

NOTICE TO THE READER.

A NEW edition of this little book having been called for, it is again sent forth on its mission, in the hope that the Divine blessing may continue to rest on it, through profit being derived by a fresh set of readers from a perusal of its pages.

One request the writer here ventures to make, viz., that its statements should be judged by the only true and full standard of doctrine—the written Word of God; so that what is found in accordance with that should be accepted, and, if there be found anything contrary to that, it should be rejected.

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PRIMITIVE CHRISTIANITY.

PART I.

THE EFFECT OF THE WORD OF GOD.

CHRISTIANITY is aggressive. It carries on a warfare with powers unseen, though not unfelt. It has for its sphere, the world ; and for its object, to turn souls from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God. Judaism was strictly conservative. God had confided to Israel the testimony of the existence of one true God. "Hear, O Israel, Jehovah our God is one Jehovah." (Deut. vi. 4.) The idols of Egypt had been unconscious witnesses of His power. Israel had experienced again and again that He was God, and there was none beside Him. In the midst of the nations of the earth they should have preserved this testimony ; for preservation of truth

communicated, not the conversion of others, was the special service given them with reference to the kingdoms with which they had intercourse. God's people they were: this was a privilege none others could enjoy. The stranger, if circumcised, could eat of the passover; he could also rejoice with Israel at the feasts of Weeks and Tabernacles before the Lord; but he remained a stranger still. From the day of Pentecost a new order of things commenced. Simeon had predicted that the Lord would be "a light for revelation of [*not* to lighten] the Gentiles;" and James, at Jerusalem, years afterwards, bore witness that "God had visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name."

An Exodus as real as that of Israel from Egypt, though not manifested in the same way, ought surely to characterise the accomplishment of this purpose. Though no external marks of divine displeasure as yet appear on that which they leave, those brought out should have as deep a sense of the worthlessness of the world, and the things of the world, as ever Israel had when judgment was executed by Jehovah on the gods

of their taskmasters. Should there not be as marked a coming out from all that formerly enslaved the soul, as when the 600,000 men, besides women and children, journeyed from Rameses to Pi-hahiroth, and then traversed the bed of the Red Sea? All Egypt knew that Israel had departed. Should not the world be constrained to attest the reality of the conversion of souls?

Is this commonly the case now? Was this the character of the work in apostolic times? We leave to the reader to answer the first question. Is not what follows an answer to the second?

At Rome, at Athens, at Corinth, at Ephesus, as well as at Jerusalem and Antioch, God worked and souls were converted. But at Thessalonica a work was commenced, carried on, and completed within a short time, as far as the apostle's preaching was concerned, which became a pattern or "type" of what may be achieved by evangelization, and what those evangelized should exhibit. And the example the church at Thessalonica set is the more valuable, because the majority certainly of the converts were, previous to the

apostle's visit, heathens. The change to them and in them was immense. The marks of it as seen by others were unmistakeable. These converts had a faith, a definite hope, and a clear object before them. No haze clouded their minds ; no uncertainty dimmed their perception of the truth. The message was plainly delivered, and simply received. They had life, and life in its activity, developing itself in a healthy and true way. There may be, how oftentimes there is, such feebleness of life that its very presence is doubted. In Paul's mind, there was not a mere hope about their spiritual existence : there was certainty. He could thank God for their decided conversion. He "remembered without ceasing their work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope of the Lord Jesus Christ." The work in them being real, he could speak to God about it. He thanked God for the fruits brought forth. He saw by their progress, he knew by their life, that they were of the number of the elect. Hence he owns them as brethren, and writes of them as beloved of God ; "knowing," he writes, "brethren, beloved of God, your elec-

tion." Their faith, their love, their hope, all these were manifest. And this epistle, though written soon after their conversion, was not penned till their steadfastness in the truth had been tested, and the reality of their faith plainly demonstrated. (1 Thess. iii. 6.)

They had suffered persecution from their countrymen (chap. ii. 14), yet their faith had not given way (chap. i. 3 ; iii. 6). They had endured much, yet it had not soured them. Their love to the brethren was patent : on that score Paul had nothing to correct ; he had only to urge an increase of it (chap. iii. 12). It had spread far and wide, even to all the brethren which were in all Macedonia. It reached even beyond them, for it embraced all men (chap. iv. 9, 10). They had given up a position of present ease for one of trial and persecution. They had a hope, but they knew it could never be fulfilled on earth, yet they fainted not. The enduring constancy of the hope of (*not* in) the Lord Jesus sustained them. Thus life in its activity, life with its characteristic affections, life in patient endurance of tribulation was theirs.

But what had wrought this change? "Our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance." They heard the word, they felt its power, they were made sensible of the presence of the Holy Ghost, and full conviction of the truth preached pervaded their souls. What effects can proceed from the reception of the gospel—"our gospel," as Paul describes it—when received not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which works effectually in them that believe! They heard Paul and Silas preach; but the words, they felt, conveyed truth from God to their souls. It was God's word to which they gave ear, which quickened, and after that continued to work in their hearts. Conversion with them was but the commencement. The word then began to work in them, but did not then stop working in their souls. The instrument employed was divine and effective; and the lives of the agents bore testimony to the power of the same word over their souls. Joy filled the hearts of these simple believers. They received the word in much affliction with

joy of the Holy Ghost. As they received the truth they felt its power, and made those around them sensible that they felt it.

