindicate his own Name and the honour of his plan. "Our God shall come"—can there be any more thrilling, inspiring certainty? Israel looked for him to come in person, descending upon the Mount of Olives in visible shape (Zech. 14. 4) striding the two sides of the riven mountain like some gigantic Colossus. "The Lord my God shall come, and all the holy

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

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

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

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

The intimate relation of the command to the coming judgment shows that it must relate in the first place to a gathering taking place on earth. The picture is based upon the inauguration of Israel's nationhood with their covenant at Sinai. The devout Israelite, following the words of the Temple service, would turn his thoughts back to Moses and the cry of the people "All that the Lord hath spoken will we do, and be obedient" as the Levites intoned this verse about holy ones and a covenant by sacrifice. To the Israelites, the Law under which they came at Sinai was a Covenant by sacrifice and they themselves were God's holy ones, a peculiar people, a chosen nation, a royal priesthood. It was as a united people, separated from the nations of earth, that they faced the hardships of the later wilderness experiences in their journey to the Promised Land. That picture points the doctrinal teaching for us in this verse. The "gathering" is the separation of God's consecrated ones from the affairs and interests of earth to serve the provisions of this "covenant by sacrifice". We who are Christ's have entered into a covenant just so surely as did Israel—not a Law Covenant as was theirs, a Covenant of which the criterion is works rather than faith, but nevertheless a covenant demanding sacrifice in even greater degree than did Israel's. Nothing that is worth having in God's great Plan is attainable without sacrifice, renunciation, endurance.

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

between all who are the Lord's saints—but it is completely apparent in heaven. And that unity which is recorded in heaven is reflected back to us on earth so that all who are truly Christ's find themselves in heart oneness with each other even although they may abide in different spheres of normal worship, fellowship or service. There is a "unity of the spirit" which transcends the boundaries of sect or organisation and it is *that* unity which is the fulfilment of this command "Gather my saints together unto me".

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

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

"Scripture is like a modern continent, with extreme and unhealthy congestion at certain well-known centres and vast tracts of country uncultivated and unknown."

Sylvester Horne

It is only through labour and prayerful effort, grim energy and resolute courage, that we move on to better things.

(J. F. Willfonger, missionary and martyr.)

FOSSIL THEOLOGY

A lump of coal showing on its surface, in delicate tracery, the form of a fern or fish, is prized by the geologist as a specimen of the vegetation or fauna of a very remote period in the day of creation. Such a fossil is valuable as a connecting link between the dead past and living present, possessing no other value except to be burned.

In the world of theology there are many such relics of bygone ages in the form of liturgies, creeds, confessions of faith, many of them originating in the Carboniferous period of religious knowledge, the "Dark Ages", which, apart from their value as antiquities, representing the mind and practice of the religious systems of their day, are of no use except as fuel.

"For what so fiercely burns

As a dry creed that nothing ever learns?"

It is remarkable that in this age of progress and development, men of education and intelligence should shape their thoughts and teachings after the pattern of these Theological Fossils, which are as devoid of life as the petrifications that we find in the museum duly classified and labelled.

In the advanced light of medical science of to-day, the physician who follows the old system of bleeding, pilling and blistering, and confine his patient in a dark, ill-ventilated room would be denounced, since medical colleges are continually experimenting and opening up new avenues of knowledge as to the causes and cure of disease. In like manner, theology can learn nothing so long as the minds of its teachers are moulded and shaped by the petrified dogmas of their ancestors. He who receives his credentials as a teacher is not a free man if he is bound to accept as the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, the doctrines handed down to him from the "fathers" of his denomination. What these men, hundreds of years ago, declared to be truth is truth, to which nothing can be added and from which nothing can be taken away. No matter what light advanced scholarship may have thrown upon the inspired Word; no

matter what science may have revealed; no matter what new truths the servants of God may have brought forth from the store-house; the religious instructor of to-day must shut his eyes to the light, and stop his ears from hearing strange or new sounds, and submissively bow to the teachings of theologians, priests, and prelates as though their voice were the voice of God. There is no idolatry that has this worship of the stocks and stones of Fossil Theology; there is no tyranny more oppressive than is the tyranny of creed.

How is this accounted for? Denominations are formed about the teachings of some man or set of men. These teachings are accepted as the quintessence of truth; preachers are instructed in these doctrines, and ordained to teach them; colleges are endowed to perpetuate them, and the graduate from these schools, before being authorised to preach, must subscribe to the system of practice and doctrine taught, and agree to teach the same. He is not a free man. He dare not turn either to the right or to the left under penalty of losing his commission, and with it the means of gaining a livelihood. Instead of building upon the foundation of the prophets and apostles, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone, the foundation is human; and the Divine injunction applies with terrific force: *"In vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrine the commandments of men"*.

There is little wonder that spiritual deadness is characteristic of so many churches, with inquisitorial ecclesiastics snuffing out the light of truths as soon as it shows its first feeble rays, and compelling those who hunger and thirst after righteousness and truth to accept their dead forms and creeds, or else look elsewhere to have their cravings satisfied. Thank God that his truth is not committed to such, but is as free as the water of life to all who will go to the fountain to drink. Divine truth is not in dead forms and compiled dogmas, but it is liberty and life in Christ Jesus.

From "Words of Truth"

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

(Rev. Paul Gliddon)

The authority of emperors, kings and princes is human; the authority of councils, synods, bishops and presbyters is human; the authority of prophets is Divine.

Sir Isacc Newton



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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GAINSBOROUGH HOUSE, MILBORNE PORT

The Bible Fellowship Eventide Trust, a parallel organisation to the Bible Fellowship Union, runs this Christian retirement centre, primarily for those sympathetic with the views expressed in this journal. It now has vacancies for several single people and hopes shortly to have accommodation for a couple.

It is situated on the West side of a delightful village, 100 miles South West of London. Readers considering moving to a retirement home are invited to write for details to the Secretary: John Thompson, Bethel, 24 Henning Way, Milborne Port, SHERBORNE, Dorset, DT9 5HN (Tel: 0963 250074).

The Index — An Acknowledgement

Several U.S.A. readers have of their own volition co-operated to produce and print an exhaustive index to the contents of the "Monthly" between 1962 and 1991, and the result is a very superior production on stout art paper which it is thought will be hailed by many as a long-felt need. (Many suggestions have been made in the past that this should be done.) The index is now being distributed and they very graciously undertook to distribute them to all our overseas readers and by now all such should have received their copy. UK readers should find a copy enclosed with this issue. If anyone, either UK or overseas, has failed to receive a copy one will be sent on request to 11 Lyncroft Gardens, Hounslow.

We feel that readers in all parts of the world will feel, as we do, that this is a monumental effort, and we ourselves do express our appreciation for this "labour of love", a sentiment in which we feel that many others will join. Thank you, brethren in Christ.

Current Delays

It is expected that by the time this issue is published our recent problems will be largely ameliorated. The stockroom will have been set up in the new location and literature despatches should by now be resumed, filling any unfulfilled requests.

It is likely that a few slips have occurred; if anyone finds they have missed receiving any literature expected or any recent issue of the "Monthly", please advise Hounslow and the deficiency will be rectified.

Gone from us

— ❖ —

Bro. John Downing (*Middlesbrough*)
 Sis. Rhoda Ford (*Bexhill*)
 Sis. Lily Guy (*Hornchurch*)

— ❖ —

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

RUTH THE MOABITESS

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

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

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

Elimelech, of the tribe of Judah and closely related to Salmon the founder of Bethlehem—probably his cousin—lived with his wife Naomi and two young sons in the district of Bethlehem. The land was smitten by famine and the family

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

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

Naomi could see no future in Judah for the two girls. She advised—even entreated—they to leave her and find other husbands of their own people. Orpah took her advice and went back; Ruth refused to do so. In words of compelling beauty, some of the most beautiful in the Old Testament, she affirmed her resolve to stay with the older

woman, come what may. Judah was a strange land to her, Judah's God an unknown God, but she would accept both in her love for her dead husband's mother. *"Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee; for whither thou goest, I will go; whither thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God. Where thou diest, I will die, and there will I be buried. The Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me"* (Ruth 1, 16-17). And so Ruth came to Bethlehem.

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

Nevertheless God was not unmindful. Of all the farmers in whose fields she might conceivably find herself gleaning, *"her hap"* says the narrative *"was to light on a part of the field belonging unto Boaz, who was of the kindred of Elimelech"*. By an overruling providence of God, we must be sure, she had been guided to the man who had both power and will to help them in their plight. Boaz was a son of Salmon, who entered the land with Joshua, married Rahab of Jericho, and was the most important man in the community. Boaz himself was *"a mighty*

man of wealth", but not only so, he was also an upright and God-fearing man and respected by his employees. Coming into the field in which Ruth was working he saluted his men with the greeting *"The Lord be with you"* to which they responded *"The Lord bless thee"*. It is easy to see that here was a man who did not run away into Moab or anywhere else when famine and invasion afflicted the land; he stood his ground and maintained his loyalty to God and now, in consequence, as the Mosaic Law promised, he was prosperous and secure.

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

So passed some three months, from April to early July, whilst the barley harvest ran its course

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

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

So she instructed Ruth in the manner she must make the customary formal approach to claim the benefit of the Law. The third chapter of the Book tells the story, how that Ruth adorned herself in her best raiment and joined Boaz in the threshing barn where he was finishing the day's work with his reapers. There, when all had composed themselves to rest and the others were all asleep, she made her plea, and Boaz listened. What were his feelings at that moment we do not know, for they are not recorded, but what he had to say to her was all probability a crushing blow to her hopes as well as to his. Gladly, he said, would he have done as she desired, but—*"it is true that I am thy near kinsman; howbeit there is a kinsman nearer than I"*. An unknown stranger had the right to take Ruth and to him must she bear the son who would take the inheritance. Perhaps that was the moment when Ruth's determination to remain a child of Israel, with all the obligations it might entail, was

put to its severest test. That she passed the test and emerged triumphant is evidenced by the fact that the matter proceeded according to law, and the unknown kinsman was brought upon the scene. *"Tarry this night"* said Boaz gently *"and it shall be in the morning, that if he will perform the part of a kinsman unto thee, well: let him do the kinsman's part; but if he will not do the part of a kinsman to thee, then will I do the part of a kinsman to thee, as the Lord liveth; lie down until the morning"*.

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

So Boaz married Ruth, and of their descendants was born some two hundred and fifty years later David, king of Israel, and a thousand years after that, Jesus, the son of Mary. The story of Ruth the Moabitess probably owes its inclusion in the Bible to that fact, but being thus included it remains an eloquent testimony to the far-reaching consequences of the love and faith displayed by this alien girl who embraced the obligations and privileges of the commonwealth of Israel in full assurance that God would receive her.

"HE KNOWS"

"Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask" (Matt. 6. 8). "Your Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things" (Matt. 6. 32). It was no light thing Jesus undertook when He began to teach his disciples dependence upon God for their needs. A little while before He had called them to leave their ordinary pursuits to follow him. Of some of them it is said "*they straightway left the nets and followed him*". (Matt. 4. 20). And again "*they straightway left the boat and their father and followed him*" (v. 22). Introducing them to their new life's-work Jesus took them with him on his first evangelistic tour in Galilee, and as He spake before them in the synagogues, and wrought his works of mercy here, there, and yonder, He brought home to their minds that there was a great work to be done in Israel. People flocked together in crowds after him from every corner of the land, bringing along with them their ailing friends and relatives—"*they brought unto him all that were sick . . . and He healed them*". (Matt. 4. 24).

This first tour through Galilee was an object lesson to teach them how great the task and how urgent the service to which He had called them. Israel was expectant and hungry. Long had they been as a flock untended and unfed. And they had sickness other than that of flesh. His preaching had revived their hopes, and quickened their anticipation. Hence those crowds from Galilee and Decapolis, and Jerusalem and Judea, and from beyond the Jordan (v. 25).

How illuminating and vital were those contrasts He drew between the "old" and the "new", between what "ye have heard it said" and what "I say unto you"! And how inspiring the assertions that they were "salt" in the earth, and "light in the world"—those vast crowds that had come to his preaching! And the "salt" must season; the "light" illuminate! They were the "salt"; that crowd was the "earth"! They were the "light", that concourse the "world"! Needs must be that "they" be introduced into "it" if the work is to be done.

How self-evident the need that Jesus should lead

them right back to the Source of things, to the Father who would know all their needs, would know all their moods, would know all their experiences. Apart from the very slender provision that the labourer should be worthy of his hire, no other earthly provision was made for their necessities. No wonder then they had need to be told "your Heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of these things". How well they learned that lesson of implicit trust is obvious from the records of their lives.

"Your Heavenly Father knoweth" is still a promise for our own times. Christian life has no such stringency to-day as for those early pioneers, yet this assurance is a sore need of our otherwise very strenuous days. Bedded in amid the conditions of a very different form of civilisation Christ's disciples are still sent forth as "salt" and "light". There is still the command to impart the preserving savour of the salt, and to shed abroad the illuminating properties of the light, yet, spite of our best attempts, decay grows apace, and darkness more deeply over-spreads society. How do we feel about it from day to day? Do we despair and give up the attempt? Has the salt become savourless, and the light become dim in consequence?

Cheer up, dear soul, your Heavenly Father knoweth all about the weariness and worries of your little day! He knew long years ago what the conditions would be to the end of the Age. The great point with him is not exactly what you have done as the "salt" and the "light", but what you would do if you could do as you would. It is the spirit of your service that counts! When therefore you have tried to be a grain of salt and failed, or tried to cast a glow of light that waned too soon, try to recall the assuring words.

Let the seeming failures of our little day send us inwards unto him, with our confessions of what we would have done but for the foes around, and the lack of strength within. If you have tried and failed, and tried and failed again, be assured your Heavenly Father knows all about it and has put the frail attempt to your credit and treasure above.

Attractive as is the proposal, we cannot "cut" repentance and get on with the Kingdom, for things will not be taken out of their Divine Order.

Rev. Paul Gliddon.

Absolute truth can have nothing to fear from the disintegrating influence of time.

Sir James Jeans.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO THE BOOK OF RUTH

Twenty years ago the BSM featured a suggested identification of the unnamed kinsman who declined to carry out his obligation, related in the Book of Ruth. Since then a more exhaustive investigation, generally confirming the original findings but including additional evidence offered by historical records not considered at the time, makes possible a revision which offers a more detailed picture of the probabilities.

* * *

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

Positive data leading to the building of a time-scale is very meagre, only that Caleb was 80 at the Entry to the Land and therefore 40 at the Exodus (Josh. 14. 10-11), so that Joshua, his comrade in arms, the only other man over twenty years of age at the Exodus was probably about the same; he died at 110 (Josh. 24. 29). The Oppression under the Aramaic invader lasted eight years (Jud. 3.8), and Mahlon the son of Elimelech had ten years of married life in Moab after his father died (Ruth 1.4). Elisheba daughter of Amminadab the last "prince" (leader) of the tribe of Judah in Egypt, was the wife of Aaron the High Priest who was 83 at the Exodus so she must have been about 80 years of age at that time, with four sons born in Egypt. That is about all; not much on which to build conclusions. It is surprising however what careful attention to apparently unconnected fragments of Scripture can yield. In piecing together the available data it must be borne in mind that recorded life spans differed from that which is usual to-day. The normal life-span at the time of the Exodus was 100/120, not to speak of the redoubtable Caleb who at 85 had the strength of a 40-year old and was still chief leader of the army (Josh. 14. 10-12) besides being the father of the (probably) teen-age daughter Achsah. Moses died at 120, Aaron at 123, Miriam at 137, Joshua at 110 and in secular history of the time there is Ahmose el Kab,

Admiral of the naval fleet of Egypt in the time of Moses, who ended a strenuous naval career at 110 just after the death of Joshua, and Amen-hetep son of Hapu, distinguished Egyptian statesman, who died at 130 just before the Exodus.

At this style of life-span, the childbearing age of the women must have extended up to 75 or so, as is evidenced by Elisheba who, 80 at the Exodus, must have been the firstborn of her father since her brother Nahshon had already succeeded him as "prince" of the tribe at the Exodus; and two of her four recorded sons, Eleazar and Ithamar, were both under twenty at that time since they both entered into the Land forty years later. Salmon the son of Nahshon was prince of the tribe at the Entry so Nahshon must have died in the Wilderness and he himself have been born there, hence could only have been in his twenties at the siege of Jericho as is also evidenced by his marriage to Rahab of Jericho (Matt. 1.8) who both from the nature of her calling and the fact that her father, mother brothers and sisters are mentioned but no husband, could well be as young as 20.

The first time-period noted at this stage of Israel's history is the invasion and oppression of Chushan-Rishathaim the ruler of Aram-Naharaim, which is stated to have lasted eight years (Jud. 3. 8), but how long after the Conquest is not said. Under the terms of the Mosaic Covenant, however, invasion and subjection to enemies was one of the penalties of apostasy. Apostasy reared its ugly head during the later lifetime of Joshua, was suppressed, but returned in force after his death and that of "*the elders who overlived Joshua*" and "*all that generation*" (Josh. 24. 31. Jud. 2. 10-11). Joshua died 30 years after the Conquest aged 110; not many of his generation were likely to have survived him by more than a few years and this gives time for the emergence of the "*new generation which knew not the Lord nor yet the works which he had done for Israel*" (Jud. 2. 10). Hence the beginning of the Chushan oppression can be put at say year 45 from the Conquest. It was followed by Othniel's rule as judge for 40 years; Othniel would have been a young man at the Conquest when he married Achsah (Jud. 1. 13) but he had just led the victorious assault on Kirjath-Sepher so could hardly have been less than 30; this would make him 118 at his death. Such age corresponds well with some of his contemporaries.

The famine which decided Elimelech to move

into Moab (Ruth 1.1) would also have been a penalty under the Mosaic Covenant for apostasy so that must be taken as occurring at the same time or probably several years before—famine came first, with loss of crops and herds due to drought and so on, followed by invasion and subjection to their enemies. The “elders who outlived Joshua” (Josh. 25.31; Jud. 2.10) must have been under 20 when they left Egypt but even so would all be gone in another fifteen years or so after his death. The “new generation which knew not the Lord, nor the works which he had done for Israel” (Jud. 2.10), now in their thirties and forties, were the ones who apostasised. The death of Joshua was the signal and before long idolatry appeared among the people. Hence year 45 from the Conquest could well be the start of the Chushan oppression with Elimelech taking his family into Moab four or five years before, when the famine struck. It is significant that there was apparently no famine in Moab only just next door, demonstrating that there was more than climatic deficiency in the matter. And it is clear that Elimelech was a man of no faith or an apostate or he would not so soon have abandoned the Land of Promise.

The first oppression of Israel by a foreign power after the Conquest was that of “Chushan-Rishathaim king of Mesopotamia” (Jud. 3.8), which lasted eight years. Until comparatively recent times the identity of this king with the terrifying name was quite unknown; none of the usual commentators so much as make a guess at it. With modern knowledge of the history of the times however it is known that at the time of Joshua’s conquest of the Land there existed a powerful state called Mitanni, situated between the rivers Tigris and Euphrates, more or less on the present Iraq/Turkish border. This state eventually gave way before the rising power of the Hittites soon after the time in question. Its last but one king, Tushratta, died fighting the Hittites, but there are letters from him in existence to the Pharaohs Amen-hotep III and IV, and since the latest findings give the best dates for the reigns of these two Pharaohs as 1430 to 1360 B.C., and the entry of the Israelites into Canaan was in 1413 B.C., it is tolerably certain that “Chushan king of Mesopotamia” of the O.T., was in fact this Tushratta who oppressed Israel for eight years until driven out by Othniel. (“Mesopotamia” is the Greek form of the Hebrew “Aram-Naharaim”—“Aram of the rivers”, the name by which Israel and Syria knew this land of Mitanni). After the defeat of Tushratta

and his son and the Hittite annexation of their land, Suppiluliamas I king of the Hittites went on to attack Egypt and ten years later won a resounding victory at Carchemish. Attacked by the Hittites from the north and Othniel from the south, Tushratta obviously had little chance, hence Othniel’s victory. “And the land had rest forty years” (Jud. 3.11).

On this basis the Chushan oppression ended in year 53 of the Conquest by the military prowess of Othniel, who delivered the nation and assumed the rule. This deliverance, however, again under the terms of the Covenant, can only have been because the nation had repented and returned to God, and this is in fact so stated in Jud. 3. 9-11. Likewise the news coming to Naomi, away in Moab, that “the Lord had visited his people in giving them bread” (Ruth 1. 6) implied the same thing; the famine was over and the land was giving its increase in consequence of the nation’s return to the Lord. Naomi, perhaps unlike her husband, was definitely a woman of faith, and it only needed the death of, first, her husband, and then her two sons, to decide her to return to the land of Israel.

If, then, Joshua died at 110, 30 years after the Entry, and the elders who overlived him during the next 15 years, a period of about 45 years between the Entry and the Oppression as indicated by the former considerations would seem just about right. The hero of the Oppression was Othniel, who led the forces against Chushan-Rishathaim. Othniel was the son of Kenaz, younger brother of Caleb (Jud. 3.9). Caleb, 40 at the Exodus, would most likely be say 10 years older than Kenaz, so that Othniel, born in the Wilderness when his father was about 45, would be 25 at the Entry, perhaps up to 30 when he led the victorious assault on Kirjath-sepher and married Achsah, (Jud. 1.13), about 78 when he defeated the Mitannian king and delivered Israel, and about 118 at death like so many of his compatriots.

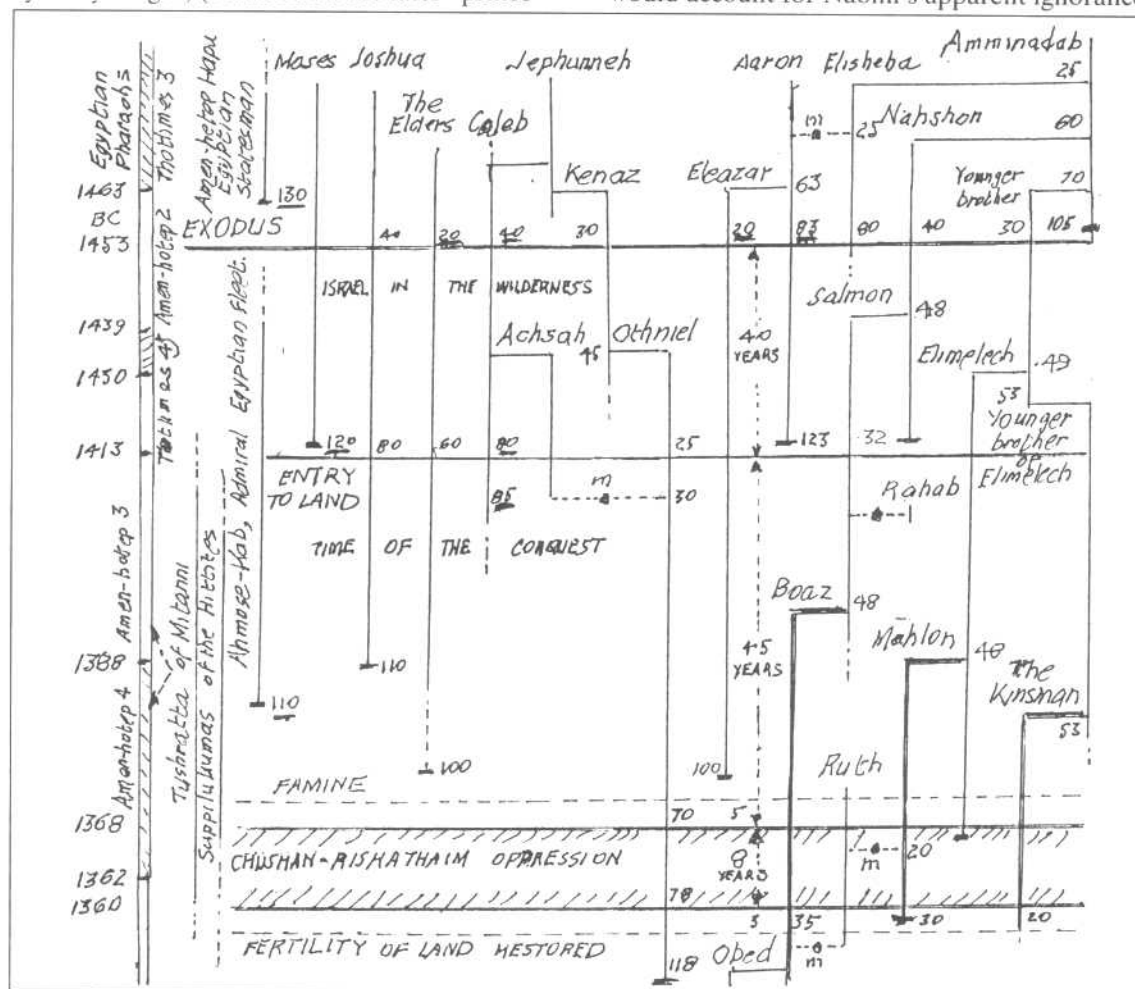
Elimelech had died in Moab and at an unspecified time after his death his two sons had married Moabite girls and had ten years’ married life (Ruth 1. 4) and then, both of them, also died. Ruth, one of the widows, is described throughout the story by a word which means a maiden or a young woman so that at this time she could not have been more than in her late twenties. If married at 18 she would have been 28. On the assumption that the two husbands were say 20 at marriage they could have been born in year 36 of the Conquest and their father Elimelech during the

wilderness wanderings.

With Ruth's arrival at Bethlehem at, say, the age of 28, Boaz comes into the story. Boaz was the son of Salmon (Ruth 4.12) and was also a blood relative of the dead Elimelech (Ruth 2.3). Rahab probably had several sons, of whom Boaz was probably the youngest, both to fit the time scale and because he was still unmarried. On this basis Boaz could have been born to Salmon and Rahab after about 30 years of marriage when Rahab was in her fifties; this would mean that Boaz was about 35 when he met Ruth.

Boaz was related to, "of the kindred of", Elimelech (Ruth 2.3). Hardly his brother, or the fact would have been so stated; more likely in a different family line. This would have been the case if Nahshon had a younger brother, perhaps ten years younger; (Nahshon as the later "prince"

of the tribe at the Exodus must of necessity have been the eldest). This unnamed son of Amminadab, brother to Nahshon, could be the father of Elimelech, who was thus cousin to Salmon. Mahlon, son of Elimelech, would then be second cousin to Boaz, son of Salmon. Under the Levirate law which obliged Mahlon's nearest living kinsman to marry Ruth and raise an heir to Mahlon's property, such nearest kinsman, in the absence of living brothers (and Mahlon's only brother was also dead according to the narrative) would be a first cousin. It could be then that if Elimelech also had a younger brother (who may not have left the land during the famine) that younger brother's son, Mahlon's cousin, might well have appeared after or about the time that Naomi had gone to Moab with her husband, which would account for Naomi's apparent ignorance of



SUGGESTED GENEALOGICAL TABLE AT THE CONQUEST

Underlined numerals denote definite ages at point indicated. Other numerals denote approximate ages at point indicated.

this individual, who as Mahlon's cousin was the "nearest kinsman" with the prior right, and her belief that Boaz was the nearest. Naomi would have known Salmon as the brother of her father-in-law and Boaz, as a young man, before her emigration. This "nearest kinsman", cousin to Mahlon, would then be about 20 at the time of the story, old enough for marriage but perhaps not too well disposed towards a woman nearly ten years his senior, and concerned withal as to the possible effect upon his own inheritance.

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

Summing up: the famine and Elimelech's migra-

tion to Moab was about 40 years after the entry into the land, some 10 years after Joshua's death, and the invasion of Chushan-Rishathaim 5 years later. Ruth and Naomi returned to Bethlehem about 11 years after that when Ruth was 28 and Boaz 35. Boaz was second cousin to Mahlon whilst the unnamed kinsman was Mahlon's cousin. Obed was the firstborn son of Boaz and Ruth, by which time Naomi, who took him in her arms, need have been no more than 80.