Situated on the great highway between Rome and the country north of the Ægean Sea, the report of their conversion was not confined to their town and its vicinity. "From you," he writes, "sounded out the word of the Lord, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to Godward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak anything. For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you." So decided was the change, so manifest the work, that all were speaking of it. Those in Macedonia and Achaia heard the report of it. Those surely who could not understand it yet talked of it. Paul and Silas had, we cannot doubt, many interesting details about it, which they could have communicated to others, but they had no need to make known the work that had been done. From the converts, not from the evangelists, people discovered it.

Well might the Gentiles take note of it, for the change was great. "They had turned to

God from idols, to serve the living and true God." Objects of sight had been given up for One they had never seen. As a living God they owned Him, for they had experienced His power to impart life. As a true God they confessed Him, and forsook the worship of idols. The ideas of a lifetime were discarded. Faith took the place of sight. It was not a change of gods, but the finding for the first time of God. The position now taken up put them of necessity in opposition to all around them. Divided service for them there could be none : all the gods of the heathen had become to them vanity. There was but one living and true God, and Him they would henceforth worship. And let us observe the language—"They turned to God from idols." It was not a mere negation that occupied them ; it was not a position of protesting simply against error that they took up ; it was something positive their hearts were occupied with—they turned to God from idols. Nor was it a desire to emancipate themselves from all control that possessed them ; for they turned, be it remarked, to serve a living and true God.

Had He given them all they desired? He had in prospect, but not in possession. Their condition on earth did not improve by the change; it became sensibly and permanently worse. They found enemies among their countrymen they had never found before. They found, too, vehement opposers among the Jews, who had never troubled themselves about them when heathens. Yet they were steadfast; for they waited for God's Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, who would deliver them from the wrath to come. Their very attitude spoke volumes. It spoke of a hope unfulfilled, a desire unsatisfied, an object unseen. For this, for Him—for it was a person—God's Son, they waited. Earth was no longer their home. Their eyes were turned up to heaven.

One can fancy the contemptuous look of a Greek, who imagined he had risen by philosophy above the follies of his day, as he heard of these believers forsaking idols for a God they had never seen, who did not shelter His own Son from death. What an occasion for the unbelieving Jew to snatch, as he would think, a triumph from these

words, "Whom He raised from the dead." For he might tell, that the One they called God's Son had owned on the cross that He was forsaken of God. Could the One forsaken of God on the cross save others from wrath? To all such taunts the Thessalonians had a ready answer. They had tasted of a joy of the Holy Ghost they had never known before, and the words they heard had a power, which no mere words of man had, or could have. Like the beggar of John ix., they could speak of something within the range of their own experience, and they knew Him for whom they now waited.

One word more. How this word "wait" manifests the simplicity of their faith! All questions about sin were for them settled. All uncertainty about their future was removed. They knew He would come to judge the wicked; but they were sure of deliverance from the wrath to come, for they had received the word "in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance." To wait, not to work, for deliverance was their business. The work by which salvation was secured was already finished. They were converted from

idolatry and heathenism to wait for God's Son from heaven, who would take them to be in the glory with Himself. The first epistle speaks of the obtaining salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ (chap. v. 9); the second, of the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ (chap. ii. 14). Presumption, the Jew might have said, to be sure of this! Presumption, many professing and indeed real Christians say in these days. It is presumption to *doubt instead of believing*, to dispute God's testimony instead of resting on it. What an example, as well as a reproof, to souls in the present day are these simple-minded converts from heathenism.

PART II.

THE EVANGELIST.

I. THESS. ii. 1-12.

THE Lord Jesus Christ, having ascended up on high and led captivity captive, has given gifts to men. "And he gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers." (Eph. iv. 8, 11.) Nothing is more marked often than the difference of gifts the Lord's people have received. Some are at home in teaching, and evidently have no gift for evangelizing. Some are true evangelists, with little, if any, aptitude for teaching. The sphere for these two gifts is quite distinct. The evangelist works in the world, the teacher labours among the saints. So in Ephesians, where gifts to men are spoken of, both evangelists and teachers are enumerated; whereas in 1 Corinthians xii., where what God hath set in the assembly is stated, evangelists are

unnoticed. We should observe likewise the order in which in Ephesians these gifts are arranged. First come those who had special authority from the Lord, then those to whom, in common with apostles, revelations were vouchsafed. God's mind having been revealed, we have next those who should go out and announce it to the world ; and then, when souls have been converted, the individual work of the shepherd, and the more general labour of the teacher, are needed. For the teacher to exercise his special gift, there must be souls gathered into the Church. For the evangelist to work, there needs unsaved sinners to be reached.

A happy, blessed service is that of the evangelist. Himself a gift from the Lord to men, he must be qualified by the Holy Ghost for his work. As God's herald he takes his stand in the world and announces the good news (*i.e.*, gospel) of salvation to sinners for *all* who will receive it. It is not a partial amnesty that he is commissioned to promulgate, nor is it a mere pardon, however graciously conceded, that he is sent out to declare. He speaks of pardon, but of justification also. He speaks of deliverance from wrath, but he speaks

of everlasting blessedness likewise. The threshold of hell shall never be crossed by those who give heed to, and rest in, what he proclaims ; and the door of heaven, he is empowered to say, has been opened to receive all who believe. The wrath of God is averted, because His Son has endured it for sinners ; and the favour of God can be enjoyed, because those who believe have it freely bestowed on them in the Beloved. Beautiful on the mountains will be the feet of them that bring good tidings, that publish peace ; that bring good tidings of good, that publish salvation ; that shall say unto Zion, Thy God reigneth. (Isaiah lii. 7.) Beautiful too now, not on the mountains simply (*i.e.*, those which surround Jerusalem, Psalm cxxv. 2), but on earth, in valley, plain, hill, city, on shore or at sea, are those who proclaim the gospel of peace, till the Lord shall descend into the air. The Spirit of God in Isaiah looks forward to that future in store for Zion, and rejoices. The Spirit of God, we learn from the Romans (chap. x. 15), delights in the proclamation of the gospel of peace now. "But how shall they preach except they be sent!" Then none can take up this service

unless they have been sent to discharge it. "Except they be sent" implies a call, and supposes a fitness in the individual for the work. God must call the individual, man cannot. Man may own that the labourer has received a call. He ought to do this, but the call is from God to the evangelist. Paul was called by God. (Gal. i. 15, 16; ii. 7.) Paul and Barnabas were separated by the saints at Antioch to the Holy Ghost for the work of missions to which He had called them. (Acts xiii. 2.) The hands of the prophets and teachers having been laid on them, they went forward to their work, but "sent forth by the Holy Ghost." And all those called for this work are specially adapted for such a service. Let any one of God's children, not qualified for evangelizing, try it, and he will at length give it up, feeling himself unfitted for it.

Paul was an evangelist, as well as an apostle, and a teacher. In him we can trace what those qualities are, which an evangelist, chosen of God, will surely in some measure possess. Paul had a burning desire for souls. Do we not, in our day, see some who possess this likewise, a thirst (is

that too strong a word ?) for the salvation of their fellow-creatures ? Paul, as an evangelist, fulfilled his work as directly responsible to God. "A dispensation was committed unto him." "Woe is unto me," he writes unto the Corinthians, "if I preach not the gospel." Would he allow others to control him, or did he seek to control others in their service ? Nothing of the kind do we read of. From those at Jerusalem, who seemed to be somewhat, he received nothing but the right hand of fellowship. They could add nothing to him. They did not even mark out his sphere, or define its limits. From God he received his call, and He assigned him his field of labour. And right well did he cultivate it ; for from Jerusalem, and round about unto Illyricum, he had fully preached the gospel of Christ, previous to his imprisonment at Jerusalem, and his subsequent voyage as a prisoner to Rome. In the Acts we get an outline of his labours, but in the Epistles we learn more of the spirit by which he was actuated.

He writes to the Thessalonians about his labour as an evangelist among them. (1 Thess. ii.) At Philippi he had suffered imprisonment with Silas,

their feet fast bound in the stocks, in addition to the many stripes previously laid on them by direction of the magistrates; yet this did not damp their ardour. True love for souls burned still in their bosoms. Well might he speak of shameful treatment at Philippi; yet they were bold in their God to speak to souls at Thessalonica. For they carried with them a message of great concern—the gospel of God. Could they be silent whatever it might cost? Impossible. In much contention at Thessalonica they declared it. Neither the past, nor the probable consequences of their boldness for the future, could shut their mouths. Where natural courage would have given way, they were bold in God to preach His gospel.

In much contention they proclaimed the truth at Thessalonica. For our exhortation, he writes, was not of deceit nor of uncleanness. They addressed themselves to neither the mind nor the flesh of the natural man. Had they done that, much of the opposition they met with would have been avoided. Neither did they approach them in guile to cloak over their real object. All with them was open. They had a message to deliver,

and they delivered it. Cost them what it might, however unpalatable it might be to Jew or Gentile, they were determined to preach, not what man would receive, but what God had committed to them. Approved of God to be entrusted with the gospel, they spoke, not as pleasing men, but God who proves the heart. Flattering words would have been out of place with such. In earnest, and fully sensible of the truth confided to them, they could not act with any thought for themselves. Neither flattery by which to find acceptance with others, nor covetousness to further their own ends, could they resort to. Entrusted with God's truth, they could not be anything but truthful. As stewards they could not seek their own things; and, whatever others might think of them, they could call God to witness to the sincerity and simplicity of their desires among them. In no form was self allowed a place when preaching the gospel. For neither among them, or others, would they stand on their rights as apostles, seeking glory and distinction from their converts. On the contrary, they were gentle (or, as some would read, simple) among them, as

a nurse cherisheth her children. The patience, the gentleness of a nurse cherishing her children, was the fitting illustration to use. What real feeling this describes! They were men of heart, whose tender affection could stand a great deal of trial from their converts. And this affection was something so new to witness; new too, surely, for the descendants of Abraham to entertain towards Gentiles after the flesh, so that the apostle uses a word by which to express it, not met with elsewhere in the New Testament. Or, if we follow the reading adopted by some of the best critics, he uses a word not met with at all in classical Greek, but found in the LXX. translation of Job. Their singular affection for souls he would express by an unusual word in the original. And the length to which they were prepared to go for these poor converts from heathenism was great. Their delight would have been to impart, not the gospel of God only, but also their own lives, because they were beloved by them. And to manifest this they supported themselves, working night and day, not to be chargeable to any of them. Freely would they preach the gospel, even if it

cost them much physical toil to supply their wants. So at Ephesus he acted on another occasion (Acts xx. 34), supporting himself and those with him. Yet if friends from a distance ministered to their necessities he accepted it. (Phil. iv. 15, 16.) What loving affection, genuine warmheartedness, does all this manifest !