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

INSIGHT OF AN INCA MONARCH

The Inca Empire of Peru, one of the most extreme autocratic States the world has known, subsisted from the 11th to the 15th centuries and was destroyed by the Spaniards who came after Columbus. The Peruvians were worshippers of the Sun and the Emperor was, to the people, the living embodiment of the Sun-god. Even so, the fact that there must be a power greater than the Sun, a God above all gods, was apparently not unknown to them. It is related of the Inca emperor Huayna Capac, last but one in the succession, that whilst officiating at a ceremony in honour of the Sun, he asked his High Priest two questions. The first, whether any man in his kingdom would dare to order him, the Emperor, to leave his throne every morning and take a day-long journey, to which the High Priest replied that no man would so dare; the second, if he ordered one of his most powerful nobles to take a long and dangerous journey to another land, would he obey. He would obey to the death, said the Priest. The Sun, rejoined the Emperor, runs across the sky every day without cessation. If he were truly the ruler of all things, he would stop sometimes and rest when he so wished. Since he does not, there must be a more powerful God whose orders he obeys. How foolish, then, to entrust our lives and the life of our country to the Sun.

One is reminded of the Jewish tradition concern-

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

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

“TEACH US TO PRAY”

When Jesus gave his disciples the prayer which we have come to call the “Lord’s prayer” He set new standards of prayer and showed them a new approach to prayer. Prayers of pagans to their gods were long and mechanical. They believed that their prayers were effective by their continuous repetition of the same old formulae. “O Baal hear us”, shouted on Mount Carmel, was typical and the apparent sarcasm of Elijah was not without foundation. The ancient gods were no more than glorified humans with all the infallibility and passion of the great leaders of men. The patterns of chanting which men used to these deified humans were expected to work like charms, or else, like the unjust judge, to bring about action through losing patience. Nothing which we know about the compassion and patience of our mighty God, who is always righteous and holy, was known to the vast majority of pagan worshippers.

Jesus’ instruction showed clearly the intelligent manner to approach a God who knows all things including the things which we personally need. It was not that we should attempt to remind God of the things we need or persuade him that we want something. Yet the fact that he knows about our needs does not exclude us from making a request. Prayer is the opportunity for us to have fellowship with God. By entering into this communion with him we become aware of his will, we share his love and we bring ourselves into alignment with his purpose. Our intercession for others, our thanks for the Father’s gifts, and confession of our faults, is all part of our spiritual growth and understanding.

“Lord teach us to pray” was a very important request by the disciples in view of the type of teaching they probably had up till this point. The Jewish religious leaders of the first century were frequently seen at street corners displaying their piety by praying. Their manner of dress, their posture and their manner of speech was an adopted stance to demonstrate to onlookers that they spent much time in prayer. Jesus turned their minds back to the Old Testament men of God, whose primary object in praying was to become aware that they were in God’s presence. If we use any means at all to draw attention to ourselves in prayer we are in danger of adopting the same attitude as the Pharisees. Even parading the fact that the believer is hidden behind a locked door for a certain period each day could become disobedience to the words of Jesus in this matter. Anything that is done which

deflects attention from the sole joy and purpose in prayer is defeating the Lord’s desire for the disciple’s growth in his prayer life. Anything which becomes a stereotyped prayer, and which is thought to be heard by God because it conforms to a special pattern, will prevent us from becoming totally absorbed into the will of God.

“... when you pray,” said Jesus, “go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father who is unseen”. This enables the child of God to concentrate completely on him. It is a wonderful privilege to have a trysting place which has God’s blessing. Yet it is not necessary to have a room or some other place specially prepared to seek the Lord. A crowded train, a bus or a busy street can become a place of hallowed ground if there we are able to give ourselves wholly to him. Jesus sought a mountain, not because it was high or had some sacred connection, but the solitary place made it easier to shut off the busy world to be alone with his Father. Nor could he make himself and his own ideas the centre of attraction.

The prayer which Jesus taught the disciples enshrined most, if not all the principles of prayer. He revolutionised their prayers by addressing God as Father. The idea of fatherhood was not unknown to the people of Israel (Psalm 89.26), but as the centuries rolled by He became for them an even more distant God, unknown and unknowable, except for those few devout souls who really drew near to God in their hearts. For Jesus it seemed natural to think about God as Father. Jewish boys at twelve or thirteen had their Bar Mitzvah. They became ‘sons of the Law’ and transferred their loyalty from their parents to the Law. Jesus had transferred his loyalty to the Heavenly Father and declared it publically in the words “Didn’t you know that I had to be in my Father’s house” (Luke 2.49 NIV). His confidant, his mentor and guide, the constant companion of his daily life was his Father in Heaven.

The One from whom Jesus drew his power and to whom he looked in danger and temptation was the One to whom the disciple could look now. My Father became Our Father and with it the recognition of brotherhood in Christ. It is difficult after two thousand years in which Christian people have been discovering God as their Father for his children in the twentieth century to realise fully what this must have meant for the ancient people. For countless centuries before that, mankind had

sought God but He appeared not to listen. It is clear from Cornelius' experience that God is not deaf to the cries of his creatures. They thought He didn't understand their pain ridden world and could not enter into their interests and feelings. He seemed too distant to notice their hopes and fears. Yet here was Jesus telling them to address the great Creator of the Universe as their "Father".

It is part of the Christian's growth in grace that we learn to wait upon God in prayer. And we must learn the lesson of the parable of the importunate widow. There is no need to find a mountain or a temple, but like Nehemiah of old, when there is an opportunity or need, we must 'send a sentence to Heaven'. It does not need to be a carefully worded prayer couched in 'special' language. God understands colloquial expressions such as 'sorry' and 'thanks'. Whether we are in front of an employer or employee, or the tradesman at the door, we need God's counsel all the time. Consciousness of the Father in the lonely and quiet moments has its effect in the busier times when folk are around. Only thus can a Christian guard against those offensive remarks and actions which do not reflect the glory of God. In the same way the child of God is prompted to say and do positive things which show that there is a God in Heaven who cares for the whole world. So may it be understood that He is more tender and forgiving than any earthly parent. He is not looking over His child's shoulder to criticise and bully. He remains at our side and waits for the sideways glance which can challenge us in every situation. "Jesus looked at Peter"; if only Peter had looked and caught that glance earlier! If only we would do so too! (Luke 22.6).

"Hallowed be your name." Perhaps it hardly need be said that the name which speaks to us of all that is noble and true, good and right, is a name that can never be taken on the lips of a believer lightly. To the child of God it means so much more, for it is all that is patient and gentle, forgiving and generous. In the Twentieth century world it is becoming more and more common for people of all shades of belief at all, to use the name of God in a blasphemous way. Are those that surround the Christian aware that such abuse of the holy name is hurtful? Does the believer's life reflect true holiness which in itself 'hallows' the name of the Father?

Many years ago a saintly Christian lady always walked about her home quietly, concerned that the Master, present with her, should be offended by her blustering manner. Stumbling one of God's

little ones is so easy. This is not the 'holier than thou' attitude of the outwardly pious religious folk. The kind of life which deliberately embarrasses unbelievers does nothing for the Master's cause. Religious Jews of Jesus' day were constantly expressing disgust for the unholiness of fallen brother Jews, and for the pagan Greeks and Romans. Their own holiness was a pretence — Jesus called them 'play-actors' — and it was not a good witness for the Holy God they pretended to serve and worship.

Just before his death, Jesus prayed to the Father in these words, "Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name — the name you gave me — so that they may be one as we are one" (John 17. 11 NIV). What was the name that God gave to Jesus? Was it 'Jesus', which means 'the LORD saves'. God was also Israel's saviour. Paul wrote of him as being the saviour of all men (1 Tim. 4.10). Does the passage in John 17 refer to Jesus' use of the name 'Father' which he was now passing on to the disciples? Or does it refer to the giving of a name by which Jesus was able to do his mighty works? They were to do miracles also 'in the name of Jesus'.

Jesus was very concerned about leaving his disciples in a very unholy world. They needed to feel free to approach the Father in Heaven in his name about any kind of problem. The disciples must be able to go forth into the world without fear, to accomplish the task He was now giving them. As members of the people of Israel they would have known God by a variety of names, each distinctive and expressing the attributes and personality of God. These things spoke of what God was like. 'Father' expresses the relationship to God in a unique way. More than anything else Jesus wanted his disciples to share the oneness which he had with the Father. Only by so doing could they begin to understand the oneness which must exist between all true followers of the Lord. They are part of a brotherhood and yet in two thousand years of Church history, failure to develop this sense of unity has promoted divisions, separations and even conflict between those who are supposed to be in the Divine family. It is not part of the believer's prerogative to make judgments about fellow Christians or to separate themselves from them. Ultimately those who judge are judged by their own judgment, because such separation hinders the growth of spiritual life. Failure in communication with brethren in Christ causes failures in communication with God.

To pray "Thy kingdom come" recognises the inadequacy of the kingdoms of this world and the desire to see them superseded by a kingdom where injustice, deprivation and sorrow shall be unknown. Jesus said in his remarks to Pilate, one of the rulers of the world in which he lived, that his "kingdom was not of this world" (John 18. 36). The nature of Jesus' reply shows that this kingdom was still future.

Through the apostles Jesus also taught that believers must pray for kings, princes and those in high authority. They fulfil a function in the purpose of God until he establishes the kingdom of Christ, when those nations will become part of that kingdom (Rom. 13. 1-7; 1 Tim. 2. 1-4; 1 Pet. 2. 13-15). It must have been very difficult to pray for some of the Roman emperors and rulers, especially if born a Jew. It may also be difficult to pray for some of the citizens of the 'kingdoms' in which we live. But to ignore the needs of ordinary folk around us is to miss a part of Jesus' work while He was here. They too need our prayers so that they may see the witness of Jesus' love in our lives. In his prayer recorded in John 17 Jesus spoke of the unity of believers being a witness to the world that he was the Son of God (v.23).

Jesus taught the disciples to pray "Thy will be done". This was the driving force of Jesus' life. In Hebrews 10. 5-7 we read Christ's thoughts in which Psalm 40. 6-8 is quoted. This was the cry of the heart from Gethsemane and this is the attitude in which God's children make known their requests to him. Some words of Jesus recorded in John 14. 13 are sometimes quoted as if there was no qualification to the expression "I will do whatever you ask in my name". If the phrases which follows were to be quoted also, it would be seen that Jesus makes a limitation upon what we may ask. "So that the Son may bring glory to the Father." In the next chapter of John's gospel, verse 7, we have another qualification "If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be given you". Desires of our human nature and comforts for our physical bodies can only be acceptable

if they promote spiritual growth in Christ. It is to God's glory that we live and for that purpose that we pray.

"You will be done on Earth as it is done in Heaven." It must be our longing that the whole of God's intelligent creation should find that fulfilment in the purpose of God. It should also be our longing that our words and actions are so much a part of God's purpose that we live here and now as part of his kingdom. It is only by prayer, persevering, importunate prayer, that the ideals will be realised in our lives.

When Jesus was in the wilderness He was tempted to take the short cut to bring in the Kingdom rapidly by giving Satan the place that God should have in his life. The same kind of temptation must have been made more than once during his ministry. It definitely occurred as He hung on the cross, through the mouths of those who reviled him. What a dramatic and spectacular means of drawing all men to him! "Come down from the cross, if you are the son of God" (Matt. 27. 40). How that expression echoes the very words of Satan in the desert! God's will is not always easy. Our patience is exhausted; our ideas of glory are frustrated and like James and John of old we are eager to be seated on the right or the left of Jesus in the Kingdom. There are some things which Jesus cannot do and cannot ask on behalf of his followers. There are some things which the Apostle Paul could not understand and could not have. We need to learn that God's will must be done, not out of a sense of resignation or of great outward piety, but because our hearts are genuinely surrendered to God.

Jesus, the sinless son of God, needed to discover his will and to be given strength to do it. There is only one way to discover that will for us. With the Psalmist we must pray constantly "Teach me to do your will, for you are my God, may your good spirit lead me on level ground" (143. 10). By the doing of that Will from the heart we shall show that we are truly the closest kin to the Master (Matt. 12.50; Eph. 6.6).

We do not all need the same things at the same time. Our needs are different in youth, in middle age, and in advancing years. Someone has pointed out that one reason why God is referred to continually in the Old Testament as the God of Abraham,

of Isaac, and of Jacob, is in order to illustrate that He is the God of every succeeding generation and the Friend of every age. This indeed is gloriously true, and we may well rejoice in it.

THE MAN AND THE MOMENT

When in the ordering of Divine Providence "the hour" and "the man" arrive simultaneously, great things may be expected—and accomplished! Just such an occasion had arrived when Barnabas went to Tarsus seeking Saul (Acts 11. 25).

Consequent upon that spell of sharp persecution arising out of Stephen's ministry—and death—certain brethren travelled into distant provinces, thus creating for themselves the opportunity denied them in Jerusalem. Among them were brethren apparently of Greek origin, who as they travelled homewards, came at last to Antioch, and there spake openly and freely to fellow Greeks about the grace and goodness of their Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. A very considerable number of these hearers believed wholeheartedly and turned to the Lord. Here was an unorthodox situation—for these were Gentiles purely and simply—yet the hand of the Lord was with them.

When the tidings of these unexpected happenings reached Jerusalem, the mother Church sent Barnabas—a brother well-trusted and greatly esteemed—to investigate, and presumably to report back.

Barnabas was both amazed and delighted by what he saw and heard, and—good man that he was—exhorted the new converts to stand fast in the Lord. But he quickly realised that this work was too big and too exacting for the local overseers to control efficiently, and that help must be found somehow, somewhere. Barnabas knew the man for the task; recollections of events and of a contact made several years before came to mind, and he was sure that but one man in all his range of acquaintanceship was capable of taking this task in hand. Hence that speedily determined journey to Tarsus to seek Saul.

But what of Saul? How had he fared since the day when his Master peremptorily told him to "depart" from Jerusalem? We have not much evidence to call upon concerning these intervening years, and such as we have is mainly autobiographical. In an outline of his experiences in which comparison with other Israelites had been found necessary, Paul unintentionally lifts the curtain upon some of those earlier years—a span of life and experience which must include those spent in and around his native town prior to the call of Barnabas. This little chapter of autobiography is recorded in 2 Cor. 11. 21-27, and records the story of countless beatings—some nearly unto death—five distinct scourgings by the Jews—to the utmost

limit permitted by the law—three beatings by the Romans (by rods). Three times shipwrecked, with a whole day and night adrift on one of these occasions; in dangers of many kinds and in many places, in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure—so runs the grim and frank recital. Foxes had holes, birds of the air had nests, but Paul (like his Lord) often had nowhere to lay his aching head!

Now all this crucial and punitive experience had befallen him prior to the story of his wanderings in Acts 19. 21-23. Where is the record of these things in the Acts of the Apostles? There is no record of all these buffetings anywhere. We have the main records of his first and second missionary journeys, and while some of these experiences occurred during the one or other, there are some which cannot be accounted for during these journeys, or these later years. At least two of the Roman beatings and probably three of the Jewish floggings belong to those early years before Barnabas sought him out. Which means, of course, that the servant of the Lord, dismissed peremptorily from Jerusalem, had laboured, perhaps in the main unsuccessfully, in the hinterland above Tarsus, during these unrecorded years, and had had to pay very heavily, in suffering, for his fidelity to the Lord. How exactly and deeply do the words of the Lord to Ananias seem to have been fulfilled—"I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of My Name". (Acts 9. 16).

Well, such was the man, and such the preparation for the work he had been called to do! In that quieter retreat, away from the stress and turmoil of faithless Jerusalem, the Lord had been inuring him to pain and persecution, to odium and disesteem in readiness for the arduous hours which lay ahead!

Thus when came the Gentile's hour, there came the "man" prepared of God to match the hour—and great things began to be accomplished!

A whole year was spent in establishing and consolidating the Church in Antioch; then forth to the wider work he and Barnabas were called to go!

The lesson here for us is that there are tides—ebbings and flowings—in the history of the Lord's people; set times and set hours for this thing or that, and that it is the Lord who arranges them. Nothing is more obvious in the stories in Acts than that the Hand of God—the Spirit of God—supervised and directed everything.

'The Spirit-led life'! "the hour" and "the man"! Are not these things the essentials today! Perhaps not in great world-shaking movements as yet, but in the more quiet and more preparatory ways. It is an unbecoming lack of insight and charity to think that God's over-ruling Providences fall only inside one little Fellowship, and that his hand controls none outside. In these coming days of intensive strain, some poor sufferer's "hour" may come, with you, or me, the intended "man"! How if that is so? Are you going to say "I've tried and tried,

and tried in vain, and am quite sure there's not another single grain to be gathered to the Lord. The whole field's been raked and combed and gleaned until it stands utterly bare of wheat"! If that is how you—we—feel, some one's "hour" will come, without the "man", or without the first-intended man! There are still "lonely hearts to cherish while the days are going by"—which a spirit of defeatism will allow to pass by unhelped and unblessed!

GOLD THAT PERISHETH

*A story of the
Millennium*

This story is founded upon fact. About the middle of the century the daily Press carried a report of a man in U.S.A., who was so convinced of the imminence of the Millennium and consequent resurrection—perhaps not realising its essential nature—that he entered into a covenant such as is here described. The outcome, so far, is not known.

* * *

The Courtroom was very quiet. The handful of spectators, sitting waiting for proceedings to begin, wore the aspect, not of sensation-seekers there to gratify curiosity, but rather that of serious-minded men and women expecting to see and hear things that could be of value in their own personal lives. They came to attention as the President entered and took his seat.

The Clerk to the Court looked up. He did not rise to speak in the ceremonial fashion characteristic of such Courts in former days. He remained comfortably seated as though initiating an afternoon chat. The whole atmosphere was that of a number of people enjoying a friendly discussion on a matter of some moment.

"This is a session of the Personal Appeals Court convened to consider the application of Edwin Brownson against the now defunct Universal Finance Corporation for fulfilment of a contract made before his death to be executed upon the occasion of his resurrection. The claim is made against the present World Government on the ground that having been responsible for bringing the old world order to an end and imposing the present regime it is morally liable for the obligations of the former system."

Some dissent from the public benches became audible. The Clerk waved his hand for quiet.

The President smiled slightly. His eyes were friendly.

"Will Edwin Brownson come forward" he said.

A stockily built man with a self-assured and—unusually in this world—rather surly expression walked from the rear of the room. The President

motioned him to sit down.

"Will you tell me about it, friend Brownson?" he invited.

The other man, obviously ill at ease but with a somewhat belligerent air, hesitated a moment, and responded.

"You already know that in what you people here call the Days that Were I was a Banker—a very successful Banker, if I may say so." The President's encouraging smile indicated that he could so say. Gratified, he continued. "That was in the early part of the Twentieth Century of the so-called Christian Era. On the basis of accepted keen commercial practices and the principle that business is business and the weakest must go to the wall I had accumulated a very considerable personal fortune and it suddenly came to me that I probably would not live long enough to spend it all. With the world showing evident signs of sliding into a condition of anarchy I was not sure that I wanted to anyway. At this juncture I became acquainted with claims by the medical world that by some time after the end of the century medical science would have evolved a means of resuscitating deceased persons who had been kept in a condition of deep freeze and so bring them back to life. At the same time certain Christian groups were loudly proclaiming their belief that the end of the world was at hand, and its replacement by a new and better order of things in which all the dead would be resurrected to live again. Now whilst I had little faith in medical science and none at all in religion I considered that just in case either eventuality did happen it would be worth my while to invest my money at death under a Covenant which would repay my money with accrued interest in the event of my resurrection." A look of cupidity came into his eyes. "I figured that by then it could amount to a considerable sum. I found a Finance Corporation which was only too willing to accept the proposition and my lawyers were to see that a copy of the Deed of Covenant was placed in my coffin at my death."

He paused for breath.

The President was smiling a little more broadly. "And—what then?" he asked.

"A few years later I was in a plane crash. I knew there was no hope. I saw the ground rushing up to meet me—and the next moment I was lying on a bench in a strange garden with two men I had never seen before caring for me. They told me that the old world had ended and a new order under the administration of Jesus Christ was in operation on the principles of love for fellow-men and no oppression of the weak. Of all of which I took no notice; I realised that the unexpected had happened and I had been resurrected, whether by medical skill or Divine power, I neither knew nor cared. I was already thinking of my Deed of Covenant."

The President was looking more thoughtful now. "Ah—the Deed of Covenant!"

"I made my way to my home town to recover the Deed and call on the Finance Corporation. The town wasn't there any more." A burst of laughter from the spectators interrupted him and he looked visibly discomfited. The clerk to the Court turned in his chair and motioned for quiet. Edwin proceeded. "A long time after my death it had been obliterated by a nuclear accident and its site was now occupied by a thick forest. I searched among the trees but found no trace of either the cemetery or the Finance Corporation building." He looked aggressively towards the President as though that worthy was to blame.

"A bit of a disappointment" commented the President drily. Everybody was smiling now.

"Disappointment! It was an unmerited personal tragedy. I saw my life in ruins. I was directed to some kind of Bureau where problems encountered by recently resurrected people like me could be investigated and something done about them and justice done."

"And?"

"They told me that money was no longer in use and that the new order required all men to take part in the world's work and share equally in the resultant products." He thumped his knee disgustedly. "As if I, a leading Banker, could be expected to do manual labour for a living, a thing I have never done in my life, when by sitting at a desk dealing in money I could live a life of luxury." He thumped his knee again. "I demand my money. The people who have vitiated the old order of things must compensate me for my loss and with that I can easily start up in business again." He paused for breath again.

The President appeared to be thinking deeply. He raised his eyes to the other.

"Friend Brownson, do you not realise that when the Bureau told you there is no place for money in the world as it now is they meant just what they said? Men are co-operating with each other on a basis of mutual trust and helpfulness and there is no place for a means of exchange such as was necessary in the old world.

Edwin looked bemused.

"With respect, Mr. President, you may be a good politician, but you don't understand high finance. The world can't run without Banks to lend money and keep the wheels of industry turning."

"We don't have any banks, yet the world seems to be getting on pretty well, considering the vast amount of reconstruction we have to do."

Edwin looked triumphant. "There you are then. How can you have reconstruction without Banks to provide the money?"

The President threw him a long, searching look. There was a pause. Some members of the audience were leaning forward, interestedly. Edwin felt he had scored a point and waited for the answer.

"From whence does the Bank get the money?"

Edwin spoke as to a child. "Speaking as a professional to a layman, Mr. President, I must put it simply."

"Pray do."

"Investors place their money in the Bank and receive interest. That money is lent to business men to finance their operations and they pay interest for its use."

"From where do they get that interest?"

"From the sale of their products."

"Who buys their products?"

"People who want them"

"How do they get the money to buy?"

"By working for their living."

"From whence do their employers get the money to pay them their wages?"

"From the Banks."

"Who charge interest for that?"

"Naturally."

The President nodded to indicate that he understood.

"And what does the Bank do with all this interest?"

"Part goes to the original investor and the rest goes to the Bank which can then lend it to more business men."

"This interest which goes to the Bank and is then lent to somebody else, in what form is it lent. It surely does not appear out of thin air, yet it was not

there in the first place."

Edwin assumed the air of a patient man explaining a difficult problem to a child. "The Bank issues it in the form of credit."

"So the Bank lends more money than it actually has?"

"Er—you could put it like that."

"And in what form does the business man get this credit?"

"Well, ultimately, in currency—banknotes."

"Which, I believe," the President was choosing his words carefully "are little pieces of paper with the Bank's name on—cheap to print and easy to handle".

Edwin beamed—for the first time. "Quite right, Mr. President. We shall make a financier of you yet."

The apparent compliment was acknowledged with a grave nod. "Maybe. In the meantime, tell me, my friend, when the workers, ever working harder to earn more money to buy more products to enable business men to borrow more money and pay more interest and make still more products to enable workers to work still harder to pay still more and ever more interest to the Banks, and get in return a lot of pieces of paper with the Bank's name on, can work no harder at all, will not the whole process eventually come to a catastrophic stop?"

Edwin looked sullen. "Not in my time it didn't." The other was speaking softly as if to himself. "And the merchants of the earth shall weep and mourn, for no man buyeth their merchandise any more. And the fruits that thy soul lusted after are departed from thee, and thou shalt find them no more at all. The merchants of these things, which were made rich by her, shall stand afar off, weeping and wailing, saying, in one hour so great riches is come to nought." He looked across at the other. "Have you ever heard those words before?"

"Never in my life" said Edwin. "They sound all gibberish to me."

"They were written two thousand years before your time. They came terribly true not so long after your death, when the financial system of the world you knew crashed into irretrievable ruin. That is why there are now no Banks."

"Rubbish" exclaimed the other. "Anyway, I want my rights." He was looking belligerent again.

The President looked at the papers in his hand. "Friend Brownson, you shall have your rights, as you term them. You have already stated the sum you invested, and an official of the Finance

Corporation who was quite recently resurrected has confirmed the accuracy of your statement. You will receive your investment, with accrued interest, which you will find has accumulated to a truly fantastic sum . . ."

Edwin Brownson interrupted brusquely "I knew immediately I saw you that I would get justice here. Give me my money and I will trouble you no further."

The President looked again at the papers before him.

"Your investment was made in high denomination dollar notes. It is proposed to pay your dues in dollar notes of the same denomination, as provided in your Deed of Covenant. Is that satisfactory to you?"

"Absolutely, Mr. President. I knew I would get justice here. Where is the money?"

The Clerk to the Court rose from his seat and crossed to a corner of the room and returned, carrying with some difficulty a large carton tied with string. He addressed the President.

"In case your verdict proved to be in favour of the plaintiff, we took the precaution of obtaining a sufficient quantity of notes from our local waste paper pulping plant." He set the carton on the floor in front of Edwin Brownson.

"Funny place to store currency" observed the latter, rushing forward to pick it up. With a cursory nod in the direction of the President he staggered to the doorway, squeezing his carton through with some difficulty.

The porter in the portico stepped forward to open the outer door for him. Passing through, Edwin checked himself. "Can you direct me to the nearest Bank?" he asked.

The porter looked puzzled. "Banks? There are no Banks here" he replied.

"You as well" snorted Edwin. "You'll be telling me next that you have no money in your pocket."

"I haven't" said the porter. "No use for it here" but Edwin had already gone, carrying his carton down the road with some difficulty.

Three men working together building a house waved him a friendly greeting as he passed by. One of them came over.

"You have a load there" he said, surveying the carton with an appraising eye. "Could I be of any help".

Edwin set his carton on the ground. "You could be if you can tell me where I can find a Bank."

The other looked at him quizzically. "Banks went out when the old world finished. No need for

them here. Much better system. You must be a new arrival amongst us not to know that. What do you want a Bank for?"

For the first time Edwin began to look serious.

"You really mean that? There really are no Banks in this world?"

"None at all, friend. You'll soon get used to the idea."

For answer, Edwin picked up his carton and resumed his progress down the road. His mind was in a whirl. The sun was shining brightly and the birds were singing but he saw and heard nothing.

It was thus that he became conscious of a stranger walking by his side. He looked up to see a pleasant face and kindly, even sympathetic, eyes. An air of other-worldly authority gave Edwin an odd impression that here was a man not like other men, as though one from some other world able to explain the inexplorable. He felt somehow that he was on the brink of a momentous discovery.

The stranger spoke. "You have a burden, my friend. Let us rest awhile." Edwin looked at the seat indicated, set by the roadside embowered in brilliant flowers, the shade of a tree shielding its occupants from the sun. Silently, and not quite knowing why, he sat down.

"There is your Bank" observed the stranger softly, pointing across the road. Edwin, startled, looked in the direction indicated. He saw an extensive wheatfield, with grain almost at the reaping stage. They were just outside the township and there were no buildings.

"Where? I can see no Bank" he exclaimed somewhat confusedly.