As a nurse he had tended them, as a father with his children he exhorted each one of them ; comforting, and testifying that they should walk worthy of God who called them to His own kingdom and glory. What care for their walk does this display ? The nurse tends the little ones, the father has to provide for the nurture or training of his own. (Ephes. vi. 4.) As his children Paul regarded them. With all the affection of a father he exhorted them. For he could not rest satisfied with a shallow superficial work. He could not be with them, and accept simply an assent to the truths he had preached. The work must be deep to satisfy him ; the change manifest, ere he could rest contented. Called to God's own kingdom and glory, they must walk here worthy of it, if they would gladden the heart of their spiritual father.

So when writing to the Galatians, who seemed slipping away from truth, he said, "My little children, of whom I travail in birth again, until Christ be formed in you." (Gal. iv. 19.) It was a Person he presented, a life he desired them to receive, not a mere scheme of doctrine. So that life should be manifested, Christ should be formed in them, they should walk worthy of God. Paul desired nothing less than this. What evangelist could rest short of it?

PART III.

THE WORK OF THE EVANGELIST.

“OTHER sheep I have which are not of this fold : them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice ; and there shall be one flock, and one shepherd.” (John x. 16.) In such terms does the Lord Jesus announce the great change which would be effected consequent upon His death and resurrection. Sheep He had which did not belong to the fold of Israel. He was, He is, in a special sense (see Ezek. xxxiv. 23 ; Zech. xiii. 7), the Shepherd of Israel. But He has other sheep whom He would bring, and they should hear His voice ; and thus following Him, as did the believing remnant of Israel, the two would form one flock, owning, and cared for by, the one Shepherd. This explains a passage in 1 Corinthians x., where the children of men on the earth are divided now into three classes, the Jews, the Gentiles, and the Church of God. Before the

Lord's death there were but two classes on the earth—the Jews and the Gentiles. So when the Lord in John vii. stated that whither He would go they could not follow Him, reasoning among themselves the Jews said: "Will He go to the dispersed among the Gentiles, and teach the Gentiles?" There were then but Jew and Gentile, on the earth. By and by it will be the same. After the Church has been caught up to meet the Lord in the air, the human family will again be divided into these two classes, and these only, Jew and Gentile.

Now, this third class exists on the earth, the Church of God. It was this class, as distinct from Jews and Gentiles, but composed of those who had been once Jews, that Paul persecuted. "I persecuted the Church of God." It was this class, composed of both Jews and Gentiles, that the Jews endeavoured to exterminate. (1 Thess. ii. 14.) And it is in the midst of the churches that the Lord Jesus Christ is said to walk as Son of man, taking special cognizance of all that goes on in them. (Rev. ii.) Moreover in the Church God, in the person of the Holy Ghost, now dwells

(Eph. ii. 22.) It is God's house. (1 Tim. iii. 15.)
God's temple. (1 Cor. iii. 16 ; 2 Cor. vi. 16.)

In early days the "within" and the "without" (1 Cor. v. 12, 13 ; Col. iv. 5) were terms understood, and limits clearly defined, by all believers on the Lord Jesus Christ. Within, were all who professed to be, and, as far as man could judge, were, believers on the Lord. Without, were all who had not taken Christian ground. Within, was the sphere in which the Spirit of God ruled and dwelt ; without was the region where the god of this world had sway.

Brought out of Judaism by the preaching of the gospel, those who were to be saved of Israel found themselves members of God's assembly or Church on the earth—a position quite distinct from that which the nation had ; the Church or assembly being spoken of as a company apart from their countrymen, the Jews at Jerusalem. (Acts v. 11.) Brought out of heathenism by the preaching of the same word, believers from among the Gentiles found themselves members of the same assembly—the Church. A common bond united them, a common interest occupied them.

They were partakers of the same life. They owned the same Lord, and belonged to the same Head in heaven. Children of the same Father, indwelt by the same Spirit, they were one with Christ, forming the Church of Christ, the house of God, the habitation of the Holy Ghost. And wherever the gospel was preached in Judea, Samaria, Galilee, Syria, Asia Minor, Greece, Italy, those who believed formed part of the Church. Philip preached in Samaria, the apostles Peter and John evangelized many villages of the Samaritans (Acts viii.), and soon after we read of the Church existing in Samaria. (ix. 31.) Souls at Antioch in Syria were evangelized by those scattered abroad upon the persecution which arose about Stephen, and shortly afterwards we read of the assembly in that city. (xi. 19-26.) Paul and his fellow-labourers visited Thessalonica, the first evangelists in that country, and but little time elapsed before the converts received a communication addressed "to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father, and in the Lord Jesus Christ."

Wherever souls receive the glad tidings which Paul preached, churches sprang up ; and as Paul

and Barnabas returned from Derbe to Antioch in Syria, they appointed elders in the churches previously formed by their evangelistic labours. But whilst apostolic power or authority was requisite for the appointment of elders, none being appointed to that office except by the apostles or their delegates in primitive times, it needed not an apostle, nor authority from one, for churches to spring up in different localities. There was a church in the house of Aquila and Priscilla at Rome, before Paul or any other apostle had visited that city. (Rom. xvi. 5.) There were churches at Colosse, Laodicea, and Hierapolis, souls gathered out by Epaphras and others whom Paul had never seen. (Col. ii. 1 ; iv. 13 ; Philemon 2.) To call souls out of the world into the Church was the work of the evangelist. Hence there was a two-fold result of his labours. Souls were gathered out of the world, delivered from the power of darkness, rescued from a condition of wrath, having passed from darkness to light through believing on the Lord Jesus Christ ; and believers, thus brought out of Judaism, and heathenism, were brought of necessity into the Church of God.

There could be no other place for them, there is no other division of men on earth recognized of God, but Jew, and Gentile, and Church of God. Ceasing to be a Jew or a Gentile by becoming a Christian, the individual forms part of the Church. The evangelist might not teach them much about the Church, its composition, its government, its position with reference to principalities and powers in heavenly places now. All that would follow afterwards, being the more direct work of the teacher set by God in the assembly; but his preaching made them take a new place on earth, *i.e.*, brought them openly into God's assembly. They had heard the voice of Christ, and forthwith became members of the one flock.

To form *a* church was not their aim. God had formed *the* Church by the baptism of the Holy Ghost. If they laboured in a place where none had laboured before, all the souls called out in that place formed the Church of God in that locality. In a country there might be many churches, as in Galatia. (Gal. i. 2.) In any locality there was but one Church of God, as at Corinth. (1 Cor. i. 1.) How differently do evangelists often act in

these days. We hear of souls brought to the Lord, and then left to shift for themselves, to choose the denomination to which they will be attached. This is called liberality of sentiment, the catholic principle on which the work should be carried on. The salvation of individuals is all that is aimed at here, to bring them to Jesus is the avowed end of such labourers. Blessed be God, however we may fall short of His thought, He never fails His people. Saved by grace through faith, we are, whether conscious of it or not, quickened with Christ, risen with Him, and seated in Him in the heavenlies ; we are members of His body, part of His Church. But such teaching as is often met with ignores the Church of God, and keeps out of sight, or overlooks, some of the distinguishing characteristics of the present interval between the day of Pentecost and the Lord's descent in the air.

If by faith in Christ we become members of the one flock, the one Church of God, there should be uniformity and harmony of action. Each one of the children of Israel had to observe the same rules, and was bound to worship God in the same

way. So each member of Christ should know what are God's directions and regulations for His Church. In ignorance surely of what the Church of God is, earnest, godly, souls, feeling the need of uniformity, have devised rules for all such as will agree on some special doctrine or church question with themselves. Hence the formation of so-called churches, composed of some, not all the members of *the* Church in any one place. Hence, too, the varied forms of church government and worship. Paul at Corinth would have nothing to do with the divisions there, save only to correct such evils. He did not form *a* church for all those who followed him, to the exclusion of those who were attached to Apollos, or Cephas, or some other teacher. All who believed at Corinth were members of God's Church there, they were all God's husbandry, God's building, the temple of God. Was he indifferent about uniformity in order and worship? He insisted strongly on it. He sent Timotheus to remind them of his ways which were in Christ, as He taught everywhere in every Church. (1 Cor. iv. 17.) As regards marriage, he ordained the same in all the churches.

(vii. 17.) If the covering of women—if the order of worship, were in question, he spoke of the customs of the churches of God, and the order of worship in all the churches of the saints. (xi. 16; xiv. 33.)

To leave souls in ignorance of the place into which they are brought through the labours of the evangelist, is to leave the work entrusted to him unfinished. What disorders would have been prevented, what feuds and troubles would have been averted, if labourers of former days had acted differently. What disorders may now be prevented, and the wanderings of the sheep effectually restrained, if evangelists, whilst leading souls to Christ, shew them that they are, through faith when saved, members of the one Church of God, and part of the body of Christ.

PART IV.

THE TEACHER.

CHRISTIANITY does not consist in the reception of a certain creed or peculiar truths. It is a life imparted, everlasting in its duration, active in its character, divine in its origin, having for its aim the glory of God and the welfare of immortal souls.

The Christian, therefore, may have a sphere of work outside the Church as an evangelist, or inside as a teacher. The former brings souls, through the preaching of the gospel, from the world without, into the one flock, or Church ; the latter leads on souls within, into the truth as revealed in God's word. For the work of the teacher is to teach what has been revealed, not to communicate fresh truth. Wherever there is a soul unsaved there is a field for the evangelist ; wherever there are saints of God to be found, there is a sphere of service for the teacher. How much this truth has

been lost sight of through the multiplication of denominations in the one body of Christ on earth ! Christians of different denominations can unite to own an evangelist as a gift to act on the world. How few are as ready to acknowledge that teachers are set by God in the one Church, for the help and instruction of all who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. How refreshing to turn from the sectarian feeling so frequently displayed in these days, to contemplate the fervent catholic spirit of a teacher as depicted in God's word.