Came the level voice again, soft but compelling in its certainty and authority. "That good ground is your capital, lent to you by the good Lord who owns all things. You have that capital to make use of, by the efforts of your own hands. You see that rich wheat, waiting now to be reaped? That is your interest, generated from your capital—but the

good Lord does not want that interest for himself. That is for you to use and enjoy, and for your continued life on earth. Every year you will reap that interest, and the good Lord will never ask for his capital back—it is yours on indefinite loan. Have you ever done business with your clients on that basis in your former life?"

For the first time in his life Edwin felt that he had to be perfectly honest. "If I had, I would have been bankrupt within a week."

"You can never be bankrupt in this world. Life, rich, satisfying life lies open before you, if you will have it. What do you say?"

The birds had ceased their twittering. Nature was silent. He looked up.

"If all this is true, what do I give—your good Lord?"

"He asks you to give him yourself—and then He will give you himself."

He sat there a long time. Presently he spoke.

"I never thought of or considered him throughout my former life. How can I expect him to consider me now?"

"The Lord Christ once said 'He that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out'."

For a long time Edwin pondered. The stranger sat silent by his side. Presently he spoke. His voice was low.

"Is it by his power that I have come back to life?"

"Yes."

He looked again at the wheatfield. He felt the strength of the sun. He listened to the twittering of the birds. He could just see the three men far up the road, still busy building their house. His glance fell upon the box of waste paper at his feet. He felt, momentarily, the soft pressure of the stranger's hand resting lightly, encouragingly, upon his own.

"Lord, I believe" he said. "Help thou my unbelief." The soft pressure eased. He turned his eyes again to the man at his side.

There was no one there.

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

T. M. Herbert

Importunity is of the essence of prevailing prayer. Never stop praying. At dawn, with David; at noon, with Daniel; at midnight, with Silas; in sorrow, as Hannah; in sickness, as Job; in childhood, like Samuel; in youth, like Timothy; in manhood, like Paul; in hoar hairs, like Simeon; in dying, like Stephen.

THE PARABLE OF DIVES AND LAZARUS

Luke 16. 19-31

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

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

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

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

Eyebrows contracted and lips were pursed at this. There is a story in the Babylonian Talmud, a story with which those Pharisees were certainly familiar, of somewhat similar character, but in that story the Pharisee is taken into the joys of the presence of God and the publican is condemned to the torment of thirst. It is fairly evident that Jesus, who also must have been familiar with the same old legend, deliberately based this parable upon that story but reversed the respective fates of the two characters. Knowing that, it is easy to see that this parable is intended to show up the utter unworthiness of the Pharisees and the nation they represented, their ultimate loss of all the good things they enjoyed as the "chosen nation", and

the reception into Divine favour of those previously outside the pale.

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

The rich man pictured the Pharisees and, by extension, the whole of the unbelieving Jewish nation. For more than a thousand years they had been the chosen people of God "*to be a light to the Gentiles, to declare his salvation to the ends of the earth*". By virtue of the Covenant made at Sinai they were guaranteed all possible material blessings, "blessed in basket and in store", safety from their enemies, and the privilege of being God's Royal Priesthood to administer his blessings to all men. They, and they alone, were to be the true children of Abraham through whom the promised blessing to all families of the earth should come. In symbolic language, they were clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day. In that position the Pharisees boasted themselves. "*We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man*". That order of things came to an end when Jesus declared "Your house is left unto you desolate" and when, having rejected and crucified the Lord of glory, the favoured position of Israel came to an utter and disastrous end in the over-

throw of the nation directly after the Crucifixion, and its dispersal among all nations. Truly *"the rich man died and was buried"*.

Lazarus, on the contrary, enjoyed an improvement of status. His life of misery came to an end and he found himself transported into "Abraham's bosom". The allusion has two explanatory instances in the Gospels. To lie in the bosom of a superior or a friend was a mark of great favour; the custom of reclining at meals with each person's head in the bosom of his neighbour implied that the one next to the host was to be envied. At the Last Supper it is John who is found to be *"leaning on Jesus' bosom"* (Jno. 13. 23). Jesus himself, in his close relationship with the Father, is said to be *"the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father"* (Jno. 1. 18). So with Lazarus; he is translated, not to Heaven, but to a position of close relationship with Abraham. That fact makes it fairly obvious that Jesus is alluding to the truth He uttered in such plain terms when on another occasion He said to these same Pharisees, again as representing their nation, *"the kingdom of God is taken from you and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof"* (Matt. 21. 43). Lazarus, then is intended to picture the despised and outcast Gentiles who at last enter into the high calling of God, as they did do under the preaching of the Apostles, becoming spiritual children of Abraham (Gal. 3. 7-8). The eleventh chapter of Romans makes it clear that the fruitless olive branches were broken off and wild olive branches (i.e. the Gentiles) were grafted in. Lazarus in Abraham's bosom pictures the Christian Church of all nations and peoples classed as children of Abraham and hence, as Galatians declares, *"heirs according to the promise"*.

In the meantime the rich man is in Hades, *"in torments"*. This used to be a "key" text to urge the reality of the "everlasting fires", but critical study soon shows that this position cannot reasonably be maintained. The word rendered "hell" here is "hades", the death state, not "gehenna", which is final doom. Hades is a temporary condition, for the time will come that Death and Hades are to be cast into the lake of fire (Rev. 20. 13-14), i.e. be themselves destroyed or brought to an end. Another and a most important consideration is that the sojourn of Dives in Hades begins to have a remedial effect; the one who in his lifetime gave evidence of inherent selfishness and lack of consideration for others in that Lazarus only got the crumbs which fell from his table is now displaying

concern for the fate of his brothers. *"I have five brethren; that (Lazarus) may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment."* He still calls Abraham "Father" and the latter still calls him "Son" (vs. 25) which does not look as if the rich man's case is hopeless. The word rendered "torment" in vss. 23 and 28 *"in hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torments"* is from *"basanos"* which properly denotes a touchstone or stone (basonite), used for testing gold. Genuine gold, rubbed on this particular kind of stone, left a characteristic mark, hence the word at first indicated a trial or test of genuineness. Since judicial trials in ancient times almost always employed torture to extract confessions, the word when used judicially came to mean "torture", hence the translation "torment" in this instance. That it need not carry this meaning is shown by other occurrences of the word in the New Testament, such as:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

So the rich man in his distress beheld Lazarus

enjoying the felicity of communion with Abraham and cried out for some small moiety of relief. "Send Lazarus that he may . . . cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame." And Abraham had to tell him that what he asked was impossible. "Between us and you there is a great gulf (Gr. *Chasma*) fixed" a chasm which effectually precluded any passage from the one side to the other. It was not that Abraham *would* not relieve; it was that he *could* not.

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

The parable does not go that far, for there is still

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

The parable ends with the rich man still in Hades. But Abraham called him "Son" and he called Abraham "Father"; and Hades will one day pass away. So there is a bright gleam behind the dark horizon of the picture. There is still hope.

Cumming on the Millennium

"I would not have a millennium without Christ, but rather Christ without a millenium. The believer's safety is in Christ, the believer's heaven is in Christ, and wherever Christ is, in the firmament above or in the earth below, it matters not—there I desire to be, and there perfect happiness will be. But I believe it will be upon earth. I believe that we shall enjoy a felicity and a glory and a peace on this orb, renovated and restored, which poet's imagination never dreamed of, and which painter's pencil never attempted to embody. I believe that the groans of this wearied world shall cease. I believe that the *miserere* that has risen a perpetual *minor* from its inhabitants shall be stilled for ever. I believe that it shall cease to be an aceldama of the living or a charnal house of the dead. I believe that the simoom shall no more sweep its soil; that the

lightning's flash shall no more rend its trees. I believe that the earth shall put off its ashen garments, and doff its raiment of sackcloth; and creation cast aside from its eyes the dark shroud of sorrow that has dimmed them; and we shall see amid the glorious Apocalypse, the sun that shall rise to set no more. "*Come, Lord Jesus, even so, come quickly!*" I believe that our poets shall lay aside their mourning garments, and put on their priestly robes; and philosophy shall be the hand-maid ministering at the altar of the Gospel; and all literature, and all science, and all knowledge, shall become instinct with glorious inspiration, and shall blend their voices in deep-toned and perpetual harmony, "*Blessing, glory, and honour, and thanksgiving unto God, and to the Lamb who was slain, for ever and ever.*"

(Rev. John Cumming, 1848).

FROM A PRISON CELL

*Reflections on the
"Prison Epistles"*

3. God's Eternal Purpose

"According to his good pleasure which He has purposed." Eph. 1. 9.

The assertion that God is working to a Plan or Purpose is several times stated in the group of letters written from Paul's prison cell. The words just quoted are proof that God is following out his own designs, and that all that He does is "according to" a purpose drafted before He began to engage in his great work. Again, Paul follows this assertion by another which says that all who are in Christ were "*pre-destined according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his Will*" (v. 11). Then in a great statement indicating that the principalities and powers in the heavenly places are learning more of God's diversified wisdom through his dealings with the Church than they had hitherto been able to learn, Paul states that even this is "*according to the eternal purpose*" (the plan of the Ages) "*which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord*". (Eph. 3. 11). Another reference to the activities of him "who worketh all things after the counsel of his Will" is found in Phil. 2. 13. "*It is God which worketh in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure*" (R.V.). This mighty energy which works creatively in the saints is linked at two points with the assertions in Ephesians. In both cases it is God that "worketh"; in both cases it is according to his "good pleasure"; hence the creative work in the hearts of the saints is part of his own great Plan.

Paul had already made known to the Church, before his prison days, that God was working to a Plan. This was no new feature of his doctrine. In his first letter to the Corinthians Paul states that both the death and resurrection of Jesus took place in conformity with previous evidences given in the Scriptures. "*Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures . . . and hath been raised . . . according to the Scriptures.*" (1 Cor. 15. 3-4). Whatever occurred "according to the Scriptures" is proof of conformity to a design. He who caused the Scriptures to be written also designed, prior to the inspiration of the prophetic testimony, that Jesus should die as an offering for sin, and that afterwards He should be raised. Again, on the same point, Paul says "*while we were yet weak*" (R.V.) "*in due season Christ died*" (Rom. 5. 6). What occurred "in due season" also conforms to design. This same thought is also applied to his birth, "*When the fulness of time came God sent forth his*

Son, born of a woman . . ." (Gal. 4. 4). "Times" also, as well as the form of Divine activity, were incorporated in the Plan. Then in Rom. 8. 28, this thought of design comes out in great prominence. The control of the affairs of life by Divine Providence is assured to all who are "*called according to his purpose*". Again, in the distant days of Isaac, in conformity with the purpose of God it was said that the elder son should serve the younger, "*that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth . . .*" (Rom. 9. 11). That incident therefore in Rebecca's life was also accomplished in conformity with a "Plan".

Thus it is abundantly demonstrated that God is no mere opportunist, no strategist or tactician, waiting to seize and exploit some flaw in his opponent's methods and activities, but the Lord and Master of every circumstance, the originator of every cause, and the director of every effect. That this is so is proved by the fact that God was working to his Plan before sin came in. It was not by the act of sin by Adam, nor yet the previous act of sin by Satan, that brought the plan into operation. It was in operation untold Ages before sin began. God did not require to make any strategic move to checkmate the tactics of the great rebel who had become his open enemy. His plans were already made, and to those plans the Most High strictly adhered throughout.

God's plans began to be executed in his first-born Son. He was the "*first-born of every creature*" (of every created thing) far back in the unfathomable depths of undated time. (Col. 1. 15). That was according to God's Plan, that He might enjoy pre-eminence in the great family of God. Thenceforward, each angelic "being" and every instituted dignity was created and set in its place to bear some relationship to him. Paul says they were created "by" him. But they were also created "for" him—just as an instrument is made for a man to use or employ. But even more than this, every created being was created "in him"—"in" a combined fellowship under his control, to accomplish a great design which had been entrusted to the Firstborn himself to be brought to full accomplishment when a certain course of Ages had run. They were to be as working members or limbs of a body, over which He was to preside as the directing brain or Head, each member being responsible, and yielding allegiance to, him and his command. Every grade

of power or rank was instituted with special relationship to what He had to bring to full accomplishment when the fulness of the appointed time should have arrived. And of the agencies in the earth which have been or will yet be found in harmony with righteousness and truth, this is also true. For *"in him were all things created, in the heavens and upon the earth, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers; all things have been created through him and unto him. . ."* (Col. 1. 16). "He is before (prior to and in advance of) all things (in the creative and authoritative procession) and in him all things consist" (are held together) v. 17.

Perhaps this may best be illustrated by reference to the co-ordinated offices blended together in the king's government. In affairs of State, whereby the government of the people is carried out, several distinct offices are blended together each having its own province or sphere of operation. First we might mention the legislative sphere, by means of which the laws are made. The nature of the legislative body may vary from dictatorship on the one hand, to an open deliberate assembly on the other. The dictator (advised by his council) will decree law, the deliberative assembly may enact it, but for the purpose of this illustration it matters not which system is in operation. Laws are promulgated either for the King (by his Parliament) or by the King (as an autocrat). That is one office. Next we may cite the Constabulary office, whose duty is to see that the law is observed by the King's subjects. If the subject fails or refuses to observe the law, the Constabulary cites the offender before the Justiciary. The members of the Judiciary Office "try" the case presented against the offender and if the occasion requires it, mete out punishment upon the offender. When the offence so warrants, the Judiciary hands over the offender to the "detention" officers, and the offender is sent to prison for the period specified by the Judiciary.

Only the legislative body made the laws, but all the others apply them. The Constabulary is composed of many ranks and grades of authority, from the supreme chief at the centre of the Administration down to the humblest village policeman. The Judiciary is also composed of many ranks or grades of office, from the high chief down to the lowest prison officer. In addition to the legal machinery there is also the customs and excise, taxing and rating authorities, health authorities, etc., etc. Each department is separate from its fellows, yet each and all are "in" the King's confidence, and do

the King's business in his stead. They are thus "in" the kingship—"in him"—yet while they are all held together "in" him and "by" him, he is "before" them all—higher in rank and prior in time. He is "first" in procession and "first" in prerogative.

Thus it was with the first-born Son of God in relation to the whole range of authorities, dominions and powers in the heavenly realms. All these sons of light were created to bear relationship to him in the government committed to his care. By him each had been created; by him, each had been commissioned and authorised to act in his name, having dignity in rank, and splendour in person, according with the allotted sphere or task.

One member of this hierarchy, a being of high and illustrious rank appears to have been accorded vice-royalty over the earth, to act first as representative of his Lord and next as overseer and caretaker of man. Of him alone could the words of Ezekiel 28: 12-15, be true. He only had been in Eden the Garden of God—and had been full of wisdom, and perfect in his beauty. He had been the cherub that had "covered"—that had spread his wings of authority over man. But iniquity (lawlessness) was found in him. He wanted to sit, not as viceroy for his appointed Lord, but as king and ruler in his own right. The story of his fall, and of the seduction of his charge from loyalty to God is too wide a story for this present exposition. Suffice it now for us to note the fact. Here, by the rebellious act of Lucifer, that ideal oneness was broken. Sin had appeared both in the heavens and in the earth. Subsequently other discontented heavenly messengers, rebelling against the Creator-Lord, left their own and sank to a lower estate to gratify evil desire. In due course the Heavenly Powers put these rebels under restraint, thus to remain until the Judgment day. (Jude 6). Thus sin and rebellion spread itself in the heavenly sphere and throughout the earth.

As that ideal "one-ness" in and under the first-born Son was the great design with which the creative work began, that "one-ness" is still the goal towards which all subsequent developments are directed. There is no alteration in the nature of the great plan for it is still God's purpose *"in the fulness of the times to sum up"* (to head up) *"all things in Christ, the things in the heavens and the things upon earth"*. (Eph. 1. 10). Not even the rebellion of Satan nor the fall of man changed the fore-ordained design. Before the world began arrangements had been made for the call and elevation of beings from the human plane to the

highest heavenly plane. "... he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blemish before him..." (Eph. 1. 4). That is proof that the entrance of sin had been foreknown, and that every step, from the tremendous step-down from his exalted place by God's first-born Son (and who in course of time came to be known as Jesus of Nazareth), on through the throes of death, until He was raised up to his Father's right hand, as the first-born among many brethren, was all fore-known and fore-ordained. Even the defection of some of the angelic host produced no alteration of the plan, for the government of heaven and earth carried on the right without their aid, carried on in spite even of their bitterest opposition. At every step of the development on earth, the evil discontents of heaven have sought to thwart and overthrow the Plan, and seem destined to fight it to the bitter end. Some Scriptures seem to indicate that despite this opposition there will open a door of hope for them in a later day, if they cease to interfere in human affairs and wait in patience for the day when judgment will begin. For all things in the heavenly sphere as well as on this earthly globe, that can be reconciled, will be reconciled to the supreme Lord of the great Plan, and to the great Designer of this sweeping universal Purpose. "For it was the good pleasure of the Father that in him" (the glorified Lord) "should all fulness dwell, and through him to reconcile all things unto himself. . . whether things upon the earth or things in the heavens." (Col. 1. 19-20). Thus the unreconciled "sons of darkness" are to have the opportunity to become again "sons of light", and return to the sphere from which they fell, and dwell again "in him" and "for him" for evermore. And all the rebellious sons of men, who

likewise, on invitation, leave the ways of sin, will be accepted into his dominion, so the earthly viceroys of him who is the head of all power and dominion and every dignity that can be named will rule the earth in his name, and establish universal peace for both man and beast, "according to the good pleasure which He purposed in him, unto a dispensation of the fulness of the times, to sum up" (to head up) "all things in Christ, the things in the heavens and the things in the earth". (Eph. 1. 9-10).

In that happy day every creature of every rank in heaven as well as in earth will occupy his allotted place and fulfil his allotted task. This is great doctrine—broad and deep and wide, yet it was not exclusive to Paul's prison days. He knew of it in an earlier day. While he does not enter into so many details in his earlier exposition, he covers all the ground relative to the subjugation of all enemies of God and of righteousness, until all things are under the First-born's feet. Then the Son surrenders the whole subjected and purified dominion to his Father and his God, so that God himself may be all in all. In his letter to the Corinthians, written several years prior to his imprisonment at Rome, Paul wrote: "Then cometh the end" (envisaged in the Plan) "when He shall deliver up the Kingdom to God, even the Father; when He shall have abolished all" (antagonistic) "rule and all" (contrary) "authority and power. For He must reign till He hath put all enemies under his feet. . . And when all things have been subjected unto him then shall the Son also himself be subjected unto him" (God) "that did subject all things unto him" (the Son) "that God may be all in all" (1 Col. 15. 24, 25, 28). This is the early germ of this great thought—Ephesians and Colossians give the full rich fruit, matured and complete. (To be continued)

A Note on Judas

A reader of long standing, commenting on the item "Judas and the Potter's field" in the May/June issue, offers the following alternative suggestion, seemingly worthy of repetition here for the benefit of other readers interested. The examination of the relevant Greek words for "buy" and "field" would seem to make the suggestion worthy of thought.

* * *

Acts 1. 19-20: Judas purchased a field (*chorion*) with THE REWARD OF INIQUITY, long before the Crucifixion, with cash that he had filched as treasure from the common purse. This "field" was a smallholding rather than a field in the usual sense of the word, the "*agros*" of Matt. 27. Even the two verbs of acquirement are different. In Matthew the verb *agorazo*, to buy in the open market, is used, while in Acts the verb *ptaomai*, to buy for oneself,

is used.

Judas bought his "field" long before the Crucifixion. The chief priests bought theirs afterwards. Two different fields and two different transactions! Judas could not have hanged himself in the field which the priests bought. Both the "*agros*" and the "*chorion*" became called the "field of blood" but for different reasons. The field in Matthew was not called *Aceldama* as in Acts. The "reward of iniquity" does not refer to the thirty pieces of silver, but to Judas' thieving (Jno. 12.6).

Finally, a small point re the fulfilment of O.T. prophecy (Jer. 18. 1-4). Zech. 11. 1-2 is more relevant but in any case Jer. 18. 1-2 has "SPOKEN by Jeremy the prophet", not "written".

Judas could not have hanged himself in the field which the priests bought, but in his own field!



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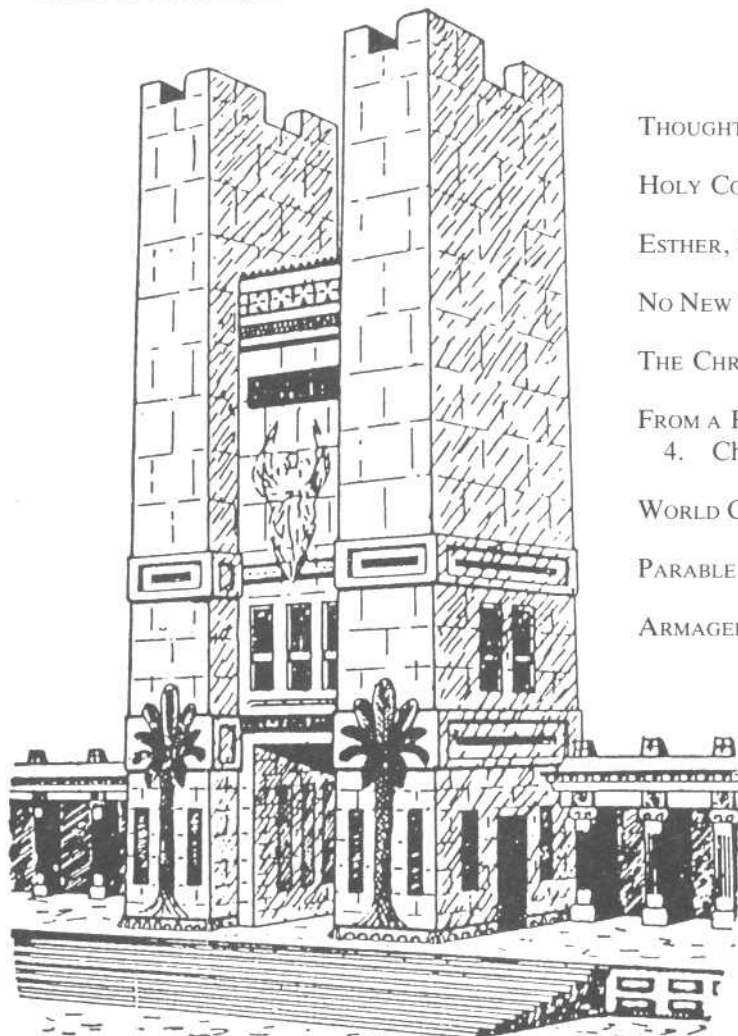
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Thou, therefore, endure
hardness as a good
soldier of Jesus Christ

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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

That unfortunate man, Uzzah, in the days of King David, who put out his hand to steady the Ark of the Covenant whilst it was being transported to its new home, in perfect good faith and sincerity was guilty of a serious error. He was licensed to go so far as to ensure the transport of the sacred object, but no farther—may not touch or handle it. Equally well-meaning followers of the Lord in later days are prone to the same mistake. It seems that the interests of the Lord's work are at stake, that something is going to go seriously wrong, and we must move heaven and earth to put things right before it is too late. Usually we fail anyway. And it is all so unnecessary. Our Lord is perfectly capable of ensuring the safety of his own work and nothing can transpire without his ordering and permission. Not that we are to sit down and do nothing under the sublime impression that He will do it for us when we are perfectly capable of doing it ourselves. There is a duty incumbent upon us, but there is a point at which that duty stops, and we should cease from our own efforts and wait for his intervention. We should be able to recognise the point at which we cease from our own efforts and wait for him to take over. We must judge when that point is reached, then rest assured that, having done that which it was our duty to do, He will step in and effect that which He had intended all along should be done.

It is so fatally easy to persuade ourselves that we are acting as champions for the Lord and his Cause

when all the time we are applying worldly methods to our actions. If our efforts yield the desired result, well and good; but if not, if obstacles arise, if the matter obstinately refuses to be remedied, then pause and consider. Maybe there is an unknown factor yet to be revealed, and all will yet be well. That is the point where Uzzah must put his hand back into his pocket, *"stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord"*.

NOTICES

Recent delays

It is expected that by the time this issue is published our recent problems will have been largely ameliorated. The literature stockroom has been set up in the new location and literature despatches should by now have been resumed, filling all hitherto unfilled requests. It is likely that a few slips have occurred; if anyone finds they have missed receiving any literature expected or any recent issue of the "Monthly", please advise Hounslow and the deficiency will be remedied.

Gone from us



Bro. Anthreas Characharos (*Knutsford*)



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

HOLY CONVOCATION

From time to time in the life of Israel there were occasions when the Temple stairs were crowded with happy throngs going up to worship and fellowship. The sweet singer of Israel used to watch them from his privileged position in the Palace near by. His heart leapt to be with them, and so he broke out into the rapturous strain *"We went up to the House of God in company, with the multitude of them that kept holy day"*. Holyday! That is the word which we now pronounce "holiday", and it is when we keep holiday, holyday, that we gather together, just as our spiritual forbears of old, to worship and fellowship. Let that always be the keynote of our gathering in assembly. Let us come together on the foundation truth that is our common basis of belief—our acceptance in Christ Jesus. Let us unite together in strains of praise that will fill the heavenly realm with music. Let us join in the voice of prayer that ascends before the Throne of the Most High *"O come, let us worship, and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord our Maker"*. Let such seasons of assembling be holy convocations unto the Lord, times in the which we draw near to God, and He to us. Israel of old gathered together from time to time at the command of the Lord, leaving their daily work and usual interests to join together in an act of worship and homage. In that, and from that, they gained a sense of one-ness with God, fresh strength for the tasks and duties of every day. In that respite from the heaviness and strain of normal life they found themselves lifted above the things of this world and given a glimpse of another, a world in which the Lord reigns supreme, and the sadness, the injustice and the hardships of this one have no place. They realised that man does not live by bread alone, but needs the indwelling Word of God in which the soul can find refreshment and rest. More than anything else these holy convocations re-awakened in their hearts the consciousness that they were a people for a purpose and that in all the circumstances of their daily lives they were under the terms of their Covenant, which Moses had negotiated for them, so many years before, being trained and prepared for a future glorious destiny. Perhaps the golden vision faded a little when the assembly was over and they had all returned to their work in the fields and on the farm, but its influence must have remained with them and encouraged them to a greater degree of faithful

endurance than would have been the case otherwise.

We, too, are exhorted not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together, and in obedience to that injunction we assemble for fellowship, for study and discussion, sometimes for prayer, all too rarely, one fears, for worship. A convention is the logical union together of many such assemblies, at appropriate times in the year, in order that the circle of fellowship may be widened, and the sense of unity deepened. And just because a convention is an expression of unity in Christ, and an outward witness to the faith, so it ought, more than any other kind of meeting to partake of the spirit of worship. We can learn of the Divine Plan from the printed page, the magazines and the books we read. We can commune with the Father in the privacy of our own homes, or our own rooms, and we do. But only in the company of our fellows may we join in that corporate worship which is the outward symbol of the unity of the Church in the flesh. So the great aim and ideal in our coming together is Divine worship together. We shall be much better equipped to study together and understand the doctrines of the faith together, and learn to appreciate the fact that our unity in Christ does not depend upon the uniformity of our theological convictions, but upon our common-union, our communion, together as fellow members of his Body.

The aim of our conventions, therefore, should be just that which is defined for us by the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 4: *"For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come . . . unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ"*. That covers everything, and leaves out nothing. These are words with which not one of us can quarrel; a declaration which no one can dispute.