Paul was an evangelist to preach that gospel proclaimed to every creature under heaven. Paul was also a teacher, set by God in the Church, to teach and warn every man, that he might present every man perfect in Christ. The Colossian saints he had never seen ; but since they were saints, he was concerned with them. For them he was suffering at Rome, and rejoiced at it, though he had never been in their midst (Col. i. 24) ; and filled up what was lacking of the sufferings of Christ in his flesh for His body's sake, which is the Church. " For you," he writes, " I suffer," because they formed part of the Church.

To Paul was given a special service—to fulfil the word of God, the mystery once hidden, but now made manifest to his saints, to whom (*i.e.*, the saints) God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” Entrusted with such a ministry, he did not feel his work was done when he fulfilled the word of God, by first setting forth the mystery. God would have it made known to the saints. By Paul, the apostle, the minister of God’s choice, was the word of God fulfilled, or completed. By Paul the teacher was the mystery, and the riches of the glory of it, proclaimed far and wide. What a theme he had to dwell on! “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” This concerned the saints in general, and each one in particular. By and by “the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.” But what these Colossians expected was, not simply to see the glory, but to be in it. When that glory is revealed, the place of the Gentiles on earth will be subordinate to that of the Jews. For those to whom Paul wrote, though Gentiles by descent, such national

distinctions no longer existed. (Chap. iii. 11.) In the glory was to be their place, and Christ in them, the riches of the glory of the mystery—the hope of it.

This One he preached, warning every man and teaching every man, to present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.

As the apostle to the Gentiles, Paul laboured hard, travelled far, and was ready to journey even to Spain to do his Master's work. Yet all the while he never forgot his own countrymen. He preached to them at Rome from morning till evening when he first reached it. The special field of labour assigned to him by the Lord had not the effect of narrowing his interests, or fostering a sectarian spirit: "Warning *every* man," he could write, "and teaching *every* man in all wisdom;" and this at the cost of much labour and fatigue to himself. (Chap. i. 29.)

Nor was this all. His heart was in the work, because Christ had the first place in his affections. His heart was interested in those saints who were at a distance, because they were members of Christ. He laboured in teaching, he had conflict

in prayer (chap. i. 29 ; ii. 1, 2). He received all who came to him at Rome, preaching the kingdom of God and those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ. He bore on his heart in prayer to God those saints at Colosse and Laodicea, and as many as had not seen his face in the flesh. Epaphras was always striving earnestly in prayer for them (chap. iv. 12). But he was one of them. All would understand his deep interest in those to whom he had communicated God's truth. But Paul felt an interest in them so deep, that he too must strive in prayer for them. And what did he desire? That they should take his part against the Judaizing teachers who would undermine his authority in the assemblies established among the Gentiles? The welfare of the saints, not their estimation of him, was his object. "That their hearts might be comforted (or, encouraged), being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment (*rather*, full knowledge) of the mystery of God,* in which are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." Here the heart of a true teacher

* "Of the Father and of Christ," Gr., Sch., and Alf. omit.

is laid bare. A slight acquaintance with truth on their part could not satisfy him. He wanted their hearts to be encouraged, and all to be united together in love. Love, the expression in part of the divine nature, he desired, but knowledge too, "and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the full knowledge of the mystery of God." And why this urgent desire for those to whom he was personally unknown? Because what he had expressed was the only true safeguard for their souls: "in which are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." He feared they should be beguiled with enticing words. Their order, and the steadfastness of their faith in Christ, he beheld and rejoiced in; but the full knowledge of the mystery of God he desired for them.

Rome was far from Colosse, but the keen eye of the teacher detected an evil of which perhaps they were unconscious. Faith they had in Christ Jesus; love they had manifested, which embraced all saints. The word of the truth of the gospel had reached them. They had received it, and it had brought forth fruit in them. He could speak of past effects, but not of them only; "bringing

forth fruit and increasing" (for so we should read) in all the world, and in them, since the day they heard it, and knew the grace of God in truth, is his description of its then present working among them. Their love, too, in the Spirit Epaphras had manifested to him. In what could they be lacking? What could be desired for them? His desire is shortly summed up in chapter i. 9—12. What they lacked, it would seem, was a clear understanding of the dangers that beset them, as expressed in chapter ii. 8 to the end, and the way to meet them.

Had their eye been anointed to see their dangers, there would have been no need to point them out. Had they been on the alert with the true remedy, he need not have stated it. But it is the part of a teacher to see the tendency of a certain spiritual course, and to supply the instruction suited to the occasion. As a teacher, he saw whither, if not warned, they might drift; and as one divinely taught, and called to teach others, he pointed out what they must do. "As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, walk ye in Him, rooted and built up in Him,

and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving." (Chap. ii. 6, 7.)