It is fundamental to the Christian outlook that the only hope for the world is the coming again of Jesus Christ, and the setting up of his Kingdom upon earth. Our prayers, our faith, our studies, our activities, our reading, our preaching, all must be directed to that glorious vision. We pray, as have Christians of all ages *"Thy Kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven"*. But we must work for the kingdom also. And while we pray, and while we work, we must study and discuss these things together, so that our message

may be ever up-to-date, and pray and worship together so that it may be vital, living. The Lord has no use for fossilised theology or sterilised witness. In the Christian world today much of the theology is fossilised; it is still expressed in language adapted to the culture of the Middle Ages and means little or nothing to those who need it so much today. The word of Scripture itself is timeless; its message is always comprehensible and up-to-date, but men, even the saintliest or the most farsighted of men, do not have the power to infuse that quality in their interpretations and expositions and formulations of faith and that is why, even although the living Word stands unchanged and abiding for ever, it is necessary that man's exposition of that Word be continually reviewed to relate it to the generation which is called to listen. And we live now in a time when men will very soon be ready to listen. The world is going to pieces; disaster is inevitable and it is near, and as the sin and selfishness and short-sightedness of the human race carry it into the ultimate collapse of all that they have built it will be as it was so many times with Israel in like circumstances. Apostasy brought judgment, but after judgment came blessing, *"For a small moment have I forsaken thee, but with great mercies will I gather thee"* (Isa. 59.7).

The same scornful and indifferent unbelievers whose self-will and arrogance is fast bringing this world to its end will later, after the catastrophe, look into the heavens and behold the Lord of glory present for their salvation. *"The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together"* (Isa. 40.5). That will be the greatest "holy convocation" of all, when the whole of mankind is gathered to listen to the voice that speaks from heaven, and the gates of the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, are opened wide that whosoever will may enter therein.

But, in the meantime, and before that great manifestation of earth's coming King, we who are pledged to his service, and hope to reign with him then, must needs maintain inviolate our confidence and expectation that He will surely come, and come speedily. In every generation there are

those who interpret the signs of their times to assure them that *"he is near, even at the doors"* (Matt. 24.33) and then, because of disappointment and disillusionment, there has been doubt and loss of faith. It is very true that no Christian group which builds its beliefs and its witness solely around imminent expectations of promised Divine intervention can long survive the failure or apparent failure of that expectation. Something more than exclusive pre-occupation with the "voice of prophecy", no matter how apparently applicable to the current situation, is necessary to a balanced and fully developed faith and service. The fellowship can only survive and continue its witness in the world if to its dispensational and prophetic expectations there is allied the age-old threefold Christian call, the Baptist message; *"Repent—Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ—for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand"*. That evangel is independent of the precise moment that the Son of Man is revealed from Heaven in the glory of the Kingdom; it is unaffected by the accuracy or otherwise of current interpretations of the signs of the times or the precise day the climax of the ages is expected. We can go on through life in the power of that message, always expecting the Bridegroom, always watching for the Kingdom, never cast down or dismayed if He seem to tarry, and the golden radiance of Millennial Day still do no more than gild the tops of the distant mountains. Do they say *"the days are prolonged, and every vision faileth?"* Say unto them *"thus saith the Lord, the days are at hand, and the effect of every vision"*. In the glorious imagery of Zechariah's fourteenth chapter, the prophet, looking toward the east, toward the sun-rising, in faith and expectation, sees the Mount of Olives cleave in twain, and a great valley appear between, and in the distant view thus opened to his eyes he beholds a great sight and cries out in exultation *"and the Lord my God shall come, and all the saints with thee"*. It is that we may be built up and strengthened in that faith that we gather in convention, and in the joy of that certainty that we serve and labour together in ministry and fellowship.

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

Big things are only little things put together. It is encouraging to think of this when confronted by a big task. Remember always that it is only a group of little tasks, any one of which you may easily do. It is ignorance of this fact that makes some men afraid to try.

ESTHER, QUEEN OF PERSIA

The story of the Jewish maiden who became wife to one of the most powerful kings of antiquity, and thereby the means of delivering her nation from wholesale massacre, is unique in the Old Testament in that nowhere in the narrative is the name of God mentioned, neither is there any indication of prayer to him or faith in him for deliverance, nor yet is He credited with any part in effecting the deliverance. Many suggestions and theories have been propounded to account for this unusual factor in this particular book, but when they have all been stated the fact remains that of all the women of faith who figure in Bible history Esther stands in a class by herself as one who gives no indication of her personal standing with God, and yet undeniably was used by him to effect a great deliverance.

Esther was a city girl, born and bred in Shushan the capital of the Persian empire four generations after the Jews were taken captive into Babylon. The decree of Cyrus, permitting all who so desired to return to the land of their fathers, was fifty years in the past and the restoration of the land of Judah was in progress. Esther's family and forebears had not seen fit to return; perhaps they considered themselves better off in prosperous Persia. Maybe the opposition and terrorist tactics which the colonists in Judea were experiencing from alien peoples in neighbouring lands deterred them from sharing the risks and fortunes of the pioneers. The situation in Judah was very much as it is in the same land today. At any rate, it would seem that Esther grew up in an atmosphere of Jewish nationalism and the Jewish faith against the background of a Gentile land, and her religious outlook must have been moulded thereby. The name of no great man of faith of the period is known—Daniel had been dead for half a century, Ezra, away in Babylon, was at the most a child of a few years old, and Nehemiah, the coming patriot, not yet born. The only name we have is that of Mordecai, Esther's cousin, who had cared for her since she was orphaned, and of his attitude towards God we have no knowledge either.

The king of Persia at the time was the famous—or rather infamous—Xerxes, weak, dissolute, ruthless, cruel, altogether unprincipled and probably half mad. The incidents and allusions appearing in the Book of Esther fit so closely into the events of this man's reign that there can be no reasonable doubt as to the identification. The

Artaxerxes under whom Nehemiah served was Xerxes' son and successor and this provides an additional evidence. When one compares the account of Xerxes' reign in Herodotus, the Greek historian, who lived only a few decades later, with the character of the king displayed in the Biblical Book it is easy to believe that both accounts refer to one and the same man. ("Ahasuerus" in the Book of Esther is the Hebrew form of the Persian Khshayarsha of which the Greek form is Xerxes).

It was to this monster that the Jewish girl, probably no more than sixteen years of age, was unwillingly to yield herself. There was no choice in the matter and any objections would be brusquely overruled. The kings of Persia arrogated to themselves the right to take into their harems any unmarried woman in the realm they wished. Xerxes exercised his rights to the full and in addition to his principal wife, who enjoyed the dignity of Queen, he also maintained a harem of three hundred of the most beautiful women in the land. But now his Queen had incurred his displeasure and been degraded to a lower position, and the great king was in the market for a new Queen. Apparently none of the current three hundred appealed to his probably somewhat jaded palate and his sycophantic courtiers suggested that perhaps the time was ripe for a fresh sweep through the empire in search of new candidates.

Esther was unfortunate enough to be caught in this round-up. There was nothing her guardian could do about it, but he did charge her not to reveal the fact that she was a Jewess. This is a little difficult to understand. There was no particular antipathy against the Jews in the Persian empire at the time; the fact that they were monotheists like the Persians was rather to their favour compared with the polytheistic Babylonians whom Persia had conquered in the days of Cyrus. If Esther's nationality was likely to be a bar to her being taken into the harem of Xerxes one would think that Mordecai would have revealed the fact immediately. Taken in conjunction with the further behaviour of Mordecai later on, it could be surmised that he might not have been altogether averse to his ward becoming more closely connected with the king, as a possible means of serving his own personal ambition. Upon the other hand, it might only have been that Mordecai, knowing how swiftly the tide of popular feeling could turn against the Jews, and realising that from now on he

could do nothing to protect his young cousin, considered it better that no one in the royal court should have any suspicion of her national origin.

So Esther was taken to the royal palace and assigned her place in the "house of the women", a luxurious building the ruins of which still exist amongst the complex of broken-down walls and standing pillars, fragments of sculpture and tiled pavements, which is all that is left of the magnificent palace of the Persian kings at Shushan, now known as Persepolis. The whole area was excavated during the years 1931-1939 and the great throne room where Esther stood with her royal husband, the Hall of One Hundred Columns, an immense apartment over two hundred and thirty feet square, can still be traced by bits of broken wall and pavements. Pieces of the wall panels of multi-coloured enamelled and glazed bricks, arranged in ornate designs, still remain to give mute evidence to the accuracy of the description in Esth. 1.6. And here Esther had to spend a probationary period of twelve months before she would be called into the presence of the king.

The first real picture of Esther we have comes at this point. The eunuch who had charge of the harem—an important and trusted official—took an instant liking to the Jewish maiden and immediately promoted her to a leading place among her companions, giving her seven handmaids as personal attendants and the best quarters he had at his disposal. It is probable that the king relied upon his judgment a great deal and that he was impressed by a non-assuming modesty and quiet dignity which may have distinguished Esther above the others. And this impression may well have been advanced when Esther, called at last into the king's presence, instead of claiming for herself, as was apparently the custom, every conceivable aid to attractiveness in the way of clothing or jewellery that could be suggested, was content to be arrayed according to the eunuch's judgment. When she was ready, she *"obtained favour in the sight of all them that looked upon her"*.

She might have been several years at the palace awaiting this moment, for the king had been away for two years fighting the Greeks. The great feast described in the first chapter as taking place in the third year of his reign was evidently in connection with an important council of all his nobles and generals held in that year in which Xerxes planned the invasion of Greece as a preliminary to his projected conquest of Europe. (Xerxes was nothing if not ambitious and never erred on the side of

modesty, as witness one of his inscriptions found at Shushan; *"I am Xerxes, the great king, the only king, the king of all countries which speak all kinds of languages, the king of this entire big and far-reaching earth"*). His plans laid, he set out with a vast army and a great fleet of war-galleys, drawn from all the countries of his empire, built a bridge of boats across the Hellespont (near the modern Dardanelles) to convey his forces into Europe, and so marched into Greece. The Greek war-galleys were out-numbered three to one, but at the memorable naval battle of Salamis in 480 B.C. the Persian fleet was completely destroyed, and on land the Greeks defeated and decimated the invaders. Xerxes left his most able general, Mardonius, to hold back the enemy whilst he himself with a few picked troops fled back to Persia as fast as he could, two years after he so boastfully set out. Comparison of Herodotus with the Book of Esther shows that Esther was probably brought into his presence about a month after his return to Shushan.

The king was captivated by this young maiden, more so than by any of the others who had been collected for him, and immediately chose her to replace the discarded Vashti. So, in the seventh year of the king's reign, Esther became Queen of Persia, an exalted position which would probably have separated her for ever from her own people and had no place in the outworking purposes of God had it not been for the machinations of Haman.

Haman was an influential noble at Court who had contrived to become the king's right-hand man. He was ambitious, arrogant, and an enemy of the Jews. Arising from the consistent refusal of Mordecai to pay him the deference shown by others he conceived the idea of destroying the entire Jewish community in the Persian empire. He obtained the king's permission quite easily and the decree went forth throughout the empire, naming a day twelve months hence when the carnage should commence. In the ensuing consternation and distress Mordecai appealed to Esther to use her influence with the king to have the decree rescinded. Esther at first was hesitant; to go to the king uninvited was to risk death unless he should extend his sceptre towards the applicant, indicating his favour, *"and I"* said Esther, *"have not been called to come in unto the king these thirty days"*. It may have been that, after five years as Queen, the notoriously fickle Xerxes was beginning again to look elsewhere. At any rate Esther was apprehen-

sive of her personal safety if she interfered.

Mordecai was not prepared to tolerate this. *"Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king's house, more than all the Jews"* he told her sternly *"for if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there relief and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place, but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed; and who knowest whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"* That last phrase is the nearest approach to any consciousness of Divine oversight and power that appears in this book, and even then it may be questioned whether Mordecai had any thought of Divine overruling in his mind. It is noteworthy that all the transactions which appear in the story seem to be on the basis of human effort and power and no indication of prayer or faith in time of need is given. Esther's response bears this out. She told Mordecai to go back to his fellows and get them to engage in a three days' fast; she with her attendants would do the same, and then she would take her life in her hands and intrude upon the presence of the king uninvited; *"and if I perish, I perish"*. It does not sound like the assurance of faith neither does it seem that the Queen felt she had a Protector whose power exceeded even that of the king of Persia. Joseph stood before Pharaoh of Egypt and Daniel before King Nebuchadnezzar at Babylon, and these were comparable occasions to this one, but those men both prepared themselves beforehand by prayer and supplication to God and then appeared before their respective monarchs in serene confidence that God was with them and would direct the issue. There is no evidence that Queen Esther felt like that. It looks almost as if she relied upon women's wiles, arraying herself in her royal apparel and appearing before the king in as alluring a fashion as possible, rather than believe that help could come from above.

The great king was in a good mood that day. At sight of his Queen he extended the sceptre, permitting her to approach, and even before she had time to introduce her request he enquired her wish and promised in advance that he would grant it, even to the half of his kingdom. Esther had probably heard such promises before; it is likely that, knowing the unpredictable nature of her royal spouse, she felt that a gradual approach to the subject at issue was best calculated to achieve a satisfactory outcome. She asked therefore that the king and Haman his chief adviser would honour her with their presence at a little private banquet that she had arranged for

them in her own apartments. The Xerxes of history is known for never refusing an opportunity of good food and good wine and it is quite in character to read here that he commanded Haman to make haste to accompany him to this unexpected treat.

At the banquet the king repeated his question and renewed his promise. He was astute enough to recognise that there was more to this than the desire to have a meal together. Esther, still playing her cards close, responded with an invitation to another banquet on the morrow, and a promise to make her real request known on that occasion.

Thus it was that on the morrow the two august personages had cups in their hands again. The Hebrew expression really means something in the nature of a drinking session and it is more than possible that King Xerxes was rapidly passing into a benign condition of mind as once more he repeated his question, *"what is thy petition, Queen Esther? It shall be granted thee. What is thy request? It shall be performed, even to the half of the kingdom"*. Esther realised that the psychological moment was now, and came straight out with a moving plea for her own life and the lives of her people, all subjects of a decree which appointed them to destruction and death. With the swift upsurge of anger for which this king is noted he demanded *"who is he, and where is he, that durst presume in his heart to do so?"* conveniently forgetting that he himself had approved the decree. But he had not known then that his favourite wife and Queen was a Jewess—and neither had Haman, who now realised that he had badly overplayed his hand. Esther's next words in answer to the king greatly increased the schemer's panic; *"the adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman"* and at that the king, in uncontrollable wrath, went out into the garden, perhaps to cool off. It is probable that the only one who remained perfectly calm and self-possessed was Esther herself, who now had the entire situation in her own hands. Haman, in blind unreasoning terror, had thrown himself on the divan upon which Esther was reclining, to plead for his life, and the king, coming back at that unfortunate moment, in blazing anger accused him of committing an assault upon the person of the Queen. Of course, he did not really believe that, but his wrathful outburst was sufficient hint to the attendants, who promptly took Haman into custody and stood awaiting orders. Haman had already erected a gallows on which he hoped to see Mordecai crucified, and the attendants, who seem to have had no love for him, knew this. One of them

mentioned the fact, in a tentative fashion, to the king, who immediately whirled round and uttered the dread words "*Hang him thereon*". So Haman was hurried away and crucified on the gallows he had intended for Mordecai.

The instigator of the decree was dead, but the decree remained. The true relationship of Mordecai to Esther was now revealed, and the king, doubtless further to please his wife, advanced Mordecai to high honour. To Esther he gave all the household and property of the executed Haman. Now Esther set about the business of annulling the decree. This was approached by falling at the king's feet and beseeching him with tears. She may or may not have known that under the constitution of Persia a royal decree once issued could not be revoked, even by the king. One of Xerxes' predecessors, Darius the Mede, found himself in this same dilemma when he was tricked into having Daniel cast into the lion's den. In that instance God delivered. This time plans for deliverance seem to have been made without calling upon God for help. The king appears to have indicated to Esther and to Mordecai that whilst he could not revoke the decree giving leave to his subjects to attack and massacre Jews to their hearts' content on the thirteenth day of the forthcoming twelfth month, there was nothing to stop him issuing a further decree giving the Jews leave to take whatever steps they thought fit to defend themselves and slay any who displayed enmity towards them. No sooner said than done; Mordecai, armed with royal authority, and the royal seal wherewith to authorise his letters, promulgated this second decree throughout the empire, also bringing it to the notice of all "*the lieutenants, and deputies, and rulers*" of the political divisions of the empire; these worthies, perceiving the direction in which the wind was now blowing, could be relied upon to assist the king's new favourites and see that the Jews were by no means hindered, and possibly somewhat helped, in their plans to wreak revenge upon their enemies.

It would seem that Esther was now firmly in the saddle and could do almost what she liked with King Xerxes. The time came for the implementation of both decrees, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, and the Jews throughout the empire acquitted themselves well in the use of carnal weapons. In the royal city Shushan five hundred were slain and in the rest of the empire seventy-five thousand according to the Masoretic

text, fifteen thousand according to the Septuagint. The king, quite unperturbed at the loss of so many of his subjects, came to Esther with the news, and asked her what more she wanted. "*Now what is thy petition, and it shall be granted thee? Or what is thy request further, and it shall be done?*" Esther has been criticised for requesting at this point that the Jews in Shushan be given leave to spend one more day slaying their enemies. She is described as blood-thirsty and revengeful. Unless the full facts of the case are known it may be wise to defer judgment. It may have been that in the royal city itself there were many enemies of the Jews still unaccounted for and they could be a source of trouble in the future. While the admittedly changeable king was in his present mood it were better to crush the anti-Jew party for good and all. It is probable anyway that in this the queen was advised by Mordecai and he appears as a shrewd and relentless politician who intended to secure his own nation's future by any possible means. So another three hundred were slain in the city before the fighting ceased.

After all, men like David, Joshua, Gideon, were responsible for much heavier slaughter of the enemies of Israel and have been—perhaps unwisely—lauded as the champions of God. Esther, a true daughter of her people, took advantage of the opportunity she had as Queen of Persia to defend that people from enemies who would have spoiled and massacred them without cause.

So the story of Esther closes, in about the fourteenth or fifteenth year of Xerxes' reign, when she had been queen for about seven years, with the Jews enjoying prosperity and royal favour, Mordecai the Jew an important man at Court, and Esther herself firmly established as the consort of the great King. Whether this happy state continued for the remainder of the king's reign is not known. Mordecai has been identified with Matacas, who is recorded in history as one of the most powerful men at court during Xerxes' reign, but the identification is uncertain. The suggestion sometimes made that Esther was the Amestris, wife of Xerxes in the pages of Herodotus, is certainly incorrect. Amestris was the daughter of Xerxes' uncle Otanes and married him long before he became king; their son Darius was at least twenty years old at Xerxes' accession to the throne. It is possible that the Vashti of the Book of Esther was Amestris and it is noticeable that although Darius was the eldest son he did not succeed as king; a younger son of Xerxes,

Artaxerxes I, became king after him. This of itself is interesting. Certain native Persian historians have said that the mother of Artaxerxes was a Jewess; it is also recorded that Artaxerxes was a somewhat mild and weak-willed man dominated by his mother and sister. He reigned for the unusually long period of forty years, indicating accession at an early age. If he was in fact the son of Esther he could not have been more than thirteen years of age when his father died—murdered—so that the queen would obviously act as Regent and adviser for a number of years. The brief glimpses we have of her character would seem to infer that she would not let go the reins of power easily. And if Esther did indeed bear a son to her husband in those early years it becomes easier to understand the somewhat excessive infatuation he seems to have had for her; she had given him a son, born during his

reign, to reign as king after him. Xerxes himself succeeded to the throne only because his own elder brother was born before their father became king. It is a fascinating thought, that the simple Jewish maid who against her will had been exalted to become Queen of Persia may have been a means in the Lord's hand to assure Israel's peace and security for more than a century. From the Restoration from Babylon under Cyrus to the end of the Old Testament in the time of Malachi was about a hundred and thirty years. That time of rebuilding the nation is illumined by a gallery of famous names who rendered yeomen service in the work of restoration—Daniel, Zerubbabel, Haggai, Zechariah, Ezra, Nehemiah and Malachi. Perhaps to that company of stalwarts raised up to perform the good purposes of God we should add the name of one woman—Esther, Queen of Persia.

No New Thing under the Sun

"Is there anything whereof it may be said, See, this is new? It hath been already of old time, which was before us." (Eccl. 1.10).

King Solomon was a wise man. We so often think we are the first to make a discovery, only to find it was known long before our time. In the realm of Scripture, too. Not so long ago the British Press featured the story of two American researchers who had discovered by means of a computer that the crossing of the Red Sea was accomplished by means of a wind which blew the waters back and left the sea-bed bare, and then, changing, allowed the sea to return and drown the Egyptians. Fame for Rhode Island and Florida State Universities! Wonderful things, computers! Now the summer edition of the *Bible Students News-Letter* of Ohio, U.S.A. (read, it is believed, by many of our readers) repeats the story as given in the *Los Angeles Times* of March 12 this year. Another University expert says *"the scenario was plausible, although few experts are familiar with the report"*.

Except Moses, who said the same things several thousand years ago—and he was there!

And of course, reputable 19th century geologists who, independently of each other, during the last thirty years of that century, investigated the area concerned, (without computers),—Edouard Naville (French); Prof. G. F. Wright, (American); Sir J. W. Dawson, (British)—and recorded in detail all that they found. (Several times during this century the BSM has alluded to their work—the most recent full treatment *"The Crossing of the Red Sea"* appeared in May/June 1973.) Full

accounts of their findings exist in *"Modern Science in Bible Lands"* 606 pp, Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1888, and *"Scientific Confirmations of Old Testament History"* G. F. Wright, 432 pp, Bibliotheca Sacra, Oberlin, Ohio, U.S.A. 1906, although both books may be difficult to procure now. All these men confirmed the Bible account of the manner in which the crossing was effected in much more detail than the present claimants presented.

Not so long ago another researcher—not U.S.A. this time—got his degree at some European University by an original treatise showing that the usual impression that St. Paul's ship was wrecked at Malta is incorrect and the calamity actually occurred far up the Adriatic Sea. Not quite original after all! This theory first saw the light in the 18th century, was publicised and forgotten, was revived in the early 19th and again forgotten, and now, again! In fact, the seabed at St. Pauls Bay, Malta, has now been accurately charted, and so thoroughly that the very course of the ill-fated vessel up to its grounding on the seabed can be verified, precisely as described by St. Luke—who, of course, was there at the time (See BSM Jan/Feb 1991).

So Solomon was right. It is wise to be very careful in claiming originality. Other men may have thought the same way before. Particularly in the realm of exposition of the Scriptures. So often, *"other men laboured, and ye are entered into their labours"*.

THE CHRISTIAN'S RACE

*Discourse on a
stirring theme*

It was once suggested that there are a predetermined number of "crowns" allotted, and that the members of the church of God compete against each other, as in a race, to win them; that the most faithful will receive the prize; that if one should prove unfaithful and drop out of the race others are ready to take his place in the contest; and that the less faithful and diligent will receive a consolation prize. Perhaps this is a rather blatant way to picture the making of one's calling and election sure. Perhaps better to consider what the Bible has to say on the matter. There we shall find that our Father has no such expedient to determine who among the millions calling themselves Christians are worthy of the prize of the "high-calling in Christ Jesus". Such a notion strikes at the root of the doctrine of election and casts doubt on the all-embracing love of God for his sons. There are but few references to Christians racing, and we shall find that the texts are more concerned with running patiently, than with racing. We are urged to run the race with patience rather than with speed and to run *as though* we were competing but there the picture ends. Does the running of others in the O.T. furnish examples to help the Christian in his course.

The first example of running in the Bible (other than from vengeance) is that of one hastening to worship and receive some guests. This well-known incident is recorded in Gen. 18. An old man sat in his tent door in the heat of the day and suddenly became aware of three strangers standing near. He could have thought that if the travellers chose to journey under the noonday sun it was none of his business; he could have thought that if they wished to speak to him or ask for food they could open the matter. Had he sauntered forward to meet them we might have thought him indifferent, but he was of better fibre. Perhaps he thought he knew them; possibly he felt they were no ordinary travellers; perhaps because he had previously had visitations of heavenly visitors he received them. It may not be known just what was in his mind but his action was immediate, for he *RAN* to meet and honour them, and by his haste we know him to be a genuine soul. He urged them to receive his hospitality and food, and when rested they could pass on their way. They briefly consent, and Abraham *HASTENS* to serve them and the meal seems to be prepared in record time. He stood by them while they partook of the meal, apparently in silence; but

something momentous is about to happen. Suddenly they say to him "Where is Sarah, thy wife?" And by the question he realises who they must be; and when he answers them they confirm the promise given years before and add details so that Abraham and Sarah know that their son of promise would be born soon, and thus is his faith rewarded in this life. And no doubt when the visitors had finally left him (v. 33), he hurried back to his tent oblivious of everything else. This one-thing-I-do was written all over that man of faith.

The next example of running is that of a man who ran to find if his prayer had been answered. The story is in Gen. 24 and is part of a charming love story. The same Abraham had sent his senior servant back to his old region in Mesopotamia charged under oath with heavy responsibility—that of finding among Abraham's kinsfolk a bride for his son, the son of promise. The long journey ended at eventide when he arrived at Haran. He and his camels needed water, and that need provided him a basis upon which to make his prayer to the God of his master Abraham. He prayed that He would show kindness to his master by prospering his journey; he asked to be answered just as he himself specified; he prayed that the Lord God would so respond to his request that it should happen that the damsel he asked for water would be the one destined to be the wife of Isaac. Then he would know that all was well. The answer to his prayer could not have been speedier, for while he was yet speaking Rebekah came to draw water for the household, and as she came to the well he *RAN* to ask for water, and she as requested in his prayer offered and drew water for his camels. The response to his prayer was so prompt that momentarily he wondered in himself if the Lord had prospered his journey, but he quickly recovered, gave her gifts and asked who she was, and hearing the name Nahor he knew all was well and he worshipped the Lord saying "Blessed be the God of my master Abraham . . ." When Rebekah heard the name Abraham she *RAN* home to tell the news, and Laban *RAN* back to the well and invited the servant to stay with them. But he is still anxious to fulfil his mission and he cannot rest till he is assured that Rebekah is willing to return with him to Isaac. Like his master Abraham who received the heavenly visitors, in his eagerness for his mission he runs. And instinctively we like these people for they were so intent on the work in hand.

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

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

The first running of the Bible was from vengeance. Is that in any way a lesson to us? In one sense it is true for we like mankind were under condemnation; but unlike them we have learned that instead of running away from the justice of God it is far better to hasten towards him, relying on his mercy, for He himself has made the arrangement whereby mercy triumphs over justice. Unless He had made a way of escape we should have been eternally without hope of life. It is declared in the Word that though man had fallen from grace, God himself promised to benefit mankind when He gave the gospel to this very Abraham, and so unalterable is his will in that promise that He bound himself by oath to fulfil it. This promise and oath is considered in Heb. 6 where the writer urges his readers to be followers of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. In verses 12-20 he reasons that we have every ground for confidence and hope because the promise has been bound by the oath of God, and believing it is impossible for God to lie, have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us, which we have as an anchor of the soul, entering within the veil where the Forerunner has already entered and received his honour—priesthood after the order of Melchisedek. What more ground for hope could be needed. Who would not *RUN* to follow this Forerunner? And so we have fled for refuge—not by attempting escape from justice, but towards him for mercy, hope and confidence. Nothing in the Bible implies that our Lord competed with another as in a race, yet as Forerunner he hastened to serve his Father, and appeared beyond the Veil in the

presence of God for us, thereby opening the new and living way that those who believe and follow may obtain their reward. He thus became a goal and an incentive to his followers, which seems to be in line with Heb. 12. 1, 2. There we are encouraged to run with patience the course set before us, looking unto Jesus. He kept his eyes set upon the joy before him; we keep our eyes on him. As Forerunner he finished his course with joy; and we along with others may succeed and share his reward. And in it all we are not attempting to beat the other fellow—in fact we wish him to have an abundant entrance into the kingdom. Thus it is no race at all; but each of us running patiently, persistently, will receive the crown at the end; and the doggedness of our running is the measure of our loyalty, the proof of our value of the hope and the extent of our love of him who has called us. And this tallies with what we have seen of the O.T. worthies—their running proved their genuineness of heart and purpose.

In order to obtain the prize, or reach the goal, or finish the course, we are exhorted to lay aside every weight and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and to run with patience. Does this imply that there is one sin, common to us all, holding back, or slackening our perseverance? Most things which prevent progress, will, when considered prove to result from lack of faith. "*Whatsoever is not of faith is sin*" said Paul, and it is a perfect aphorism. In line with these considerations are other words of Paul (Gal. 5. 7) "*Ye did run well, what did hinder that ye should not obey the truth*". They had not been competing with each other, but they had been running diligently, patiently following the Lord. They had been justified by faith in him, they were children of faith, children of Abraham, sons of God; yet someone had turned their thoughts away from faith; someone had lured them over to the works of the law from which they had been freed in Christ; someone had "put a yoke upon the neck of these disciples" and they had ceased to run with other followers of Christ. It will be noted that the running of Gal. 5. 7 is synonymous with following or striving, and like thoughts are in Gal. 2. 2, Phil. 2. 16 and Rom. 9. 16; and in truth those in the N.T. who so run are those who follow Christ, but with this difference, that the running reveals the persistence of the follower. So Heb. 12. 1; "*Let us lay aside every hindrance of faith and follow with patience, so ardently that we run*". Thus, running as a Bible figure differs from walking, (which pictures fellowship), and standing, (which pictures honour

innate or credited now; e.g. Luke 1. 19 and Rom. 5. 2), and sitting, (which pictures kingly honours after life's race has been run, e.g. Rev. 3. 21). And so with patience the Christian runs, or with endurance, for the race is no sprint. No doubt the apostle had in mind the Marathon race of the Greeks where endurance is often in N.T. usage combined with hope, particularly the hope of the Lord's Return, with all that it holds for the Christian's eternal felicity. Thus there is always before us a goal of aspiration as well as of prize—something to reach as well as to receive. The words "*Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of faith*" refer to him as the goal of aspiration and the pattern of patient faithful running. And true, there is reward for those who faithfully follow him home, but many would agree that the prize or reward we desire is best found in the words of the hymn "*Jesus, our only joy be thou, as thou our prize wilt be*".

We cannot leave the topic without referring to Paul's words in 1 Cor. 9. 24-27, for there is the exhortation to run as in racing. The exhortation seems disconnected from the context, for in the preceding verses the Apostle has been defending his calling and office. Clearly, some critics within the Corinthian church had raised objection to his apostleship, saying that he had prospered by it. Nowadays the charge will seem baseless to we who believe that probably no Christian had surrendered more for his Lord and the faith. But the charge was there and evidently the critics had made some headway and were causing dissension among the brethren. No doubt the Adversary was behind the false accusation. The method used has been adopted at other times in church life; that

when the apostle's preaching and teaching cannot be gainsaid, belittle his service on the grounds of morals or that he makes a living out of the gospel. Paul's denial is correct (see v. 18, etc.), and rather than that, he had become the slave of all (v. 19) and accommodated himself to gain the Jew and those without the law, and even become as weak to gain the weak. Possibly Corinth mistook his self-immolation thinking that none would lower themselves unless there was gain to be made; but then perhaps there was jealousy in Corinth. Then Paul changes (v. 24-27) and suggests to them that they think of better, nobler motives for service. In effect he says "Do you not realise that I am running in the service of Christ as though one will receive the prize? Do you not know that I strive for the mastery and fight for the gospel, not as one that beateth the air? Those who contend in the games do it to obtain a corruptible crown, but with you and I much more is at stake. Run with me, fight with me, Corinth! And far from making profit out of the gospel, I subject myself to its service, keep under my body and bring it unto subjection, lest after all my service of Christ I should be unapproved, or had run in vain". How happy he would have been to know that Corinth and other churches were running with him in the service of the gospel, laying aside every weight and having their feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace!

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

Carlyle on Book of Job

I call that, apart from all theories about it, one of the grandest things ever written with pen. One feels, indeed, as if it were not Hebrew: such a noble universality, different from noble patriotism or sectarianism, reigns in it. A noble book; all men's book! It is our first, oldest statement of the never-ending problem—man's destiny, and God's ways with him here in this earth. And all in such free flowing outlines; grand in its sincerity, in its simplicity, in its epic melody, and repose of reconciliation. There is the seeing eye, the mildly understanding heart. So *true* every way; true eyesight

and vision for all things; material things no less than spiritual: the horse—"hast thou clothed his neck with *thunder*?"—"he *laughs* at the shaking of the spear!" Such living likenesses were never since drawn. Sublime sorrow, sublime reconciliation; oldest choral melody as of the heart of mankind; so soft, and great; as the summer midnight, as the world with its seas and stars. There is nothing written, I think, in the Bible or out of it, of equal literary merit.

(*Thomas Carlyle 1795-1831. Historian and philosopher.*)

FROM A PRISON CELL

*Reflections on the
"Prison Epistles"*

4. Chosen in Him

"According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world." (Eph. 1. 4).

One of the most wonderful and astonishing of these great thoughts with which the Epistle to the Ephesians begins is that embodied in the words of the text. Quoting the small section in full, we read: *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, even as He chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blemish before him in love, having foreordained us unto adoption as sons through Jesus unto himself"* (vv. 3-5).

There is far too much in this short section for this present study, and we must confine attention to just the few words in the head text, for they contain much food for reflective thought. It is a wonderful and solemnising thought to realise that the faithful of this Gospel Age have been chosen in Christ from before the foundation of the world, and that we, also, of these strenuous days, if found faithful unto death, may also win Christ and be found "in him" when the ever living God makes up the number of his elect.

The context tells of many great positions of authority and power created for those high heavenly beings which were brought forth to be helpers and assistants to the first-born Son of God in the great Plan entrusted to his care, and into which they will enter in the fullest sense, when all things in heaven and earth are "headed-up" by Christ. In the words of the text Paul has transcendently great news for those from the human family who follow faithfully in the footsteps of their beloved Lord. In the unfathomable depths of ages gone by the same almighty sovereign God who framed the great all-comprehensive universal plan for the various gradations of heavenly beings also foreordained that a company of earthly beings, born as members of a fallen race, should be redeemed from the power of sin and death, and follow their Saviour and Redeemer from the confines of this terrestrial plane up into the highest place of the heavenly realms to be his own family of sons. This phase of the Divine intention took shape at the same time that Divine wisdom devised the great Plan for the heavenly realms—that is, it took shape even before the creation of the heavenly beings for their respective places in the Plan. By this fact we are informed that ages before man was

created, God had purposed that man should be created. And by the same evidence it was foreseen that circumstances would arise among men whereby a way would be opened so that beings of a lower sentient plane could be transformed and carried up to a higher plane. There must be some deep and unique reason for this procedure, otherwise, like all the native members of the heavenly hosts, they could have been created, at first move, in those heavenly realms. To be first born as men, and then changed and adapted afterwards to heavenly conditions is an experience without parallel in the vast creative Plan. So far as one can say, there can be no other reason for such a course than to give them contact with sin, on the lowest plane where the evil moral consequences of sin could be experienced and understood; and then for some great purpose, too deep at present to understand, have been lifted up to the highest place as companions and brethren of the first-born Son. Divine foreknowledge was fully equal to the task of knowing that man would fall into sin, and be allowed to die, and framing its Plans accordingly. That knowledge would not implicate the Divine Creator as conniving in man's fall any more than that He was responsible for Satan's fall. With full knowledge of the heavenly realms and of universal law, Satan fell by deliberate choice. He exercised the freedom of his will, and decided to rebel against high authority. So also did man—though within more circumscribed circumstances.

Divine foreknowledge could foresee the fatal swing away from righteousness of man's free-will, and planned to save man from the consequences of his fatal choice, and under the same circumstances call from among man's progeny a company to be transformed and then transferred to the higher sphere. Right back there in that distant past God purposed that man should be redeemed, and at that distant time made choice of One to be man's Redeemer. That is what Peter says when he writes: *"... ye were redeemed . . . with precious blood as of a lamb without blemish and without spot, even the blood of Christ, who was foreknown indeed before the foundation of the world"* (1 Pet. 1. 18-20). This statement is an exact parallel to the words of Eph. 1. 4-7. Right back there in the unfathomable depths of time God purposed that man should be redeemed, and not only so, but that from among fallen men he would invite such as were

right-hearted before him to follow his well-beloved Son through death to his heavenly throne. This is what Jesus means in his great committal prayer. *"And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self, with the glory which I had with thee before the world was . . . Father, those whom thou hast given me, I will, that where I am, there they may be also, that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me, for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world."* (John 17, 5 and 24).

This is the transcendental thought that amazes all who can comprehend it, and stirs their hearts to the very depths with emotion too deep for words. It is not easy to think back into those distant times and ponder on the Divine purposing, but, whether we can comprehend it or not, this inheritance in Christ was made secure by the sovereign will of God. And, more wonderful still, the fore-ordination of this purposing actually gave God joy and delight. Long ages before He would look upon this company of sons, God found pleasure in anticipating the days of their coming, and in the good pleasure of his Will deliberately ordained and chose this company and arranged its acceptance into his presence through his well-beloved Son. That great pleasure sprang out of his great love for his unborn family, for it was "in love" that He predestined it to be adopted. That all-seeing eye of God could look forward down the long distance of time, and as He saw what would come to pass among men as the story of his grace was told, He felt the warm movements of his loving heart expand towards those who believed and responded to his call.

Full sonship and full access to the Father's glorious presence belong to a later day, when every trace of sin and selfishness has been cleansed away, and when the clinging tendrils of this earth have been cut away once for all. No trace of unholy

thought or defiling desire can be carried up into his heavenly home. Hence his future sons must be set free from these undesirable things here and now. To that end He most graciously forgives their sins—covering them with the precious blood of the worthy Lamb of God—and thus looks upon them approvingly through the abundant merit of his Son.

Then, to help them break the power of sin in their lives God has sent his Holy Spirit into their hearts, as a source of energy and strength, upon which they can draw in time of need. It is as though the Divine hand reached down to snap all the fetters of sin and to lift his prospective child over every stone and obstacle, by making every right impulse and desire stronger every day, and impressing the minds of his beloved with firmer resolve to live always and only for this purpose of God. Thus, holiness is engendered in the adopted one's heart—first, a desire to be free from sin; next, a determined resolve to become devoted in every sense and degree to the Will and purpose of his Father and his God. Thus holiness becomes complete.

Who would not go through fire and flood, and fight down every foe, for such an inheritance as this? Who would not relinquish every earthly prize and count it as unworthy refuse to win such a place in Christ? Do we wonder that Paul writes words which glow with living fire, as he contemplates what that future inheritance will mean (Phil. 3, 17-24).

God grant this thought to lie heavily on our hearts so that in the few years of this earthly life it may penetrate and permeate us through and through with deeper longing to be accounted worthy to go up into the higher realms to see and share the glory of the worthy Lamb.

To be concluded

"My jewels"

There is one school of thought amongst geologists which stresses evidences that many mineral substances, including the diamond, may have originated from organic (vegetable) residues by means of great heat and pressure, in the same way as coal and amber. Branfield, in *"Continuous Creation"* (1950) gives the basis for this conclusion and says *"perhaps the most curious thing in this world of wonderfully strange things is the diamond—a vegetable gum transformed"*. Now if

this be indeed a fact, then the analogy is very apt. Out of the dead and dying plants of the earth, born of the earth and destined to survive only a few years and then follow their predecessors into oblivion, to be crushed and ground under pressure, fused and metamorphosed by heat, is produced at length a glistening crystalline diamond, the most valuable of all jewels. This is how the Christian is so worked upon by the Master that at last he becomes firm and handsome.

WORLD CONVERSION — WHEN?

That grand old Christian statesman, George Lansbury, once visited Lenin at Moscow in the course of an endeavour to promote friendly relations between European powers. In his book, *"My Quest for Peace"*, he told how the Russian leader listened sympathetically while he spoke of Jesus Christ and his saving power, how that no nation that rejected God could hope to be truly prosperous in the long run, and then said quietly "Lansbury, go back to England and convert your own people to Christianity—then come and talk to me again!"

Lansbury never returned to Russia.

In January 1953 five African chiefs from Nyassaland came to England to voice their people's protest against forcible inclusion in the new political amalgamation of East African territories. Said their spokesman *"the British won Nyassaland at the first, not by military weapons, but by the Bible. Now the British have abandoned the Bible—but you will not hold Nyassaland with guns and bayonets"*. That is a damning indictment of the change that has come over the affairs of Britain in little more than a century. Only that much ago missionaries were penetrating almost every part of the non-white world with the Bible in their hands and the love of God in their hearts. They braved dangers innumerable; perils of Nature, ferocity of man, but they kept at their task, and they planted the seed of the Gospel in a myriad dark places where it sprouted and blossomed and brought forth its fruitage of light.

In most of those same lands to-day the tide of Christian faith is receding. Even the hardest of missionary societies are being forced to withdraw. The prevailing tendency to-day in almost all countries—of no matter what ideology—is to make the nation's Churches subject to State policy and exclude foreign influence. Hence some great Powers, whilst giving every facility for the organisation and continuance of native "national" Churches, have banished "foreign" missionaries and Christian connections entirely or almost entirely from the spheres under their control. The withdrawal from China of what is perhaps a famous society, the China Inland Mission, is a notable case in point. The taking over of Christian institutions in India by the State is another. It is not that Christianity has been suppressed in such lands—in most cases the national Churches are healthy and vigorous and able to go about their work within

their own borders unmolested and often with help from the State—but two of the essential characteristics of the Christian Society have gone; that fellowship of Christians which transcends national distinctions is interrupted, and missionaries, aflame with zeal to win more hearts and lives for Christ, no longer cross the frontiers.

Each successive generation of this Twentieth Century includes a smaller percentage of convinced Christians than its predecessor. The religious background to daily life which three hundred years ago was normal does not exist to-day. An observer overheard a snatch of conversation between a young soldier and his girl friend, as they stood looking into a shop window. The girl's eyes lighted on a crucifix. "Look at that little figure of a man on a cross" she exclaimed. "I've seen it before. There must be some story behind it! I wonder what it is?" "Something to do with the Bible, I think", replied the soldier vaguely, and the pair moved off. Questions put to a group of high school students in their teens revealed that one in every five did not know what event Good Friday commemorates. The facts show that despite the efforts of organised Churches and evangelical campaigns, Christianity is fast becoming the faith and guiding principle of a pitifully small number of people, and they increasingly found among the elderly in years. The little bands of young Christians in their teens and twenties and perhaps thirties, battling manfully against increasing odds, have need of all the youthful enthusiasm and vision they can summon, and even so must surely oftentimes ask themselves where is all this going to end.

That is the great question to-day. Is world conversion an ideal that will eventually be attained, despite present apathy and disinterest in the Christian faith, or is it an impossible dream, a hope that will never be fulfilled? Will present materialism and reliance upon human philosophy and scientific achievement continue until the life and death of Jesus Christ and the deeds of his apostles become dim legends as shadowy and unsubstantial and unrelated to modern life as our own English stories of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table?

Such a tragic end to the great thing that had its beginning in the Roman province of Judea two thousand years ago is out of the question. World conversion *WILL* come; this earth with its teeming

millions *WILL* be the Kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ; those who have spent time and effort and life itself in bringing men and women to Christ, whether in far-off heathen lands or right here in our own country, *WILL* share in that triumph and find that none of their efforts have been in vain. The world *WILL* be converted; but it may not come in the way we think.

The inspiration and incentive for all Christian missionary work springs in the first place from the words of Jesus, spoken after his resurrection, when He was about to leave his disciples. "*Go into all the world—and preach the gospel to the whole creation.*" (Mark 16. 15). "*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you . . . and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.*" (Matt. 28. 19, Acts 1. 8). A pretty comprehensive mandate! We have a saying in our day "*The sky's the limit*". That is how it must have seemed to those men, simple, untravelled Galilean peasants and fishermen, given a commission which took in its scope the whole of the earth.

Although there is no doubt about the universal nature of this commission to evangelise the world, Jesus did not promise that his followers would effect the general conversion of the world before his return. In fact He indicated just the opposite. "*When the Son of Man cometh*" He said on one occasion "*will He find faith on the earth?*" (Matt. 18. 8) Judging by the catalogue of disasters and wickedness, apostasies and waxing cold of love, which crowd some of his foreviews of the events of this Age, as narrated for example in Matt. 24, it is obvious that He did not expect so to do. The Age which opened at Pentecost will see at its close, not a world fully converted, living at peace and in the glorious liberty of the children of God, but a world facing catastrophe and held in more vigorous bondage to sin and the effects of sin than ever before. The Lord Jesus Christ returns to earth as He promised, not because his Church will have saved the world without him, but because his own personal presence is necessary to the world's salvation.

That is the secret behind this apparent failure of Christian missionary effort to-day. It was not expected that Christians should convert the world in this Age, before the return of our Lord. It was intended that they should prepare the way for his return and preach the Gospel in all the world *for a witness*. The present Age is a time during which disciples of Christ are being trained and disciplined

for a much more extensive missionary work that is to come in the next. James the Just, first Elder of the Church at Jerusalem, thus summed up the matter at the Council whose deliberations are recorded in the fifteenth chapter of Acts: "God first visited the nations to take out of them a people for his name . . . '*after this*' (quoting the prophet Amos now) '*I will return, and I will rebuild the dwelling of David which has fallen*' (the habitation of Israel) '*that the rest of men may seek the Lord, and all nations*'. . .". There is a three-fold Plan outlined here. First, God will make a selection, from among all nations, of those who are peculiarly called by his name—devoted Christians of all nations and generations, in all years that pass between Jesus' First and Second Advents; second, the restoration of the national polity of Israel, in preparation for the new centre of world administration under Divine control, and thirdly, a time when all men everywhere will be called to turn and seek the Lord. That latter is obviously the time of world conversion for which we look.

In the first two centuries of Church history there was no expectation that Christians must convert the world and present the finished work as it were to God at the end. Rather there was a fervent and fixed belief in the early dissolution of the institutions and powers of this world in face of the coming and appearing of the Lord himself in power and glory—the Second Advent. Hence their universal belief in the Millennium, the Age of Christ's reign upon earth, when wars would be made to cease and evil eliminated from the hearts of men, until death itself had vanished. (Rev. 21. 3-4). That was the hope and conviction of the Early Church.

During the second and third centuries certain heretical sects began to put grossly sensuous and material interpretations upon the Millennial prophecies and in consequence this aspect of the original Apostolic teaching passed under a cloud and was largely banished from "official" theology. The teachings of St. Augustine in the fourth century paved the way for what became a very general belief in Christendom, that the thousand-year reign of Christ in which He vanquishes all his enemies (1 Cor. 15. 24-28) is during this Age *before* Christ comes, and not in a future Age *after* He has come. That theory sounded all right at the time it was formulated, when Paganism was rapidly giving way to Christianity in the political sphere as well as the religious, and it looked as though the Church was destined to sweep on from triumph to triumph until it had conquered the world. It does not look so convincing to-day, when from the outward and

natural viewpoint, Christianity is in retreat almost all along the line and the prospect, not only of winning new ground, but even of regaining ground already lost, is bleak. It is becoming more obvious that the Church of the first two centuries was entirely right and that our calling is to continue with our missionary work with as much, or more, ardour as in our best times, not in expectation or hope of converting the world now but certainly in the firm conviction that we are sowing the seed which is to result in world conversion after Christ comes.

There is a very significant remark in the comprehensive answer which Jesus gave to his disciples in response to their question as to how they would know when the time of his return and the consummation of the Age had arrived. (Matt. 24). Amongst the sequences of wars and rumours of wars, famines, pestilences, persecutions, that were to characterise the successive centuries of the Age, we find this statement. "*And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come.*" (Matt. 24, 14). The importance of the statement is shown in its setting. Up to that point, Jesus was speaking of the characteristic events of the Age. "*You will hear of wars and rumours of wars; see that you are not alarmed; for this must take place, but the end is not yet.*" After that point we are in the time of the End itself, there are signs and portents and events associated with the transition period during which the "*kingdoms of this world become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever*". (Rev. 11, 15). It would appear therefore that this "preaching the gospel of the Kingdom" must be carried into the whole world, not at this time for their total conversion, but "for a testimony to all nations" before the end can come. In other words, in the outworking of this great Plan of redemption the full comprehension of which is locked deep in the "determinate wisdom and foreknowledge of God", the Age for world conversion cannot and will not come until the gospel has been preached first for a testimony "to the uttermost parts of the earth".

Such an understanding of the matter should give greater impetus than ever before to every effort for Christian witness. If the essence of present-day evangelism is to take the Gospel to places where it has never before been, and failure to convert all who have in past time been reached does not of itself imply any thwarting of the Divine purpose,

then the closing of doors that have been open for centuries past need not occasion undue despondency. The Gospel *has* been preached, the testimony *has* been given; a few have retained the seed in their hearts and even if the doors do close upon them and we see them no more, we may have confidence that those same doors will swing open again, never more to shut, at "his appearing and his Kingdom". Even though faith in a country such as our own is at a low ebb and the signs are that it will sink still lower, yet our country has had the testimony and a few remain witnesses to the saving power of God in the life. The tide will turn again. That is the great hope and expectation to sustain faith and zeal while as yet our missionary work goes on. *He promised to return*—and under the administration of his Kingdom Christian evangelism will soar to heights previously undreamed.

There are Christian observers who point out that in a geographical sense the statement in Matt. 24 has now, albeit recently, been fulfilled. The disciples set out from Jerusalem and speedily carried the name and message of Christ throughout the Mediterranean world. Successive generations of evangelists pushed on, but it was not until the phenomenal increase of missionary work in the 19th and 20th centuries that the utmost limits of the world were reached. It is an established fact that the Gospel *has* now been preached "in all the world" "to all nations" "for a testimony". That being so, we may be much nearer to a tremendous change for the better in earth's affairs than is generally thought or hoped. No one will dispute that a change is necessary—and if the present appalling prospect that faces mankind is in fact destined to be resolved by some kind of Divine intervention, saving men from the worst consequences of their own folly and putting the Christian Church in a position of immeasurably greater influence than it has enjoyed at any time past, few will be found to criticise the change except those whose interests lie in the maintenance and perpetuation of evil and evil things.

Speaking to the philosophers of Athens, St. Paul declared that God "*has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all men by raising him from the dead*". (Acts 17, 31). Christ Jesus is that one, the time, clearly, that of his Second Coming, and the day, consequently, the one that Jesus referred to when He said "*Truly I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man*

shall sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel". (Matt. 19. 28). Such a statement cannot be referred to this present Age when the last thing a Christian disciple expects to experience is the occupancy of a throne or the prerogative of judging anything or anybody. The Apostle Paul expressly relegates the time of ruling and judging to the future, as in 1 Cor. 6. 2 "*Do you not know that the saints will judge the world?*"

The preaching of St. Peter at Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost, as recorded in Acts 2 and 3, associates the coming of the "last days" with a great opportunity for salvation and a time of world conversion. "*In the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh . . . And it shall be that whosoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.*" (Acts 2. 17-21). Associated with this declaration there is a call to repentance as preparation for the coming of this future day of grace. "*Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for establishing all that God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old.*" (Acts 3. 19-21). These passages obviously pre-suppose a time at the end of the Age, at the Return of Christ, when there will be a great outpouring of the Gospel upon the peoples of earth and a correspondingly great response. There is a definite basis for this belief in the Old Testament. For instance, Zephaniah says (3. 8-9) "*Therefore wait for me' says the Lord 'for the day when I arise as a witness . . . to gather nations, to assemble kingdoms, to pour out upon them my indignation; for in the fire of my jealous wrath all the earth shall be consumed.*

Yea, at that time I will change the speech of the peoples to a pure speech, that all of them may call upon the name of the Lord and serve him with one accord'." All of this indicates very clearly the Divine intention that a day of grace—and a most successful day of grace at that—is to succeed the day of judgment which brings this "present evil world" to an end. The Book of Isaiah is eloquent on this subject. The great Hebrew statesman saw very clearly the nature of that day which is yet to be, when all missionary and evangelical effort will converge into one great work of reclamation and reconciliation among all mankind. The figure of Messiah is predominant in all his pen pictures—the king who will "reign in righteousness" of Chapter 32, the one who is to "feed his flock like a shepherd" of Chapter 40, the "servant" who is to "bring forth justice to the nations" of Chapter 42, the anointed One, bringing liberty and healing to the captives, of Chapter 61. "*It will be said on that day, 'Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the Lord; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation'.*" (25. 9). "And the effect of righteousness will be peace, and trust for ever." (32. 17). "*For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations.*" (61. 13).

This is only a fraction of the vast store of Biblical evidence that a glorious future is before Christian evangelical work, and a programme that envisages a definite endeavour to reconcile to God every member of the human race who has strayed away from him or never known him. The apparent failure of to-day is only apparent; the Advent of the King will change the entire situation, and set the stage for the conversion of the world.

Calvin on Christian Courage

It is true that we have, before all things, to humble ourselves, as we have already said. Yet we must lift up our head when God calls us to Himself. And this courage is given to all the faithful, as we see when St. Paul says that Jesus Christ has a crown laid up for all those who await his coming.

Now we cannot thus await our Lord Jesus Christ unless we are surely persuaded that He has fought with the fears of death in such a way that we are freed from them, and the victory is ours. And

though we have to battle to make ourselves feel our weakness as we should, to make ourselves turn to God, and to draw from ourselves a true confession of sin, yet we can be assured that Jesus Christ has fought and obtained the victory, not for himself but for us, that by him we may now surmount all cares and fears, and that we can call upon God with the sure knowledge that He has his arms ever stretched out to receive us.

John Calvin.

PARABLE OF THE TEN VIRGINS

Matt. 25. 1-13

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

In order to emphasise that injunction Jesus gave a set of five parables, each one drawn from a different sphere of life but all designed to inculcate, from their various viewpoints, the need for watchfulness. The five are, first, the parable of the days of Noah (Matt. 24. 36-42; Luke 17. 25-37); second, the parable of the goodman of the house (Matt. 24. 43-44; Luke 12. 39-40); third, the parable of the faithful and evil servants (Matt. 24. 45-51; Luke 12. 42-58); fourth, the parable of the ten virgins (Matt. 25. 1-13); and fifth, the parable of the talents (Matt. 25. 14-30). There are in fact two more parables of watchfulness, one (Mark 13. 34), which may be merely another version of the parable of the talents, and the other, that of the men awaiting their lord's return from the wedding (Luke 12. 36-38), which is very much akin to the story of the ten virgins and may owe its inspiration to the same source. Jesus may have told both stories on the same occasion and one been preserved by Matthew, the other by Luke.

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

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

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

To disregard an invitation to such a feast, or to

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

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

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

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

ing oil every now and again over the mass from a vessel which was carried. With these torches they escorted the bridegroom, and it was this "torch-light procession" which was the reason and purpose of their vigil.

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

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

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

To-day, that injunction is more than ever vital. In the early years of our Christian walk, especially when the movement with which we may have been

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

whatever sphere of life and activity the Divine providence may assign us, it will always be true that we have missed the prize of the High Calling of God in Christ Jesus, because we were unready.

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

An Invitation

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

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

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

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

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

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

A. A. Esteb

Who finds God in his love finds everything. He seeks but one, it is true; but that one is of universal content. Oh rare compendium of wealth miracu-

lous! Why run we after variety? Let us hasten to lay hold of him, who being held, holds all.

— Origen

ARMAGEDDON

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

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

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

The general theme of the Book of Revelation is the conflict between good and evil which began, so far as the book is concerned, with the birth of Christ at Bethlehem and is concluded at the end of the Millennial Age when all evil is eliminated and mankind, fully reconciled to God in Christ, has achieved its destiny. In this picture the disciples of Christ of this Age, the Church, are shown as waging a good warfare against the hosts of evil and enduring martyrdom for their faith, emerging triumphant on the "other side". The powers of evil, and all in the world who support those

powers, move inevitably into a harvest of their own sowing in which all they have built through the centuries comes crashing down in total disruption because it has been built on evil principles and evil is inherently unstable and cannot endure. They have sown dragon's teeth and reap accordingly. And this is the time that the Lord Christ, with his resurrected martyr-disciples, returns to take his great power and reign over the earth—an event which marks the transition from the present Gospel Age to the future Millennial Age. This event, combining both the downfall of the "kingdoms of this world" and the establishment of the Kingdom of God, is Armageddon.