Such are his directions. Further on he shews how these, if carried out, will meet all that would draw them aside. Here he sums them up. One object is put before them, Christ Jesus the Lord. One revelation about Him he keeps before them, "As ye have received." Nothing fresh had they to receive, but only to keep hold of and apply what Epaphras had been the means of communicating. And this is most valuable in these days. For what Epaphras, a minister of Christ, had taught them, was all that they wanted. The fulness of what he had given them, each one had to learn for himself; but the revelation he had conveyed to them embodied the full truth: "As ye have received," he could say, and "as ye have been taught." Paul reminds them of what they had been taught. The truth communicated by him and others to the Church Epaphras had set before them: and Paul, who fulfilled the word of God, had nothing further to make known. Of fresh truth, hitherto unrevealed, about the Lord

Jesus, he says nothing. Of development in after ages he is silent. What they had they were to hold, and as they had received Christ Jesus the Lord, they were to walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him, &c. He shuts the door against anything besides Christ, or anything beyond Christ. As a teacher, he expounds what are the riches of the glory of the mystery. He shews that there can be nothing needful, nothing to be possessed of value, for their souls outside of Christ. Philosophy, vain deceit, pretension to knowledge hidden from others, the need of observing Jewish rites, all such teaching, from whomsoever it might come, would, if accepted, turn them away from Christ their Head, "from whom all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God." (ii. 19.)

As Paul writes: "As ye have received:" so John exhorts the little children, "Let that abide in you which ye have heard from the beginning." (1 John ii. 24.) Both these teachers and apostles, though one fulfilled the word of God, and the other recorded "the revelation of Jesus Christ

which God gave unto Him to shew unto His servants things which must shortly come to pass," turn souls to what had been revealed about Christ, as all they wanted, and all God would give. To what was known in the days of Epaphras, to what was heard from the beginning, is the teacher to turn now, and from it, as found in the written word, to build up souls in the truth.

With the Church for his sphere, and the word of God for his repository, from which all his teaching was drawn, the teacher in primitive times learned both how to divide rightly the word of truth, and how to speak to souls as they were able to hear it. For the necessity of the first of these qualifications we have inspired authority. (2 Tim. ii. 15.) For the illustration of the second we have the example of the Master Himself. (Mark iv. 33.)

Peter on the day of Pentecost rightly divided the word of truth, when he forbore to say of the prophecy of Joel, "this day is fulfilled:" and when he stopped short in the middle of the last verse, following the example of the great Teacher, who stopped in the middle of Isaiah lxi. 2 in the syna-

gogue at Nazareth. (Luke iv. 19.) Paul knew how to act thus in teaching, when in the Romans he declares, "Ye are become dead to the law by the body of Christ;" whilst in writing to Timothy he could say, "We know that the law is good if a man use it lawfully." And James is another instance of this, when he spoke of that same law as the law of liberty, the expression of God's mind for the creature, which to the new man is perfect freedom.

To speak as souls were able to hear was another characteristic of the first teachers of Christianity. The example of such a manner of procedure the disciples witnessed in the Lord's dealings with the multitude, and the advantage of it in His dealings with themselves. (John xvi. 12.) Paul thus acted with the Corinthians and Hebrews. (1 Cor. iii. 2; Heb. v. 11, 12.) But herein do we discern a difference. The Lord did not upbraid the multitude, nor rebuke the disciples for their inability to hear and receive what He had to speak. But Paul does rebuke both the Corinthians and the Hebrews, and rightly so. For in their day the Holy Ghost was on the earth in

the Church, to guide believers into all the truth. All therefore that Paul could have taught them would have been truth in season, though, from their respective states, not seasonable for them. The moral condition of the Corinthians, who were carnal, and the infantine state of the Hebrews, hindered him from entering on those truths peculiar to Christianity which he would have otherwise set before them. There are stages of spiritual growth; fathers, young men, and infants in Christ. There are states and special circumstances of souls, and even of assemblies, which require spiritual discernment on the part of the teacher, and divine guidance how to meet, and how best to edify and to help. Tychicus was the bearer of two letters from Rome. One, known as the Epistle to the Ephesians, was a circular letter, if the reading of the two oldest MSS. be followed, "to the saints who are also faithful in Christ Jesus" (chap. i. 1), to be read in various assemblies. The other was a letter specially addressed to the Colossians, and dealt in truth suited for them, to be read also by the assembly at Laodicea.

But apart from the spiritual condition of souls, which hinders them from receiving truth, there may be special circumstances which call for a peculiar line of teaching. In Jude we have an instance of this. As one taught of God, able to judge of things as they are, instead of as they may appear to ordinary observers, he would have written about the common salvation, but saw it was needful to write unto them, and to exhort them to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered unto the saints. The evils, which will culminate in the open apostasy of Christendom, he saw were already in their midst, introduced through the entrance of some who had come in unawares, and were feasting with the people of God. Of these people he writes to warn the saints. What was happening was not unforeseen. Enoch, before the flood, had prophesied of such : and the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ had spoken of the mockers who should be in the last time. Jude therefore did not write of what was new ; but he wrote to remind them of what had been predicted, and to point out the commencement of its fulfilment. To have written about

the common salvation would have been in consonance with his spirit; to write about contending for the faith once delivered to the saints was needful for them.