Both these factors are included in this passage in Revelation but it will be helpful to take a look at the background first. For several chapters back the Revelator has been tracing the conflict between good and evil from the birth of Jesus through the Age until in chapter 14 he sees a representation of the great event which closes this Age and challenges the institutional powers of evil to mortal combat. That event is the Second Advent of Christ, and the Revelator casts it in the guise of Daniel's vision where Daniel sees the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory, to witness the overthrow and destruction of great wild beasts representing earth's empires, and to set up his own kingdom which shall never pass away (Dan. 7). Now John in his 14th chapter also sees this Son of Man coming on a cloud, but he adds some additional detail. There are two harvests to be reaped, one the "*harvest of the earth*", of wheat, for He wields a golden sickle for the purpose, and the other the vintage, of the "*vine of the earth*", which is to be cast into the "*winepress of the wrath of God*". The interpretation is not difficult. The wheat harvest is the Lord's gathering of his Church at his coming, as also pictured in the parable of the wheatfield in Matt. 13. Following this translation of these faithful and watchful believers to heavenly conditions comes the overthrow of evil pictured by the vintage, in which the "vine of the earth" is reaped and cast into the winepress. This goes back to Isa. 63 where the conquering Lord is pictured as treading the winepress in his irresistible progress toward the establishment of his Kingdom.

This general outline of chapter 14 is amplified in chaps. 15-19 by the insertion of detailed news of certain aspects of the process. In chapter 15 the

"sanctuary of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven" is opened, and seven angels bearing "the seven last plagues" come forth. The "tabernacle of the testimony" is, of course, the Mosaic tabernacle in the wilderness at the time of the Exodus, the ritual centre of the Levitical ceremonial law. The sanctuary or "Most Holy" of that structure was normally closed to mortal sight, only the High Priest being permitted to enter, but there were occasions when the supernatural Shekinah light which illuminated its interior, the "glory of the Lord", blazed out in the sight of all Israel in demonstration of Divine judgment against some blatant wickedness. One such occasion was at the rebellion of Korah and his followers (Num. 16) when the plague decimated Israel in consequence. This is the allusion here. The end of the Age has come, the Lord comes both to take his Church to himself and to destroy evil and set up his kingdom, and all this at the time in human history when the apostasy and unbelief and rebellion of man has involved them in inevitable world disaster and ruin, aptly described here in Revelation as the "seven last plagues". These "plagues" are not heaven-sent; they are the logical and certain consequence of man's own course and actions, but they are pictured as emanating from the Divine sanctuary because they are Heaven's laws that have been transgressed and Heaven pronounces the judgment. The same principle is exemplified at an earlier time in history when Israel went into captivity to Babylon on account of the joint sin of princes, priests and people, and the Lord said "their own way I recompensed upon their heads" (Ezek. 22. 31).

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

symbol of pestilence; the rivers and streams run blood, a symbol of universal warfare; the sun's heat increased to scorch the earth and men upon it, a picture of famine. All these plagues are with us today—famine, pollution and war are in the forefront of the great problems which face the world's leaders.

All this leads logically to the fifth plague, the undermining of the controlling centre of the powers of evil. This means, in effect, the approach to imminent collapse of the present world order. Jesus foresaw the same thing when He uttered the historic words "upon the earth distress of nations with perplexity . . . men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming upon the earth" (Luke 21. 15-16). It is to be especially noted that these plagues are pictured as coming upon evil institutions and evil men, not upon the good-living and the upright. It is the evil in the world, and not the world itself, that is to be destroyed. So it is "his kingdom", the kingdom of the beast, that is full of darkness and his followers who blaspheme God because of the plagues. And this paves the way for the sixth plague, one feature of which is Armageddon.

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

God Almighty . . . and they gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon" (Rev. 16. 14-16). The A.V. renders "he gathered them" but "they" is correct in the Greek text. The demonic spirits do the gathering and the net result is that described in the 19th chapter: "*I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war against him that sat on the horse, and against his army*". This is the final confrontation between the King of Kings and his heavenly followers on the one hand and every earthly power and institution that supports or perpetrates evil on the other and the outcome is that these evil powers are destroyed.

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

so that when he pictured the opposing armies of the end time gathered into a place called Megiddo every one of his readers familiar with Old Testament history knew exactly what he meant, that once more the "*stars in their courses*" were fighting from heaven to put to flight the hosts of darkness.

The result of this conflict is the subject of the seventh and last plague; thunder, lightning, hail, earthquake, greater than men had ever previously experienced, and the utter ruin of "*the great city*". Symbols like these were used by many of the Hebrew prophets when speaking of the last days. A vivid description is afforded by Isaiah's vision in chapter 34 of that book. The sword of the Lord is unleashed against all idolatry and all ungodliness and the land is likened in its resultant desolation to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah—it has become a waste howling wilderness inhabited only by predatory wild beasts and unclean birds. But not forever; the following chapter, Isa. 35, tells of the succeeding renovation: "*the wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad . . . and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose . . . they shall see the glory of the Lord, and the excellency of our God*" (Isa. 35. 1-2). As with all the prophetic pictures of the End Time, judgment and blessing are associated and the one is always followed by the other. So it is with Armageddon. The overthrow of evil is followed by the "*new heavens and new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness*" of Peter's epistle (2 Pet. 3. 13) and in the Revelation visions this forms the theme of chapters 20-22, following directly upon the detailed description of the closing events of this Age which occupies 17-19.

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

Those who are guided by God are led by the right way to the best place.

The women were too late with their spices; Mary was not with her ointment.



BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

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

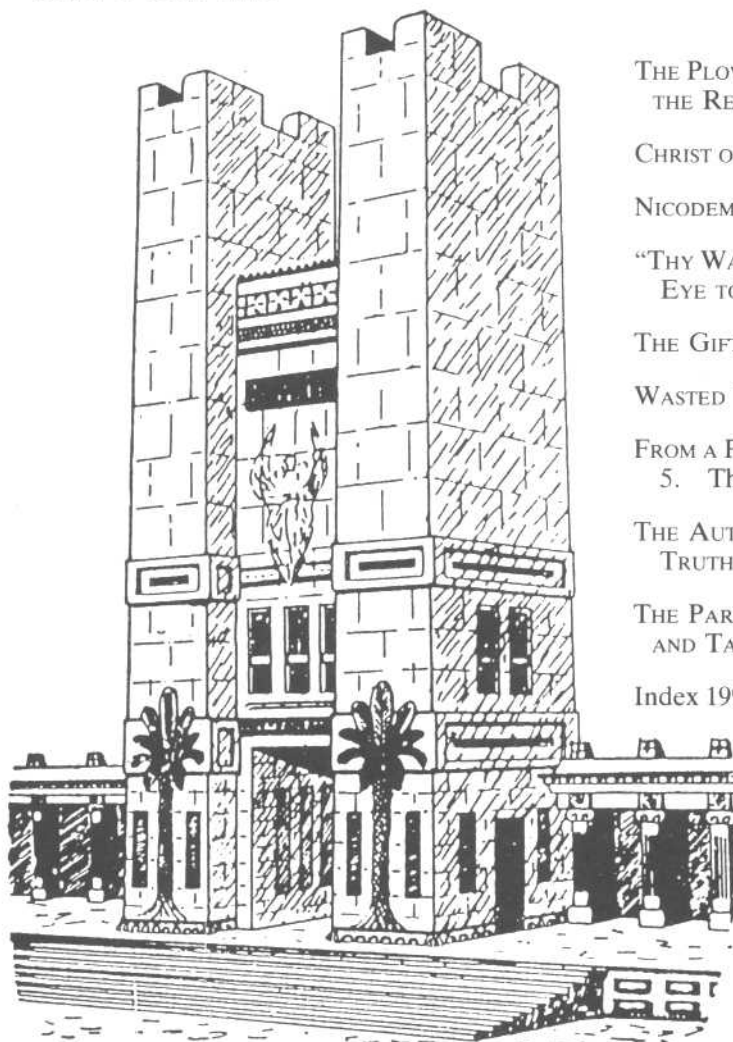
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*Lift up your heads, O ye gates
And be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors,
And the King of glory shall come in.*

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This journal is published for the promotion of Bible knowledge, maintaining the historical accuracy of the Scriptures and the validity of their miraculous and prophetic content viewed in the light of modern under-

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BOOK REVIEW

Mari and the early Israelite Experience. Abraham Malamut 160 pp paperback. 8 pages plates. 6 maps and plans. Index. Oxford University Press, London & New York. £9.95. ISBN-0-19-726117-5.

The existence in Abraham's time of the Semitic State of Mari between Ur and Canaan was unknown until 1936 since when excavations have been going on. 25,000 cuneiform tablets have been recovered from the palace of the capital city, most still undeciphered. Abraham passed through its territory on his way from Ur to Canaan. The interest of this book lies in the light it sheds on Biblical records of those times, showing the similarities between the development of the two peoples. The author, who is Professor of Jewish History at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, does not claim, as many do, that this indicates dependence of Hebrew Biblical history on Mari, but rather "two separate but analogous corpora", — like the NT Book of Hebrews, a system of comparisons and contrasts. On this basis the book will commend itself to Bible Students who regard OT history as in a class by itself, intrinsically older than

any other. Valuable light is thrown on obscure OT texts as Psa. 74.13, Job 7.12, Jer. 44.19 and many others. Information is given on the development and customs of tribes associated with the stories of Abraham and Nahor, and stress laid on the importance of Hazor as the capital city of Canaan in those days, confirming Josh. 11.10. The relation of Israel's ancestors to Mari, its prophets, its kings, its rituals, its epics, illustrate and confirm what the OT has to say about the nation which was born at Sinai.

There is a 19-page Bibliography which contains about 600 entries, usual full index, eight pages of plates an interesting one of which is an air view of the great palace which appears to rival that of Nebuchadnezzar in the days of Daniel. A glossary of Accadian and Sumerian words, another of Hebrew and West Semitic words, and perhaps the most useful to the general reader, an index of nearly 300 Bible texts referred to in the book.

Obtainable through booksellers but NOT from 11 Lyncroft Gardens.

NOTICES

Christian African Relief Trust. At this time of year it may be timely to mention the work of this Trust, which is conducting a rapidly expanding operation of Christian aid directed towards the needs of the starving multitudes in Central Africa. Whilst most of our readers will be persuaded that no really effective relief can come to the suffering whilst the present world system endures, and until it is superseded by the Millennial kingdom of our Lord, there will be many who will find that of their abundance they can add a contribution towards the wellbeing of these unfortunates. The latest issue of the CARF Newsletter tells of the despatch of food and clothing to no less than ten Central African countries where responsible pastors and others are kept busy receiving and distributing them to those in need.

Gifts of usable clothing and tinned or dried food are as acceptable as cash; all is used to pack and transport gifts in food and kind to the needy countries. All such contributions and/or requests to be put on the Newsletter mailing list can be sent to the Secretary of the Trust, which is a registered Charity responsible to the Charity Commissioners. Address Mr G. G. Tompkins, "White Gates", Tinker Lane, Lepton, Huddersfield, HD8 0LR.

BSM Renewal requests. The general dislocation of our work during this present year has affected the usual system of ascertaining the wishes of readers for 1992. UK readers in the 3000 series, and overseas readers in the 7000 and 9000 series, who have not as yet signified their desire for 1992, have in most cases not had the usual yellow reminder inserted; perhaps they will do so now. We are continuing to send for the present. UK readers in the 5000 series should have had their pink renewal slips in the September issue, and here again it is desired that if we have not heard from them during this year that they do notify us at once. By the end of the year it is hoped that the process of computerising our circulation list will have been completed, and all should be well.

Gone from us



Bro. G. Chapman (Windermere)



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

THE PLOWMAN SHALL OVERTAKE THE REAPER

A Parable for our times

"Behold, 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. And I will bring again the captivity of my people Israel." (Amos 9. 13-14).

Amos was a countryman and a gatherer of wild figs (Amos 7. 14). He was also a prophet, a man deeply devoted to God and looking in faith and hope for the coming of God's Kingdom on earth. It is not surprising therefore that his visions of that kingdom were framed, not in military settings as was the case with Daniel, or priestly, temple settings as with Ezekiel, but in the rural settings of agriculture and husbandry. Because of this the Holy Spirit has given us, through him, an intimate little parable—for parable it is—of one aspect of the Time of the End which is of special interest to us to-day. It illustrates, in symbolic language, a truth that we must take to heart if we would be intelligent servants knowing what our Lord doeth.

The general background of the picture is one of unprecedented prosperity in material things. The harvest has been so plentiful that it has had to be prolonged into ploughing time, and since in Israel the harvest normally commenced in May and was over by June, whilst ploughing did not commence until October, this must have been a wonderful harvest. The vintage of grapes, which is normally gathered in August and ended by September, has been so heavy that the treading of the winepress, converting the rich yield into new wine, is still going on when sowing time commences in November. There is even greater prosperity to come, for in consequence of all this, the mountain slopes upon which the vines are grown, will "drip" (*Heb.*) sweet (new) wine; the exuberance of vines resulting from that sowing and the consequent heavy yield of grapes making it as though the mountains were literally "dripping" with wine; whilst the hills (the lower rounded eminences of the "shephelah" or plain of Judea) will melt (flow down—*Heb.*), an allusion to the rippling effect of the wind as it passes over vast fields of standing corn, making it appear from a distance as though it were flowing down the slopes in successive waves. Amos saw a land rich in vines and corn and growing richer, and with the Psalmist he could well say *"The little hills rejoice on every side. The pastures are clothed with flocks; the valleys also are covered*

over with corn; they shout for joy, they also sing." (Psa. 65. 12-13). And to crown this sunlit vision of the future the Lord stamps it as a revelation of the End Time by telling his prophet *"And I will bring again the captivity of my people of Israel, and they shall build the waste cities, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards and drink the wine thereof..."* (Amos 9. 14).

Having thus noted that the real application of the picture is to the coming of the Kingdom, and believing that coming to be an imminent event, we naturally feel a close interest in the details of this parable. First of all, notice that there are two harvests and two vintages included in the picture—this fact is not always readily realised. The first harvest is plentiful but it is brought to an end by the ploughman, breaking up the ground for the work of a new year; and the result of that new year's work is another harvest so plentiful that the very hills, covered to their tops with corn, seem to be literally melting with their golden load as the wind passes over it. The first vintage is plentiful, too, so plentiful that the labours involved encroach upon the work of sowing for the next year; but evidently the sowing accomplishes its work, and in that next year even this plentiful vintage is excelled by the masses of vines, terrace upon terrace, covering the mountains as far as eye can see, so laden with purple grapes that to the poetic mind, foreseeing in anticipation the day of gathering, it is as though the mountains "drip with new wine". In our understanding of this Scripture therefore we must find room for two harvests and two vintages. It is also closely associated with faithfulness to the Lord and zeal for his service on the part of a people consecrated to his service. This is indicated by the evident connection between the words of Amos and the promise of God given to Israel recorded in Lev. 26. 3-5: *"If ye walk in my statutes, and keep my commandments, and do them, then I will give you rain in due season, and the land shall yield her increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit. And your threshing shall reach unto the vintage, and the vintage shall reach unto sowing time; and ye shall eat your bread to the full, and dwell in your land safely."*

A point that needs to be considered is the connection of this passage with the preceding few verses, which are quoted in Acts 15. *"After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle*

of David which is fallen down, and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up; that the residue of men might call upon the Lord, and all the Gentiles upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things." (Acts 15. 16-17). The whole prophecy has to do with the active work that is going on in the end of this Age to bring in the everlasting Kingdom of God.

The realisation that there are two harvests indicated in the text yields the interpretation. Obviously these two harvests are the fruits of the works of the great Ages in the Divine Plan, the Gospel Age and the Millennial Age. Leaving chronological considerations out of the question, it is clear that there has been for a hundred and fifty years now a great Christian activity centred around expectation of the Lord's return to set up his Kingdom, and that during that time there has been a great rise of Bible Societies, organisations of students, mighty revivals, and every form of Christian witness and activity. In a very real sense it could be said that the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have witnessed a reaping of seed that was sown during the earlier part of the Gospel Age.

But this has been a spiritual work, a service designed to reach the spiritually minded and show to them more plainly than before the "High Calling of Christ Jesus" which is the great preoccupation and purpose of this Age. Whatever may be one's personal convictions regarding the Gospel Age "Harvest" in a dispensational and theological sense, it can hardly be denied that in its practical outworking it has proved to be a movement of Christian people of all denominations into a condition of closer personal relationship to their Lord and an enhanced appreciation of their High Calling. That is a rather important point. The next Age is an age of world conversion in which the ambassadors of Christ will reap abundant results from their labours; the present age, in its partial failure to convert the world, has shown that its primary purpose is the winning for Christ and the preparation for future missionary service a smaller body of dedicated believers, "a people for God's Name". During this "reaping", therefore, our Lord has been primarily concerned with the members of his Church more so than with the world at large.

But as the Age passes on to its end a new feature develops. The end of the Church's career in earth is at hand, the glorification of the last members imminent, yet it cannot be that God leaves himself

without a witness on earth. He has never done so in all recorded history. Clearly there must be some who have gained an understanding of the Divine Plan and whose hopes and aims are directed, not towards the heavenly, but towards the earthly phase of the Kingdom. As the spiritually minded ones "decrease" so must these earthly heralds of the new Day "increase". Their work is not that of reaping the harvest of this Age; rather that of preparing the ground for the next. As the reaping tails off to its end so the breaking up of fallow ground for Millennial work will begin to come into operation. Here is where the "ploughshare of trouble", as we have called it, will do its work; for the breaking up of the "field" preparatory to the work of the new Age is not only to be done by preaching and witnessing, it is also to be done by trouble upon the nations and the failure of all men's schemes for reform and reconstruction. In fact, it may be more correct to think of the ploughman as picturing the trouble that is upon the nations, and the sowing of seed as the Kingdom message which will be proclaimed consistently until the world passes into Armageddon. There is no doubt that in the near future men's hearts are going to be ploughed as never before.

The ploughing, then, goes on for some little while after the reaping has ceased. This "harvest" of the Age evidently had its commencement over a century ago, and progressed until it became a mighty work. The ploughman of trouble first became evident toward the closing years of last century, and by now is rapidly overtaking ("coming near" is the literal Hebrew meaning) the reaper so that the reaping work is being steadily reduced and diminished by the pressure of the general trouble on the nations. Is not this true to the facts? Every tendency of the day is to the suppression of interest in spiritual things. The widest field of endeavour yet remaining to those who seek to gather spiritually minded ones to closer relationship with the Lord lies, not with the mass of men generally, as was the case say a century ago, but in Christian systems where may be found those who yearn for heavenly things. Such are the last grains of wheat in this, the final hour of the harvest.

The ploughman has not quite overtaken the reaper; but he is coming very close. Perhaps the full development of that fast approaching world system which is to force all except the faithful "Watchers" into a material, scientific, anti-Christian mould of thought and action (see Rev. 13. 14-17) will mark the completion of the over-

taking. There the reaping will end; the work of the Christian Church in this Age be finished, and the glorification of the last members not long delayed.

But there will still be those who are "scattering the seed", continuing the message of the coming earthly Kingdom. Even though the Church be gone, God will still have his witnesses in the earth, and the signs of the approaching catastrophe may be by then so evident that there may be not a few who will stop and listen to the message of the Millennial reign. But the treader of grapes will by then also be coming very near; with the completion of the gathering of the harvest of the earth it will be the turn of the vintage (Rev. 14. 18) and the One who treads the winepress of the wrath of God (Rev. 19. 15) will be coming forth to that dread work. "Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah?" cries the prophet (Isa. 63). The answer leaves no doubt as to the identity of the One who will both bring to the dust the evil systems of the earth and set up his own glorious Kingdom in their place. The time of Armageddon, of "Jacob's Trouble", of the last uprising of evil against the incoming forces of the Kingdom of righteousness, will have come, and the vintage will for a time press against the sowers of seed and bring their work to a temporary standstill. There will be one sharp time of trouble in which it will seem as if all the powers of righteousness have been silenced and crushed to the earth; but it is at that moment that God arises from his place to intervene in earth's affairs, and from the moment of that intervention that we are to date the Kingdom established in power.

It is from this point of time that the mountains will commence to "drop" new (sweet) wine, the true and health-giving teachings of the Kingdom. "Out of Zion shall go forth the Law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem." (Isa. 2. 3). The old doctrines which have been characteristic of the "vine of the earth" will have been done away; Satan will be bound and no longer able to influence mankind for evil; the great institutions of man

which have oppressed and enslaved so many will have been utterly destroyed, and every vestige of man's former rule have passed away. This will be the "mountain" in which the Lord will "make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wine on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined" (Isa. 25. 6). The wine of that Kingdom will be abundant and free. "Ho, everyone that thirsteth, come ye to the waters; and he that no money; come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." (Isa. 55. 1). That is the "sweet wine" which the "mountains" will "drop down" in that day.

It is later in the Age that "all the hills shall melt". The growth of the Millennial corn-harvest will require all the Age for its accomplishment. Then, as now, it must be "first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come." (Mark 4. 28-29). All through the Age the Divine missionaries will be at work, teaching, instructing, encouraging, persuading men to turn from sin to serve the living God. They will see the immature wheat growing to full stature and turning from green into gold; one day there will be a sweeping of the Holy Spirit over the earthly wheatfield and all the erect stems will rustle and stir in response to the Divine influence that is passing over them, and it will be as though great waves are passing over the serried ranks of stalks, and one might say "see, the very hills are flowing down into the plain". But it will not be the melting that means destruction; it will be the melting that indicates a final and complete surrender of all human hearts to God, the response of the creature to the Creator, the visible effect of the work of the Divine Spirit in the earth. So will the last shadow of evil flee away, the last rebel against the authority of God reap the inevitable consequence, and the sons of men enter into the glorious sunlight of the Divine presence: "for in this place will I give peace, saith the Lord."

Whence but from Heaven, could men unskilled in arts,

*In several ages born, in several parts,
Weave such agreeing truths? or how or why
Should all conspire to cheat us with a lie?*

*Unasked their pains, ungrateful their advice,
Starving their gain, and martyrdom their price.
Then for the style; majestic and divine,
It speaks no less than GOD in every line:*

Dryden

CHRIST OUR PROPITIATION

"Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood." (Rom. 3, 25).

The thought behind this word "propitiation" is that of a means of blotting out sin, not that of conciliating an offended Deity, the idea upon which much erroneous Christian theology has been built. To our English minds this fact does not come so easily as it did to the first readers of Paul's epistle to the Romans, for when their eyes fell upon the word "*hilasterion*", which has been translated "propitiation", they thought instantly of the "mercy-seat" in the Most Holy of the Tabernacle and so of Christ as being set forth a "mercy-seat"—a means of covering sin and reconciling man with God.

When the Hebrew Scriptures were translated into Greek, several centuries before Christ, the translators were faced with the problem of finding a suitable Greek word to describe the "mercy-seat". They chose "*hilasterion*", which was the word for an altar or other means of offering sacrifices to appease or placate the pagan gods of Greece. This Greek translation, the Septuagint, was the one in general use in the time of Paul, and he would naturally use the same term, which is quite correctly translated "propitiation" in English. In a similar fashion, centuries later, the first English translators of the Hebrew Bible adopted "mercy-seat" to express the Hebrew "*kapphoreth*" because, as it is quaintly expressed in one early rendering "There God appeared mercifully unto them; and this was a figure of Christ."

Now "*kapphoreth*" means simply and solely a place of covering, and the "mercy-seat" was so named because the sins of Israel were "covered" by the annual sprinkling of the blood of the sin-offering. "*Kaphar*"—to cover—is not used in the sense of putting a roof on a house or a hat on one's head, but it is a word which implies the absolute obliteration of that which is covered. It means, primarily, to paint an object with pitch or bitumen, and is used in reference to an animal that is covered

with a shaggy fur, or of the obliteration of writing by drawing the writing instrument completely over the characters. Here are some examples of its use:—

Gen. 6, 14. "Thou . . . shall *pitch* it (the ark) within and without with pitch."

Isa. 28, 18. "Your covenant with death shall be *disannulled*" (i.e., the written agreement or covenant shall be obliterated).

Prov. 16, 6. "By mercy and truth iniquity is *purged*."

It is this thought of covering, so as to obliterate completely, that lies behind the terms "reconciliation" and "atonement" in the Old Testament, for both these words are translated from "*kaphar*". Thus we have:—

Lev. 8, 15. "To make *reconciliation* upon it" (the brasen altar).

Dan. 9, 24. "To make *reconciliation* for iniquity."

Ezek. 45, 17. "The meat offering, and the burnt offering, and the peace offerings, to make *reconciliation* for the house of Israel."

Lev. 16, 6. "And Aaron shall . . . make an *atonement*."

Lev. 16, 30. "On that day shall the priest make an *atonement* for you."

Ezek. 16, 23. "When I am *pacified* toward thee for all that thou hast done, saith the Lord."

And so God says (Isa. 44, 22) "I have *blotted out*, as a thick cloud . . . thy sins." When the High Priest sprinkled the blood of the bullock upon the "mercy-seat" on the Day of Atonement he was covering over and obliterating the sins of Israel from the sight of God.

There is perhaps, more of mystic truth than we have recognised in the lines of that familiar hymn:

"The Cross *now* covers my sins,
The past is *under* the blood;
I'm trusting in Jesus for all,
My will is the will of my God."

A correction

An omission in the article "*Historical Background to the Book of Ruth*" in the July/August issue has to be corrected. The statement in paragraph 2 on page 79 that "Joshua was the only other man" (besides Caleb) "over twenty years of age at the Exodus" should of course read "Joshua

was the only other men over twenty years of age who actually entered the Promised Land". Many readers will have realised this; some though may be perplexed. The remainder over twenty, of course, died in the wilderness.

NICODEMUS

He came by night, a most unusual proceeding for any man in that day, least of all a public figure and a Pharisee. There was no night life in those times, not even in metropolitan Jerusalem. As soon as the sun disappeared below the horizon and the swift darkness descended, never much later than six o'clock, work ceased and all good men retired into their houses, barred their doors, and remained there until the morning. Only thieves and robbers and a few homeless beggars were to be found in the open after that; in walking through the silent streets in the dark, Nicodemus was taking a decided risk and his motives might well be questioned should he fall in with one of the city watchmen. And it was quite unnecessary; Jesus was always accessible and Nicodemus would have had no difficulty in effecting a meeting and conversation with him during daylight hours. But he came by night.

There would seem little doubt that Nicodemus did not want his contact with the prophet from Nazareth to come under the notice of his colleagues on the Sanhedrin, the highest ecclesiastical court in the land. He was not only a Pharisee but also a member of that august body and apparently held high office therein. For that very reason his movements and contacts would attract more notice than those of lesser men; much as he wanted to talk with Jesus he did not wish his interest to be generally known. The risks and inconvenience of a nocturnal visit did not weigh so heavily with him as the possible consequences of a day-time call. So he came by night.

It is not said of Nicodemus, as it was said of Joseph of Arimathea, that he *"was a disciple, but secretly, for fear of the Jews,"* (Jno. 19.38). At this particular time he was not a disciple at all—still an enquirer. But his attitude was probably much the same as that of Joseph. Both were highly respected members of the ruling class and both had much to lose if their interest in or connection with the Galilean prophet became known—the High Priest, President of the Sanhedrin, would see to that. It might be felt, to the detriment of these two, that other prominent and influential men had openly shown their leaning to Jesus or espousal of his mission without taking any such precautions. Simon the Pharisee, Jairus the ruler of the synagogue, the centurion whose servant was healed, Joanna the wife of Chuza the steward of

King Herod's court; all these made no secret of their association with Jesus. It is true, however, that all these were in Galilee or elsewhere, remote from Jerusalem, whereas Nicodemus and Joseph were in Jerusalem where the situation was markedly different from that in the north. Perhaps we should not be too uncharitable towards Nicodemus in his caution and lack of faith.

Even so, the brief glimpses we have of him in the Gospels do seem to picture a man timid rather than confident, not at all sure about the prophet who had taken his interest, not inclined to risk his reputation and his position by an open avowal of discipleship, and yet conscious that there was something in the message which found a responsive chord in the thoughts of his own heart and bid fair to satisfy some of his own unanswered questions. In short, Nicodemus might well have been very much like so many of us, not favoured with the courage and persistence of a Paul nor yet the outspoken aggressiveness of a Peter, nevertheless desiring in our hearts that in all things we might be more like Christ and serve him all our days.

Two and a half years later Nicodemus was still not ready for an open avowal. When, at the Feast of Tabernacles six months before the Crucifixion, the Sanhedrin had sent the Temple guard in an ineffectual attempt to arrest Jesus, and sat debating their failure, his voice was raised in Jesus' defence but only in a mild and half-hearted manner. *"Doth our law judge any man?"* he queried *"before it hear him, and know what he doeth?"* (Jno. 7.51). Even that was too much for the arch-plotters. *"Art thou also of Galilee?"* they enquired sarcastically; *"search, and look, for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet!"* In their arrogance they betrayed their ignorance of their own Scriptures, for at least one prophet, Jonah, did come from Gath-hepher in Galilee, and some of Israel's greatest heroes, like Barak and Gideon, arose from that part of the country. It was not until the final tragedy that Nicodemus roused himself sufficiently to pay belated honours to the Lord whom he undoubtedly revered, when he joined with Joseph of Arimathea in effecting the entombment of Jesus, so saving his body from the unceremonious treatment usually accorded to executed criminals. He took his stand then, regardless of consequences, for the priestly fraternity were not likely to overlook this deliberate act of honour to the man they sought by every possible means to

vilify and discredit and eventually encompass his death. From that time and forward it is virtually certain that Nicodemus was numbered among the avowed believers in Christ now formed into a definite community under the leadership of the Twelve.

Despite this apparent early luke-warmness, there must have been something in Nicodemus which Jesus recognised as pure gold, something which, although overlaid with Pharisaic prejudices and inhibited by reluctance to risk loss of standing in his own circle, was capable of responding to the Gospel, for to him Jesus imparted some of his most profound themes. Here in the record of the conversation between these two on that quiet night lie embedded some of the basic principles of the Divine call of this Age—what St. Paul was later to term the “High Calling of God in Christ Jesus”. It is probable that at first he saw Jesus only as a prophet, somewhat in the line of the Hebrew prophets of old, able like some of them to perform miracles of healing and the like, and imbued with a burning message of reproof and encouragement as were they. It is not likely that at first he connected Jesus with the Messiah for whose coming he, with all Jews, looked. But Jesus must have seen in him the seeds of what could afterwards flower into definite understanding and acceptance of his Messiahship and on this account told him things he admittedly could not understand at the time but assuredly did later on.

First of all came the Lord’s quiet insistence “*Ye must be born again*”. This theme has been taken up and made into a cardinal tenet by some sections of the Church and the expression “a born-again Christian” is by no means unknown today. Some renderings suggest that the meaning is really “born from above” and it is said that the Greek can bear either meaning. But really it means to be born afresh, anew, from a new beginning, in the same sense in which Paul (2 Cor. 5.17) declares that if any man be in Christ he is a new creation; old things are passed away and all things are become new. The idea behind the expression is that when one comes into Christ, by dedication or consecration of life to him, life commences anew by virtue of the power of the Holy Spirit; this in Scripture is spoken of as being begotten or born of the Spirit to a new life in Christ, which comes to full birth, or maturity, at the resurrection into the heavenly realm to be with Christ. Nicodemus, of course, could make nothing of this; trained as he was in the legalistic formulæ of the Mosaic Law he could

visualise the consummation of the Divine purpose only in terms of a reformed and righteous Israel maintaining that Law in its entirety and so claiming the right to rule the nations as predicted by the prophets. The idea of a rebirth into a new kind of life and another world, the spiritual, was quite foreign to him and he could make nothing of it.

By way of leading his thinking into right paths Jesus then indicated that something more than the Mosaic Law was necessary for entrance into eternal life. Nicodemus was familiar with the baptism by water—John the Baptist’s call to repentance and ceremonial cleansing, with its attendant immersion in water as symbol of that cleansing, was well known to him and he might even himself have submitted to baptism at the hands of John and counted himself in full accord with God’s purposes thereby. But Jesus had to tell him this was not enough, he must go on from repentance and sincerity to a full yielding of self to Christ, association with him in all that He stood for, full consecration of life and talents and all to his service, in expectation of eternal union with him in the life to come. So, said Jesus, he must be baptised, not only by water, but also by the Spirit, to come into that relation with God. “*Except a man be born of water AND of the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God*”. It is possible that Nicodemus could not make much of this either, at least at that time in his experience; it is certainly true that many who have sincerely accepted Christ in times since have never come to that understanding, and their Christian lives have been lived on the level of acceptance of his teaching and ethics, but not on that of unity and association with him.

The third important principle followed naturally from the first two but it had to be defined. There are two natures, fleshly and spiritual, and two worlds, terrestrial and celestial. Nicodemus knew only of one, and until he could be made aware of the other he would never enter into a real understanding of Jesus’ mission and the call of the Gospel. “*The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.*” (Jno. 3.8). The wind as an illustration of the power of the invisible Spirit is apt enough, but in fact Jesus does not seem to have been talking about the wind. This is the only occasion out of three hundred and seventy occurrences in the New Testament where “*pneuma*” is translated “wind”. In all other cases it is “spirit”. In fact the Greek word for “wind” is “*anemos*” and so

occurs thirty-one times. "Bloweth" is better "breatheth" and "sound" is "voice" (*phone*). What Jesus really said to Nicodemus was "the Spirit breatheth where it desires and thou hearest its voice, but canst not tell . . ." etc. Nicodemus was accustomed to trusting in the mechanical righteousness conferred by observance and sacrifice, the vision of God seen in the miracles and outward works and material evidences of Divine power. Jesus had to tell him that none of these things had any place in the world of the spirit, that good as they were in their own sphere, there was another in which the power of the Spirit was the motive force, the voice of the Spirit the channel of instruction, the world of the Spirit the ultimate goal, and only the spiritual senses could be receptive to these things. Just as his earthly mind and body was attuned and adapted to this terrestrial sphere, so by the power of the Spirit manifested in a new birth and new life must he expect a new mind and, eventually, a new body attuned and adapted to the celestial. *"That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the spirit is spirit."*

And, of course, Nicodemus comprehended nothing of all this. *"How can these things be?"* he asked helplessly. Came the grave and mildly reproachful reply *"Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?"* Far less learned and educated men than he, fishermen and peasants and tax collectors, were already in fair way to understanding, but that was because these had given themselves to Jesus and devoted their lives to him.

Nicodemus knew too much of the Mosaic Law, too much of the traditions of the Talmud, too much of the wisdom of this world, easily to comprehend and accept what Jesus was saying. His superior position and knowledge became a handicap when he came into contact with the world of the Spirit.

So Jesus shifted his vantage ground and talked of other things, of faith, of belief, and the love of God which led to the sending of his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth should not perish but have everlasting life because God sent him not to condemn the world but to save it. And he who believes has life already. Far removed was all this from the old theology of Judaism, but perhaps it was in all this that Nicodemus saw the light. We do not know, we are not told, what was the immediate outcome, or in what state of mind Nicodemus wended his way home through the streets that eventful night. But the fact that Jesus took so much trouble with him and talked with him on such profound themes, and perhaps not least that the story is recorded in such detail for the benefit of future generations, maybe justifies the inference that Jesus saw in this man's mind something which He knew would one day blossom into full discipleship.

Perhaps, after all, it did need the miracle of the Resurrection to clarify all the doubts and perplexities and make Nicodemus God's man for ever, as it did with James and others. Then, if not before, came full illumination on the quiet words spoken by Jesus to the questing man who came to him by night.

A Dark Saying of Jesus

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

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

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

“THY WATCHMEN SHALL SEE EYE TO EYE” *A well-known text examined*

“Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice; with the voice together shall they sing; for they shall see eye to eye, when the Lord shall bring again Zion.” (Isa. 52. 8).

The setting of this text is the promised return from captivity to Babylon. There would be watchers on the walls of Jerusalem and heralds hastening over the mountains to announce to the watchers the coming of the returning hosts intent on rebuilding the Temple and city. The long night of captivity is past; the day of Divine favour is come. Hence the stirring cry of the watchmen in the seventh verse. *“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that bringeth good tidings of good, that sayeth unto Zion ‘Thy God reigneth’.”* (Isa. 52. 7). Then come the words of our text. The rejoicing watchmen sing together because they see, *face to face*, the heralds of good tidings announcing the Lord returning to his sanctuary in Zion.

That is what this expression “eye to eye” means. It occurs in one other place in the Old Testament, Num. 14. 14, “For thou, Lord, art ‘face to face’,” the thought in Isa. 52 is that the watchmen see clearly, face to face, the heralds of glad tidings announcing the imminent return of their God to his people.

Rotherham’s rendering is “*Eye to eye shall they look upon Yahweh’s return unto Zion*”, “Probably ‘face to face with the event’.” Moffat has it: “*They see the Eternal face to face as He returns to Zion*”. The Septuagint confirms the thought by having “*Eyes shall look to eyes when the Lord shall have mercy upon Zion*”.

Students know that this wonderful imagery was not intended solely for fulfilment in the days of Israel’s return from captivity. Paul uses the seventh verse as applicable to the heralds of the Gospel, in Rom. 10. 15. The “Watchers” on the walls of the Holy City of this Gospel Age have waited through a long and dreary time during which the people of God have been held captive by an oppressive system which has crushed the Truth to the ground. Only a few of the “poor” have remained to be “vinedressers and husbandmen”,

but these have faithfully manned the walls watching for the promised “return”. The night is far spent, the day is at hand, but as yet only the first gleams of dawn are perceptible.

Then come the heralds. Hastening over the mountains, pressing toward the Holy City, so long down-trodden and oppressed, they come with glorious news. The KING is on his way. He is returning to Zion with favour. How eagerly the Watchers fasten their gaze upon the heralds. They haste—therefore the news is good. Did they bring bad news their pace would be slow. They each seek to outvie the others in order to reach the city first. How beautiful the sight, heralds upon the mountains proclaiming the coming King!

So they meet, face to face. No longer any doubt. The news runs round the city. Not all the watchers receive the news at once. Not all hear exactly the same story from the different heralds, all zealous to proclaim the essentials of their message. But one central truth stands out—THE KING IS AT HAND! He may be upon the mountain approach; He may even be within the city, and making himself known to those who have perceived his entrance. There is no lack of love and zeal on the part of those who have not actually seen him enter the gate, if so be He really is now within the walls. All are united in the one joyous theme—the time has come. “*I am returned to Jerusalem with mercies.*”

That is the story of this closing period of the Gospel Age—a period which is now well advanced. Is the King within the walls? Is He at the gates? Whether the one thing or the other, the important teaching of the text is that we are “face to face with the event”. The Watchers and the Heralds have met, and their united testimony has been given to seekers after the Lord for many generations past. Divine Truth, things new and old, has been established in its rightful place. The work is not finished; the Temple must be adorned with yet nobler vessels of truth and understanding, that the day may at length come when the great outer doors will be flung open and the invitation come to all men to enter and walk in its light.

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

scious experience that it may have, to the bosom of a parent.

H. W. Beecher

THE GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT

The inauguration of the Christian Church at Pentecost and its progress during the next few decades was accompanied by manifestations of Divine power giving ability to the Apostles and others to perform works of healing and miracles, speak with strange tongues, and in other ways give evidence of their possession of supernormal powers. These operations of the Holy Spirit on the minds and lives of these early Christians are usually referred to as the "gifts of the Spirit" and it is commonly understood that the purpose of their conferment was so to inspire and vivify the first ambassadors of Christ that they might discharge their commission in a manner impossible without such help. Despite the disciples' association with Jesus and all they had learned from him, they were still "ignorant and unlearned men" (Acts 4.13), unfitted by nature and background to speak and teach in the convincing manner needed to spread the Christian gospel over the Roman world. Jesus had already told them they would receive power when the Holy Spirit came upon them after his ascension, that they would be his witnesses to the uttermost parts of the earth (Acts 1.8). The bestowal of the "gifts of the Spirit" was the fulfillment of that promise.

It is perhaps natural that the more outwardly spectacular "gifts"—miracles, healing, tongues—should come first to mind when the subject is mentioned, but in fact there were others of a more intellectual nature, of greater importance, which had their place. The complete list of these "gifts" is given only in 1 Cor. 12. 4-11. That their purpose was to act as an essential aid to the missionary work of Apostles and others is made plain in Heb. 2.4 which speaks of "*so great salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to his own will.*"

The descent of the Holy Spirit upon the waiting believers in the upper room on the Day of Pentecost was marked by the bestowal of these gifts. They found themselves miraculously possessed of the power to speak in languages not their own "*as the Spirit gave them utterance*" (Acts 2.4). They proceeded immediately to use this power to preach Christ to the multitudes visiting Jerusalem for the feast from all parts of the known world, and the hearers expressed their amazement. "*Are not all*

these which speak Galileans? How hear we every man in our own tongue wherein we were born? . . . We do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God". Not only so, but miracles of healing, of demon exorcism, and so on, followed, together with a clear-sighted understanding of the Divine Plan and the ability to expound it such that the ecclesiastical rulers of the day " *marvelled . . . and could say nothing against it.*" Thus was fulfilled the prediction of Jesus that the coming of the Holy Spirit would convince the world of sin, righteousness and judgment (Jno. 15. 7-11); the power of the Father behind the apostles rendered them adequate to their task and invincible.

The "gifts" as listed in 1 Cor. 12 are nine in number. They are, in order of appearance, the word of wisdom; the word of knowledge; faith; gifts of healing; working of miracles; prophecy; discerning of spirits; kinds of tongues; interpretation of tongues. It would appear that Paul listed them in the order of their relative importance. Qualities of the mind and intellect came first, healing and miracles afterwards and tongues last of all. In 1 Cor. 12 these conferred attributes are called "manifestations" of the Spirit, and this may be a more accurate description of these special powers than "gifts".

The "word of wisdom" was the first and most important of the "gifts". In the ordinary way wisdom comes with experience; this is true in the things of God as with mundane matters. But these men had no experience and the work to be done could not wait for the years of painstaking effort which is normally the prelude to the acquiring of that experience by the Christian. The Holy Spirit supplied the deficiency. Jesus had already promised that. "*I will give you a mouth and wisdom*" He had said "*which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay or resist*" (Luke 21.15). The narratives of Acts 4 and 5 are examples of the fulfillment of that promise. The Sanhedrin, trying Stephen, "*were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake*" (Acts 6.10).

The "word of knowledge" comes next. The acquirement of knowledge is a work of time; it cannot be accumulated in an instant. These early believers had a sound knowledge of the Old Testament, the "Law and the prophets" but that needed supplementing by an equally sound understanding of the Divine Plan as it was now developing in this new Christian era. The conviction with which the

Apostles preached "Jesus and the resurrection" attests the fact of a supernatural infusion of knowledge. In after times Paul constantly invoked this same gift upon his own converts, that the Roman believers might be "filled with all knowledge", the Corinthians "enriched in all utterance and knowledge", the Philippians "abound more and more in knowledge" (Rom. 15.14; 1 Cor. 1.5; Phil. 1.9). Later on, as they began to learn the truths of the faith in study and discussion they had no further need of the gift, but for the present it was vital.

Faith; the third gift. One might wonder in what way faith can be a gift; it is so personal an attribute, derived from one's own experience of God in Christ. But these early believers had not had that experience. Faith in the God of Israel, faith in Jesus Christ whom they knew and had seen risen from the dead, but no foundation yet for faith in this new phenomenon, this insight into spiritual things conferred by the Spirit, so different from all that they knew of the work of the Spirit of God in Old Testament days. They needed time to become accustomed to this new power in their lives, to be sure that it was truly and altogether of God, and there was not time. Later on the writer to the Hebrews was to define faith as the conviction of things unseen but at this moment of time that conviction was still immature—until the inflowing energy of the Spirit possessed their minds and gave them assurance—faith. Their faith in the risen Jesus was complete and unshaken, but that was on the basis of experience and things known. Now they faced the unknown future. They had enthusiasm for their mission; what they needed was *faith that it would be accomplished and the Spirit gave them that faith to sustain them until they could develop their own.*

From gifts for the mind Paul passes to gifts for the hand. Power to heal the sick, cast out demons, give sight to the blind, even raise the dead, all as Jesus had done; this was theirs. The object was to demonstrate in the sight of all men that they were indeed the accredited associates of that Jesus who had done these things in life and, now risen from the dead, continued to do them through his followers. The Book of Acts records some instances where this healing power was exerted by Peter, Philip and Paul; doubtless many more cases at the hands of other apostles and disciples remain unrecorded. But this was all for the evangelising and the benefit of the unbeliever; when Trophimus lay sick at Miletus and Epaphroditus at Rome no miracles of healing were performed upon them and

Timothy's chronic infirmities were alleviated only by the medical advice of the day. The gift was not for personal use, not even for Paul's own "thorn in the flesh".

Closely associated with this gift was the parallel one of the working of miracles—better understood as "mighty works", which is the meaning of the Greek word—examples of Divine power exerted through Apostles and others in unusual or unheard-of ways. Intended to constitute a continuation of the mighty works done by Jesus, the narratives are singularly reticent as to detail. The raising of Dorcas by Peter and the incidents of Elymas and the Pythoness slavegirl (Acts 9. 36-43; 13.6-17; 16. 16-18) are about the only ones recorded with four or five instances where Paul, Philip, and others are stated to have "wrought signs and wonders". The restraint shown by the New Testament in respect to such miracles stands in sharp contrast to other extant Early Church writings in which cases of miracles or alleged miracles appear in profusion. The logical conclusion is that from the Scriptural point of view this particular gift of the Spirit was intended to establish connection between the ministry of Jesus and that of his Apostles in the eyes of the world, but no more, and logically would cease when that purpose had been achieved.

The "gift of prophecy" was that of public expounding of the faith as distinct from the work of the evangelists. The evangelist preached Christ to the unconverted; the "prophet" explained the doctrinal and dispensational features of the faith to the converted. The work of the prophet was thus entirely within the Church. In the list of Divine appointments in Eph. 4.11 the prophet comes next in importance to the apostles and superior to the evangelist. The necessity for such a "gift" at the time is obvious; none of the necessarily immature believers, apart from the Apostles, had yet gained by reading and study and discussion that detailed understanding which was necessary to fulfil the office of expositor, yet the necessity was pressing. Hence, for the time then subsisting, chosen men received that knowledge by power of the Holy Spirit and retained it until in the lapse of years they had themselves become sufficiently mature in Christ to need it no longer. Judas, Silas, Agabus, and the four daughters of Philip are named as some upon whom this gift was bestowed and most of the Christian communities appear to have included prophets in their midst.

"Discernment of spirits" is not likely to have anything to do with the celestial creation, whether

good angels or evil angels. It is more likely to have been the faculty of quick and accurate discernment of men's minds, their sincerity or insincerity, in matters concerning their conversion or profession of faith. Paul at Lystra perceived that the lame man "had faith to be healed" (Acts 14.9); Peter in the cases of Ananias and Sapphira, and of Simon the Sorcerer, manifested this power of discerning the inward thoughts and condition of mind. When John exhorted his readers to "try" (test, examine, scrutinise) the spirits, whether they be of God (1 Jno. 4.1) he may have been thinking of this particular gift.

The "gift of tongues" is mentioned three times in the Book of Acts and again in 1 Cor. 12 and 14. In each of the Acts instances it is clear that the expression indicates the instantly bestowed ability to speak a variety of foreign languages. This is evident from the account of the Day of Pentecost, when the Apostles found themselves addressing the multitudes of pilgrims from overseas lands in their own languages. There is no doubt about this. *"How hear we every man in our own tongue wherein we were born . . . we hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God"*. There was an imperative necessity for this miraculous gift. The Apostles were Galileans; their native tongue was Aramaic, the language of the peasantry and fishermen of Galilee. In the cities and by the upper classes generally, Greek was usual although in the main the people were bi-lingual. It is unlikely that any of the Apostles, while understanding and reading Greek, could converse fluently in that language or at least sufficiently so to speak publicly. Here at Jerusalem they were faced with people from places as far apart as Italy and Iraq, Roman Asia and Arabia, speaking at least twenty and probably more mutually incomprehensible tongues. It was the Divine intention that the message to be preached this day should be carried at once to all these lands by the returning pilgrims; that this intention was accomplished is evidenced by the almost immediate appearance of the Christian message in so many countries remote from Judea long before any Apostolic missionaries visited them. The facts of history demand that this message was indeed so preached at that Feast of Pentecost; the only way in which it could have been done was by the miraculous impartation of ability to speak such languages. It has often been debated whether the speakers understood the words they were saying or were vehicles of the Spirit having no consciousness of the meaning of the sounds they

uttered, but there is no reason to add mystery to plain statement. An ordinary man becomes multi-lingual by studying and practising languages for a term perhaps of years; these men became multi-lingual in a moment of time, for the rest of their lives remaining able to understand and talk in those languages whenever the need arose. Although the majority of the listeners in Jerusalem at that time were Jews of the Dispersion, they would mostly only understand and speak the language of their native land; comparatively few would understand Aramaic even as many Jews returning to Israel today are quite ignorant of Hebrew.

This miracle was repeated twice, once at the conversion of Cornelius and his household, the first Gentiles to be accepted into the faith (Acts 10.46) and again some fifteen years later upon the occasion of Paul's contact with the John the Baptist community at Ephesus, which led to the establishment of the Ephesus Church and the vigorous evangelisation of Roman Asia spearheaded by that Church (Acts 19.6). It is evident however that the gift was conferred upon others at other times—it was definitely possessed in the church at Corinth, but the extent and nature of the gift apart from the three historical instances in Acts can only be inferred from Paul's remarks in 1 Cor. 14.

From the sentiments and admonitions of this chapter it would seem that the church at Corinth had been guilty of misuse of the gifts in their midst, or at least of placing undue stress upon those of lesser importance. In the main the Apostle seems concerned with correcting their attitude towards this particular gift, the gift of tongues. It should be noted that he is discussing the use of the gifts only in the church meeting, not in outside evangelism, and so naturally starts off by saying that prophecy, public expounding of the faith, is more important than tongues—the reason being, as he says later on in vs. 22, that *"tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not; but prophesying serveth not for them that believe not, but for them that believe."* Whilst he does not forbid or disparage the use of tongues in the church meetings he does stress that unless someone is present who can "interpret"—translate—the exercise is a waste of time. So, he says in vs. 2, *"he that speaketh in a tongue"* (in the meeting) *"speaketh not unto men but unto God, for no man listens"* ("understandeth" here should be rendered hears or listens). Obviously in a meeting where all habitually spoke Greek an extempore address delivered in, say

Arabian, would attract no listeners; only God would understand it. That is Paul's meaning. Such a man only edifies himself (vs. 4) but the one who "prophesies"—expounds the faith—edifies the church. The whole of the chapter stresses this principle, that the gift of tongues should only be exercised in church meetings if one is available to translate what is said; Paul himself, master of more languages than any of them, would rather speak five words in a tongue his hearers' understood than ten thousand in one they did not.

Some reference might be made at this point to the impression prevalent among many that the "tongues" consisted, not of spoken languages, but of unintelligible, even incoherent and frenzied, utterances having no real significance to the hearers but a very real significance between the speaker and the Lord. The assumption here is that the one possessing this gift is transported into a condition of ecstasy in which he utters intensely, passionately, emotionally, sounds bearing no relation to the laws of ordinary language but in the power of which the believer feels himself in tune with his Lord and speaking the very language of heaven. It is easy to see how the hearers, if in sympathy with him, would react, and perhaps the whole congregation be swept up in a wave of emotional feeling which might be interpreted by them as a profound religious experience. The almost invariable use of the term "unknown tongues" in the relevant passages has contributed to this idea, but in fact the word "unknown" was added by the A.V. translators in all cases and does not appear at all in the original text. The extent to which such an ecstatic outpouring of meaningless emotions could be made to impress non-believers as a "sign" of the truth of Christianity would be problematical in the First Century, and even more so today, and in any case is open to one very serious objection. In that day this kind of behaviour was the hallmark of the priestesses and sometimes the priests of the pagan religions, and of the ministrants at the "oracles" who professed to foretell future events; it was also characteristic of demon obsession. The "damsel possessed with a spirit of Python" whom Paul cured at Philippi (Acts 16) would have habitually acted thus. It cannot be accepted that the reasoned and reasonable gospel of Jesus Christ had to be commended to the unconverted by practices reminiscent of an idol temple. It is true that there is scope in Christian worship for the expression of the emotions in varied ways often to the spiritual benefit of the participants; a great deal depends

upon the cultural background or the racial origin of the believers concerned, but this is derived from the national temperament and is in no sense a gift of the Spirit. The gift of tongues in the First Century was given to facilitate the rapid propagation of the Gospel throughout all nations and that was achieved, not by reproducing pagan ecstasies with which most people were already familiar anyway, but by making it possible for the first Galilean missionaries to speak to all people in their native tongues.

The final gift, the interpretation of tongues, was supplementary to this one. The word means translation. The function of the interpreter appears from 1 Cor. 14 to have been chiefly in the church meetings and fits in well with Paul's insistence that although the real place for the gift of tongues was in evangelising the foreign unconverted, there was good in using the gift at church meetings provided someone was available to translate what was said back into the "home" language for the benefit of the hearers. The whole chapter makes plain Paul's own feeling that whilst he did not disparage the use of "tongues" in the meetings of the church for worship and instruction, he did not feel it was to be specially commended.

To what extent did these gifts persist after the death of the Apostles and their contemporaries? This is a much debated point but when the purpose for which the gifts were bestowed is understood it should be clear that they would vanish when that purpose had been achieved. By the early part of the 2nd century Christian communities had been established in every part of the Roman world, and the written word—the Gospels and Epistles which now form our New Testament—was being circulated. The orderly development of Christian thought, experience and service could and did proceed without these special aids. The miraculous gifts of the Spirit were replaced by the guidance of the Spirit; the attainment of maturity in Christ is to be effected by the written word, the Scriptures, and the instruction of human instruments — apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers—raised up by the Lord for the purpose as declared by Paul in Eph. 4, 11-15. These are set for the perfecting of the saints, the work of the ministry, the edifying of the Church of Christ, he says. Writing to Timothy, he advised him to study the holy Scriptures, which were able to make him wise unto salvation, effective for doctrine and instruction in righteousness, and all that the Christian life demands (2 Tim. 3, 16-17). The whole pur-

pose for which this present Age is set aside is the development in knowledge and experience of a body of consecrated believers, the Church of Christ, to be the Divine agents for the reconciliation to God of "whosoever will" among mankind in the next. The qualifications for such honoured position can only be attained by means of a life of gradual growth into the Divine likeness and an ever deepening understanding of the Divine Plan and Divine laws gained by continual consideration of, and meditation upon, the sacred Scriptures. There is therefore no reason to expect that any kind of miraculous power, intellectual or physical, is to be expected to aid the Christian's progress towards the "prize of the High Calling" (Phil. 3.14). Neither should we expect the manifestation of the outwardly spectacular 'gifts' to bring the unconverted into the fold. The 20th century is not as was the First Century; there is now no need, as there was then, to present the credentials of the newly emergent Christian faith to a world that had never heard of it; we now have two thousand years of credentials with all the sayings and writings of godly men of all ages supplementing the Book which has gone to the world in its millions. Nevertheless it is claimed by many sincere Christians that the "gifts", especially those of miracles and tongues, have persisted throughout the Age and to the present day. This belief is based largely upon traditions of miracles at various times in church history which in most cases are gravely suspect. Most of the "Early Fathers" were emphatic that the "gifts" diminished after the death of the Apostles and had vanished by the middle of the 2nd century; a few such as Justin Martyr (A.D. 150) and Irenæus (A.D. 178) allege that miracles

did continue but without giving specific examples. The narratives of later centuries are unlike the miracles of Jesus and the Apostles, often puerile in the extreme, such as Bishop Germanus in A.D. 429 restoring a blind girl's sight by applying relics of the saints to her eyes, Augustine of Britain in A.D. 603 healing a blind man as proof that his own method of calculating the date of Easter was the correct one in God's sight, and St. Benedict in the 6th Century miraculously making whole his house-keeper's broken flour sieve because he wanted his dinner. That God can exert his mighty power to heal the sick or raise the dead, at any time in history including our own day, is undisputed; the real question is whether the miraculous cures so often reported by zealous men of God are due to Divine interposition, to auto-suggestion, to the influence of mind over matter—a subject which is now receiving a great deal of attention from scientific investigators — or to other unknown influences. And an important factor in the answer to this question is that the mighty works and acts of healing by Jesus and his disciples were intended to foreshadow the work of the Millennial Age, the time of Christ's kingdom on earth, when "*the eyes of the blind shall be opened . . . and the lame man leap as an hart*" (Isa. 35). The coming Age, not this one, is the Age of miracles. The walk of the Church in this Age is by faith, not by sight, and the evidences of Divine acceptance are those which are discerned only by the Spirit-guided mind. In that fact, perhaps, resides the best reason for the gifts of the Spirit ceasing, as St. Paul in 1 Cor. 13 said they would cease, back there in the days of the Apostles.

WASTED YEARS

"And the ill-favoured and lean-fleshed kine did eat up the seven well-favoured and fat kine . . . and the thin ears swallowed up the seven rank and full ears." (Gen. 41. 4-7.)

Away back there, when the world was young, a Pharaoh of Egypt had a dream, so much out of the ordinary that his wise men and magicians were quite unable to interpret it. The spirit of disappointment was settling upon the royal Court when one of Pharaoh's responsible servants bethought himself of a similar experience that had come to him some while before. He had been in prison with another offending servant when to both of them came startling dreams. With them in the prison was another young man, a Hebrew, and

this young Hebrew offered an interpretation of these dreams which came true. The forgetful courtier called all this to mind now, and at last told it to Pharaoh. The young Hebrew was sent for and appeared in the presence of the royal dreamer.

Pharaoh told Joseph the outstanding particulars of his night-visions, for he had dreamed twice, and there seemed the same purport behind both dreams. First of all, seven fat kine had come up out of Egypt's famous river, followed by seven lean kine which ate up the fat ones, but were not improved in appearance thereby. Falling asleep again, the king saw seven fat, well-laden ears of corn come up on one stalk, and then seven thin ears, blasted by the east wind, spring up after them

and devour them. The understanding of the dream came quick and clear to Joseph, for the Lord God was with him, and in all this working out his Providences. From Joseph's lips Pharaoh heard an outline of things which were to follow hard on the heels of the dream. Seven plentiful years of harvest, followed by seven lean years of famine which would consume all the abundance of the prosperous years! Let Pharaoh prepare during the years of plenty for the years of hardship to follow! Such was the interpretation of the dreams the young Hebrew gave his royal auditor. Even here in a strange land, caged within the walls of a prison, the God of his fathers was with him, and was opening for him, not only the prison doors, but the door to a great opportunity.

There are many lessons which could be drawn from this short piece of Bible history, did time and space permit, but for the time being, ponder a little on the fat and lean kine, and the good and parched corn. This dream of the Egyptian monarch may contain a parable for to-day—and perhaps a warning also.

By the goodness of God, those who have known the way of the Lord for a considerable time, perhaps had the advantage of having come to him in youth or early manhood or womanhood, and into whose hearts has come the "*joy of the Lord which is your strength*", can testify to the fact that they thus experienced a time of vigorous growth and active extension of knowledge and understanding of the way of the Lord, which has persisted through the years. Even though the call may have been heard, and answered, much later in life, it still remains true that the commencement of the way was marked by this entry into a broadened field of understanding of what life can hold. And if, added to this, the believer was guided into a full appreciation of the inherent goodness of God and his fixed intention to save all of mankind who can possibly be saved, and to intervene by his great power in earth's affairs when men seem destined to ruin the world and themselves irretrievably, then he had double cause for thanksgiving. Many there have been who have thus had come into their lives a veritable abundance of spiritual things—things new and old, from the treasury of the Master. To understand that Jesus gave himself a Ransom for All, to be testified in due time, and thereafter opened a High Calling for all who would follow him, through death to immortal life, was sufficient to fill their hearts and minds with joy and gladness, and their hands with willing service. A new song

was put into their mouths, and a new fervent and deep love was born in their hearts, for our God and Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. There was a freshness, a thrill, a beauty about it all, as the sweet story of his love flooded their souls, and awakened every tuneful chord within them to sing his praise. The fervent expectation of the coming Kingdom of Christ when all that are in their graves shall come forth to the final stage of the Day of Grace and find the opportunity of eternal life open before them, dispelled as in a moment the old nightmare of a stern and vengeful God. And those to-day who share this knowledge of God and faith in his redemptive Plan are counted in with such, for we who now serve Christ have at some past time made our own start in the Christian way and have shared in these early joys. And out of the acceptance of all this came the desire to co-operate with, and serve, such a loving God and Father. It was then we gave him our hearts in full consecration—our very selves—that his will might be done in us, and we stepped out, in faith, into the Way that leadeth unto Life. We accepted the assurance of his Word that our consecration was verily a burial "into his death", a "being planted together with him" really and truly a "suffering with him". There came a new power into our lives, the power that wrought his resurrection and exaltation, to help us to wage successful warfare upon the meannesses and pettiness of our little lives, to transform and change them into miniatures of his great life and to bring all our thoughts into captivity to the Spirit of Christ within us, to garrison and to keep our hearts in peace and quietness before the Lord. They were the years of the fat kine, and the good ears!—the years of abundance and plenty, the years when we had to extend our barns and storehouses to enable us to hold all that the Lord our God was giving us, the years of busy husbandry, when the services of hand and heart yielded great harvests as the "wheat" grains were gathered.

But where are we to-day? Has the scorching east wind blown upon us and caused the later years to consume all the benefits and fulness of the earlier years? Is the truth of those days no longer to us the truth of to-day? Have the joys and delights of the New Song vanished from our hearts and lips? And have we grown old and lean and withered, as the lean years have eaten up our store of love and grace and ready response to God? Is our love cold?—have the lean years eaten that up too? And the readiness to serve the Lord and the brethren—have the lean years quenched this too? Happy

indeed are we, if the lean years have not touched us, nor the east wind scorched our souls—yea rather, let us say, happy are we if the good and the plenteous years have not ceased, and we are still enjoying the great abundance, and our years are still of the fat kine and the good ears! They need not be years of leanness, for the same Lord is still our provider and source of supply.

How sad it will be, if all the benefits of the seven

years of great abundance are wasted and swallowed up in those other years of famine and poverty and wretchedness! Wasted years! Now to be shrivelled, and parched and wasted—no joy—no service—no fellowship—nothing to show out of all we have received—oh, the tragedy of it all, to have received the grace of the Lord “in vain”, to have had the transforming influence of those days, but to no purpose!

FROM A PRISON CELL

*Reflections on the
“Prison Epistles”*

Part 5. The Adoption of Sons

Having fore-ordained us unto adoption as sons through Jesus Christ unto himself.” (Eph. 1. 5).

There are two viewpoints in the Word of God concerning the mode whereby we become sons of God. One of these is based upon the process of spirit-begetting and ultimate spirit-birth. This thought originates from the words of Jesus in his conversation with Nicodemus. “*Except a man be born anew he cannot see the kingdom of God . . . Except a man be born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God*” (John 3. 3 and 5). This is the viewpoint also of Peter and John (1 Pet. 1. 23; 1 John 5. 1, 4, 18). Paul presents another view. He speaks not of begetting, but of adoption into the family of God. This view is based on a Roman custom which allowed a man of noble birth and standing to take into his family and account as his own son a youth of lowlier birth. This was all done in proper legal form. The first step was to take the intended son before a public notary and there give due note of the intention, subject to certain conditions being forthcoming at a future specified time. These centred in the response of the young man himself to the training and tuition, necessary for his prospective position, to which in the meantime he would be subjected. If he responded satisfactorily, then at the appointed day the status of full sonship would be publicly conferred, and from that day the adopted son was accounted as fully a son as though he was a child by birth.

But at the time when the father intimated his intention to adopt, a public token of his good faith in the matter was made in the presentation of a robe or ring or other gift to the intended son—a kind of pledge that he would be faithful to his promise, provided the young “adoptee” had so improved in education and general bearing as to be a credit to the house and standing of his kindly benefactor.

The Greek word here translated “adoption” literally means “placing as a son”. It is the “placing as a son” one who is not such a connection, as fully and completely as a child by birth. Thus there were two stages to the legal process of adoption. First a provisional stage, with certain conditions applicable to both parties, but mainly contingent upon the good conduct and progress of the intended son. Thence forth the whole Roman world would treat him as the father’s true son in every act in which duty caused him to become involved.

This illustration is the scaffolding upon which Paul builds his great theme of Divine Fatherhood and saintly sonship. God is the beneficent and kindly Master of a great house, who desires to find fitting companions for his one true Son. It was in his own unchallengeable prerogative to choose to do this thing. Nothing could compel or obligate him so to do, had He willed it otherwise. To him belongs the right to say who shall be invited, and on what terms they may be acceptable before him. It is for him to determine what tuition, and of what kind, every invited candidate must receive to make them fitting companions for his only begotten Son. And to him belongs the right finally to decide who among the invited ones had reached up to the standard of worthiness sufficient to qualify for the position involved.

To whom did God make this gracious offer of adoption into the closest circle of his family? To the resplendent sons of the morning? No! They could not be a spectacle to man. Humankind could never have understood all that this most intimate sonship means if God had adopted his sons from them. It was from the lower plebeian level of men, and not from the patrician ranks of heaven, that God condescended to choose his sons.

As proof of the Divine good faith, the Father decided to give a pledge, in the bestowment of his own Spirit, to all who among men should respond

to his call. This was to be accounted as an "earnest"—"a pledge-gift"—to every responding soul, assuring them that if they diligently applied themselves to the necessary education and refinement to fit themselves for acceptance into this elect position in God's great house, the gracious Father would be true to his promise and pledge and accept them as his own true sons.

The Greek word for "earnest"—"arrhabon"—primarily had to do with "exchange", and so had reference to a mutual pledge exchanged between two parties when making an agreement; a token payment when the transaction was first agreed, to be returned to each party on fulfilment. But later usage changed its meaning to an "earnest"—a part price, given as a tangible promise that the whole would be paid in due time. Paul tells us that the "earnest" which God bestowed upon his invited sons is his Holy Spirit—the Holy Spirit of promise—which is a pledge to stand good until the day of redemption of God's own—translated in the A.V. as "*until the redemption of the purchased possession*". This privilege of sonship belonged primarily to Israel, as Paul states in Rom. 9. 4 "*... whose is the adoption ...*"; this same thought is asserted again in Gal. 4. 4-6 "*When the fulness of the time was come God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, that He might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons (first-stage sons) God sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying 'Abba Father'.*"

The Galatians were sons of fathers who had at one time been under the law, but were divorced from it for unfaithfulness. Some among them were in danger of being enticed back under the law by Judaizing teachers. Paul wanted them to realise that God was now calling "sons", not servants; children of the free-woman, not of the bond-woman. Only a remnant of Israel was found sufficiently responsive to heed the heavenly call and thus the privilege was extended to the Gentiles. It is in this larger sense that Paul describes the privileges of the sonship of Rom. 8. 14-16. Here he writes to a mixed church in a Gentile city, in which Gentile believers predominate. To these he says, "*For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye received not the Spirit of bondage again unto fear; but ye received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father*". The full thought concerning this spirit of adoption is brought out in the words of Eph. 1. 14. It is the promise of God that those faithful souls who mortify the deeds of the body (Rom. 8. 13) thus responding to Divine tuition and refinement, shall receive, in due time, the full inheritance of sonship

as heirs of God and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ.

Deep in the counsels of eternity God purposed to win from among men a company of sons who should be raised to the highest place in the heavenly realm. The fall of man into sin necessitated the descent to earth of his firstborn Son to become man's Redeemer, and after that, the princely-Leader of "many -brethren" up to those heavenly heights. The great privilege of sonship in this exalted closer sense was offered first to the sons of Abraham. As a people they rejected the invitation, only a remnant "according to the election of grace" being found in Israel. The invitation was then offered to those among the Gentiles whose hearts the Lord opened (Acts 16. 14). To such as made response with good and honest heart God gave the pledge-gift of his Holy Spirit, to be at once the earnest of their inheritance, and the transforming power within, to enable them to become trained and transformed, and thus made ready to become companions in full and complete sonship with his well-beloved Son. That is the story of adoption, planned before time began, but worked out in the little lives of such among men as have been found responsive to the love of an all-wise creator and Father.

Brethren in the Lord! Your calling is no small hole-in-the-corner affair in the sight of God. It is an integral part of a great plan spanning ages for its sphere. It is part of a plan which includes angels as well as men, and which, when complete, will place creatures which once were sinful human dust among and above the spirits which surround the heavenly throne. The eternal God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, long ages ago looked down the long distances of time, and with joy and delight anticipated the homecoming of his sons. The door to that heavenly home still stands open to-day, for all who are ready to follow in the steps of our beloved Lord. What do you think of it all, dear brethren in the Lord? What do you think of such a benefactor-Father, and of such a call? And, if you have received the earnest of your inheritance, the Holy Spirit of promise, are you still assured that this is the token of your future sonship and joint-heirship with the Lord?

There need not be any doubt, for "*He is faithful that promised*". Think it out again, and let that thought inspire to greater faithfulness day by day. Put your present little day into its insignificant relationship with the exceeding and eternal weight of glory which that heavenly invitation opens up! Then thank God for his unspeakable gifts and calling!

The End

THE AUTHORITY OF DIVINE TRUTH

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

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

The messages of Divine truth conveyed to us through our Lord Jesus and his holy apostles and prophets, and from time to time, as meat in due season, called to our attention by such members of the anointed body as God hath set in the Church to be pastors, teachers and even by the feeble members of the body, are not therefore subjects for mere idle consideration and human speculation and dispute; they are not common themes for reckless handling with irreverent hands—they are the eternal principles of truth and righteousness. They are the oracles of God and the principles of his holy law. They come with a quiet insistence, demanding our candid, serious, careful consideration of their claims upon us in view of the fact of a coming time in which these principles of truth and righteousness shall surely triumph and prove a savour of life unto life or of death unto death to men, according as they are obedient or disobedient to their authority.

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

In view of these considerations what folly it is for any man to ignore or reject the authority of Divine truth! How grateful to God we should be for his goodness in making known to us the principles of his law, the testimonies of his Word, by which we are to be judged. And how anxious we should be that our understanding of those principles of judgment should be clear and free from bias or human prejudice which might blind our eyes to truths of such solemn import. As the Psalmist says, *"The judgments of the Lord"* (expressed by his holy apostles and prophets) *"are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them is thy servant warned; and in keeping of them there is great reward"* (Psa. 19. 9-11).

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

In this miracle our Lord clearly taught the great truth that God was with him, and that He was indeed all that He claimed to be—the fulfilment of the Law and the prophets, the long promised Messiah. These Pharisees, though feeling the force of this testimony, nevertheless harboured so much

envy and hatred in their hearts that it blinded them to the truth. But not so was it with the young man upon whose sightless eyes the miracle had been wrought. Envy, hatred, the spirit of rivalry, were absent from his mind, and wonder and gratitude prompted him to reason out the logical deductions from this marvellous fact. In this, one observes the steps of obedient and increasing faith and the results so blessed and so different from those to which the course of the Pharisees led. The act of hopeful obedience, in following the simple directions to go and wash his clay-anointed eyes in the pool of Siloam, was rewarded by immediate sight, although the man had been born blind. This blessing, gratefully realised, increased faith; the testimony of obedient, grateful faith, in the face of opposition, brought persecution; persecution accepted in preference to the approval of men, brought the clearer revelation of the One who was the hope of Israel and the world. And not only so, but this realisation that Jesus was indeed the very Christ promised of God, expected for so many long years, came to the formerly blind man with the additional element of joy that he had been specially favoured and blessed by him.

Here we see in strong contrast the spirit of obedience on the part of the young man who received sight, and the spirit of disobedience and rebellion on the part of the Pharisees. In the one case the authority of truth was despised and its light rejected, the darkness being preferred *"because their deeds were evil"*; while in other its

authority was received and appreciated and from its blessed testimony was drawn the lessons of faith, obedience, gratitude, humility, fortitude and loving reverence. Thus, the same truth which blinded one enlightened and blessed the other. And so truth is always, as Paul tells us, a savour of life unto life, or of death unto death. It is only those who receive the truth into *"good and honest hearts"* who are rewarded with its blessed fruitage (2 Cor. 2. 14-16).

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

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

Computerised Prayer

It had to come The *"Daily Telegraph"* (September 12) reports that British Telecom are now offering a service whereby those who wish to be prayed for, or have wish for prayer to be offered for some specific object, can phone the number and have their wish recorded on a tape which will then be played over to others who will dial in and promptly start praying for the matter which comes up next. The one who prays will be expected to continue the request every day for a week; apparently the Courts of Heaven are thought to be possibly as slow in responding as many earthly institutions. The BBC, who are also involved in

this operation, is said to *"feel increasingly obliged to offer pastoral care to people who write in or phone"*. "Prayerline" will, of course, be charged at standard rate, whilst an elaborated service, "Thoughtline", will go at 48p per minute. There is no statement as to whether British Telecom will give Heaven a commission on its profits from this service in recognition of participation in the enterprise.

Perhaps the only possible comment is that recorded in the Second Psalm: *"He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall have them in derision"*.

Going to church will not make you a saint, any more than going to school will make you a scholar.

C. H. Spurgeon

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

THE PARABLE OF THE WHEAT AND TARES

Matt. 13, 24-33

Of all the parables Jesus related to his disciples, this seems to have intrigued them most. On the surface it seems so simple a metaphor; the good and the bad seed, the two harvests, the preservation of the good grain and the destruction of the bad; it all seems so straightforward a picture of the Gospel in the world and the machinations of the Devil that one would hardly expect there to be a request for an explanation. Yet there was. *"Declare (explain) unto us the parable of the tares of the field."* They evidently sensed there was some important teaching embedded in his little story and they did not want to miss it.

The parable is a dispensational one. It has to do with events of the Last Days. That is clear from the references to the harvest, the end of the world, the furnace of fire. There are some final decisions and actions taken and performed in the course of this parable, and when it is ended the destinies of those who are pictured are decided for ever.

"The kingdom of heaven" said Jesus, *"is likened unto a man, which sowed good seed in his field; but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way."*

This parable has to do with the events of an Age and the climax of that Age. The good seed is sown broadcast and commences to germinate; the tares are scattered amongst the growing wheat and both grow to maturity together until harvest time. Then the reapers come forth and separate the tares from the wheat as they gather, at the last burning up the tares and depositing the wheat in their master's barn. So will it be at the end of the world, said Jesus. The Son of Man will send forth his messengers and they will gather out of his realm all things which offend, and destroy them. After that will the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.

The parable divides naturally into two parts. First comes the growing period in which both kinds of seed are coming to maturity together, a period characterised by the statement that it was *"while men slept"*. The second part concerns the harvest and the fate, respectively, of the ripened and gathered wheat and tares.

Many a homily has found its inspiration in the alleged physical nature of the "tares" as contrasted with the wheat. The best description of this celebrated weed is probably that given a century ago by Dr. Thomson, the Palestine missionary, in *"The Land and the Book"*. It seems that zizania, to give

it its Greek name, is indistinguishable from wheat during the growing period, and only when ripened can men tell it apart. The seeds, resembling ears of wheat, have soporific and mildly poisonous properties and hence careful separation is imperative. When finally gathered and separated from the wheat, burning is the only safe method of disposal, to prevent the seeds finding their way back to the fields and renewing the harm they create.

"The good seed are the children of the kingdom." This expression occurs once elsewhere, when in Matt. 8, 12 Jesus said that "the children of the kingdom will be cast into outer darkness" where He is evidently referring to the men of Israel of his own day. This is sufficient to point the Lord's meaning. Both Jesus and John the Baptist proclaimed "the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand". Every instructed member of the House of Israel knew what that meant, whether he accepted the person of Jesus or did not. The Kingdom of Heaven was the rule of Messiah who was to reign over the nations in righteousness and destroy all evil; the nation of Israel was to be Messiah's agent in proclaiming God's salvation to the ends of the earth and to convert the Gentiles. Hence the significance of Jesus' promise to his own disciples *"In the regeneration when the Son of Man shall sit on the throne of his glory ye also shall sit on twelve thrones, judging the tribes of Israel."* (Matt. 19, 28). Israelites were the children of that Kingdom in the sense that in them that Kingdom could have its beginnings, its first representation. But they were unready, unbelieving and unworthy, so, as Jesus foretold, they were cast into outer darkness. *"The Kingdom of God shall be taken from you and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof"* (Matt. 21, 43). When uttering this parable Jesus foreknew this development and He spoke of other "children of the kingdom" who by reason of loyalty to him and belief in him and acceptance of him would become the "good seed" with which the work of this present Age should commence. He himself appeared after his resurrection to above five hundred of such good seed (1 Cor. 15, 6). On the Day of Pentecost there were found another three thousand of such seed (Acts 2, 41) and five thousand more were added shortly thereafter (Acts 4, 4). This was the seed which sown in the days of the Apostles, constituted the good seed which promptly began to grow and multiply as the message of Christ went out to the nations and the work of the Age progressed.

But the Apostles and their co-workers "fell asleep", their lives' works completed. It was then, as Jesus said, "while men slept" that the great Enemy of God and man came and sowed tares, children of the Evil One. The Apostles knew this would happen. "After my departing" said Paul to the elders of Ephesus "*shall grievous wolves enter, not sparing the flock*" (Acts 20. 29). "In the latter times some shall depart from the faith" (1 Tim. 4. 1). "The time will come that they will not endure sound doctrine" (2 Tim. 4. 3). And Peter adds his words "There shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts" (2 Pet. 3. 3). There has at all times during the Age been a very liberal sowing of tares, not usually recognised as such until the fruitage of their work and teachings begins to appear. And by then they are so inextricably mingled with the "wheat" that nothing short of the reaping of the entire field can separate them. That reaping does not take place until the harvest time.

"The harvest" said Jesus "*is the end of the age*" ("world" in this text, as in several others in the New Testament, is the Greek *aion*, which denotes an age, an age in which some aspect of the Divine purpose is initiated and progresses to its climax, a present, a past, or future age extending over a period of time). The analogy is very accurate; just as the wheat cannot be physically separated from the tares until harvest time has come, so it is true that the faithful sincere believers in Christ and those who are mere professors of faith or even outright hypocrites do not and cannot receive the Divine decree which separates them and adjudicates to each their destiny until the end of the Age, the time when the Lord Christ returns in the glory and power of his Second Advent, first to raise his own faithful servants to be with him and second to bring to an end the evil works of men and set up his own Messianic Kingdom. This can be fairly termed the harvest of this present Age; not the only harvest included in the Divine Plan, for that Messianic Kingdom itself has a harvest conducted on very similar principles. But at the end of this present Age the calling and the selection of the church, the Bride of Christ, is complete, and that which in Revelation 19. 7 is termed "the marriage of the Lamb" will mark the resurrection from the dead and the exaltation to heavenly conditions of those who throughout the Age have completed their course and formed part of the company of the "dead in Christ" who participate in the First Resurrection.

Now this harvest of the Church is only the "first fruits". There is a further harvest of that good seed which has been sown from Pentecost onward and that further harvest is going to be reaped throughout the thousand years of Christ's Millennial reign. Not until the end of that Age is the last of the good wheat safely gathered into the Father's barn. It is when we realise that fact we can also understand the significance of the furnace of fire which destroys the tares. Many there will be at the time of the First Resurrection who will find themselves left outside the company of the Elect Church. "Many" said Jesus on one occasion "*will seek to enter in and not be able, when once the master of the house is risen up and hath shut to the door.*" (Luke 13. 24-25). They will claim to know him, to have eaten and drunk in his presence and to have acknowledged his teaching, yet He declares that He knows them not. These are not eternally lost—they cannot be if they do at least acknowledge him as Lord—but they have missed the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. As "tares" they have no share in the First Resurrection. But their final judgment may well be deferred until the Lord Christ in the power of his Millennial reign, accompanied by his glorified Church, will have completed the final evangelising of all the world and reaped that harvest. The 20th chapter of Revelation contains a vision of the end of the Millennium, when Satan is pictured as being loosed from the prison in which he has spent the thousand years, and comes forth in endeavour again to deceive the nations. The vision goes on to show some who line themselves up under his banner and advance against the powers of holiness, and fire comes down from God out of heaven and devours them, Devil and all. Here, perhaps, is that furnace of fire which eventually devours the tares. When at last the long-suffering of God has been extended to its widest limit, when at last all of Adam's race who can possibly be made receptive to the goodness of God have been won for God and become reconciled to him, then at last all that is beyond redemption goes into the destruction from which there is no resurrection. The First Resurrection of the Church at Christ's Second Advent, and the Second Resurrection, of men during Christ's Millennial reign, will have restored to God all who are capable of being reached by the message and power of Christ, and after that there is nothing but the burning of the tares.

"Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." That was Jesus' con-

clusion to the parable. He may have been speaking of the Church alone, He may have referred to all who ultimately attain salvation. The declaration is equally true in either case. At the end of the Millennial reign Christ himself, the Divine Son, is to "*deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father . . . that God may be all in all.*" (1 Cor. 15. 24-28). In that glad day, when the whole purpose of God for mankind has reached its triumphant consummation, all who are righteous will shine as the sun

in God's eternal kingdom. What matter that those who are with Christ as his Bride occupy a different station than do those who have come to eternal life through the beneficent ministrations of the Messianic reign? The fact remains that every knee will then bow, and every tongue will then confess, that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. There will be no dissentient voice, no discordant note, in all God's wide universe.

A Note on Isa. 6. 9-10

There is an apparent contradiction in that Jesus in Matt. 13. 14-15 says that the people's hearts *are* hardened and *they have* closed their ears and eyes *lest* they should repent and be converted, but in Isa. 6. 9-10 AV the prophet is told to *make* their hearts hard, and *close* their ears and eyes, so they *could not see* and be converted.

The correct rendering of the Isaiah passage is in the Septuagint, from which Jesus was quoting. The Masoretic, upon which the AV is mainly based, was the later (1st century) revision of the Hebrew Scriptures which is known to have been "doctored" by the Masoretes. It should be obvious that Jesus would never commission Isaiah to go out to the people with the deliberate purposes of closing their eyes and ears to the message and making it impossible for them to repent. Jesus said that his message was in parables, dark sayings, so far as the people generally were concerned, because their hearts had become hardened and their ears and their eyes they had closed, in order that they would not have to face up to the responsibility of accepting or rejecting the challenge. If they were truly converted, God would heal them, but they refused to stand in the position where the call to repent could reach them. So they were not healed, not because the Lord wanted to keep them in ignorance but because they themselves refused to face up to the reality of his call.

The point to notice is that these men had not definitely rejected Christ. They had not taken a

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

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

How loving and tender is our God, and how wise and strong! His promises have never failed those who have put their trust in him. The fact that we are weak and lame does not separate us from the love and power of our God, while we are striving to do his will; for "*He knoweth our frame, He remem-*

bereth that we are dust". Then let us more and more lay hold of this strength of the Lord, that we may courageously pursue our course in the narrow way of difficulty and trial. Precious indeed to the saint of God is the ministry of pain and sorrow!

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