And here do we discern another characteristic of the teachers of those days. They were unwearied in teaching, and if needful shrank not from enforcing continually the same truths. So Paul tells the Philippians (chap. iii. 1), "To write the same things to you, to me indeed is not grievous (or, irksome), but for you it is safe." Judaizing error was rife almost everywhere. Often had he combated it; as often as was needful would he do it. "For you it is safe." He puts aside self where the profit of others is concerned. Peter acts in a similar spirit: "I will not be negligent [or, as some read, I will take care] to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth. Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance." (2 Peter i. 12, 13.) The welfare of the saints required such unwearied attention, and he would bestow it. He knew the dulness of

the heart, and was prepared to spend time and strength in reiterating these things as often as called for. "As long as I am in this tabernacle," he writes. He felt it not labour lost, nor time misspent in reminding them of the "words spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Saviour [or, of the Lord and Saviour through your apostles]." To the written word he would take them, the prophets of the older dispensation, as well as bring before them constantly the commandments of the apostles of the Lord and Saviour. Is not this the true spirit of a teacher, which throws itself into the mind of the pupil, discovers where it is, and labours continually to lead it on; but, forgetful of self, will go over the same ground, however irksome to the natural man, till the lesson be learned, or the teacher's work be cut short by death? Had not the apostles caught something of the spirit of the Lord, as displayed in John xiv. 10, 11, when Philip said, "Shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us?" He had pointed out in John x. 38 how it might be known that the Father was in Him, and He in the Father. "Believe the works:

that ye may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in him." To Philip's question He replies graciously, reiterating the same thing: "Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, He doeth the works [or, the Father abiding in me doeth His works]. Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works' sake."

But they rested not with providing for the present: their care for the saints made them think of the future. In this too they copied their Lord. "I will endeavour," writes Peter, "that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance." (2 Peter i. 15.) Paul warned the elders of Ephesus of the grievous wolves that would come in, and the evils that would spring up from among themselves after his departure. To the Thessalonians he writes of the antichrist that shall arise. To Timothy he describes the apostasy of the latter times, and the wickedness of the last days. (1 Tim. iv. ; 2 Tim. iii.) With these teachers it was no unwilling service

they rendered. Their heart was in it. Grace had made them willing servants for God ; love made them devoted labourers for the saints. So, whilst willing to receive pecuniary or other assistance from saints, their reward was not on earth : their hope, their crown of rejoicing, would be their converts in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ at His coming.

Paul not only thought of the future but exhorted Timothy to commit what he had heard of him in the presence of many witnesses to faithful men, who should be able to teach others also. (2 Tim. ii. 2.) And in writing to his two sons in the faith he points out what teachers should be, who are neither apostles, nor prophets to whom revelations were vouchsafed—knowledge surely of great value to us in these days.

A few words on this part of the subject is all that we have room for. There were some who thought godliness could be made a source of gain, who taught things that they ought not for filthy lucre's sake. (1 Tim. vi. ; Titus i.) The man of God must flee these things. Placed in the Church, and also being in the world, because on

earth, he was to be a pattern to believers within ; and so to act that those without, or those who opposed him should have nothing to say against him. (1 Tim. iv. 12 ; 2 Tim. ii. 24 ; Titus ii. 7, 8.) As to teaching, to God's word he must be subject. Not a hint have we of any future revelation which would modify or alter the teaching of the apostle ; not a word of the insufficiency of scripture, or a doubt of the value of it all. " Every Scripture is divinely inspired." and " That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto every good work," are statements which stamp the Word with lasting authority, and exclude all need, under whatever pretence, of going elsewhere for what the saint requires. The form of sound words he heard of Paul, Timothy was to hold fast. Of what the Spirit spoke expressly he was to put souls in mind. (1 Tim. iv.) In view of the perilous times that would come Timothy was to continue in the things he had learned, and to preach the word (not his thoughts or conceptions), making use of all opportunities that presented themselves.

What prominence is given to the written word, and what value is set on it ! However varied

may be the agents used, the words in which God has seen fit to have His thoughts clothed are not words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth. (1 Cor. ii. 13.) This was the sword wielded in primitive times ; this is the only weapon with which to do battle now.

PART V.

MINISTERING TO THE SAINTS.

THERE is a characteristic of Christianity which stamps it as divine in its origin. First displayed in the Lord Himself, who came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, we see it exemplified in a greater or less degree, in proportion as grace acts on the heart, in the lives of His followers. "I am among you as he that serveth," was the gracious declaration on His part, abundantly illustrated in His life and even death. "Whoever among you will be the chiefest, shall be the servant of all," was the line marked out by the Master for His disciples to follow. Service, the fruit of love, characterized Him: service, as a labour of love, should be manifested by them.

A marked feature of the law given to Israel, was strict justice. Their intercourse with each other was to be characterized by righteousness. "An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth," spoke of

stern justice. None could complain of it, though all at times might feel the inconvenience of it. Justice demanded the eye, &c., and the man must surrender it. A marked feature of Christianity is grace, to be manifested in that self-sacrificing service exhibited in the saints of apostolic days. What no law could rightly demand, that none of them would willingly withhold. Under the law, men looked to requite, and to be requited. Under grace, saints should desire to bestow. The law of God was a Jew's authority for demanding justice from his neighbour. The example of God's Son is the Christian's guide in manifesting love to his brother. Divine love is unselfish. It thinks of others—it serves others—it enriches others. "I seek not," writes Paul to the Corinthians, "yours, but you : for the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children. And I will most gladly spend and be spent for you : though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved." This was the expression of genuine love going out after its object, whether the affection be reciprocated or not. The spirit of Christ we see it to be, the spirit too in which God has

acted to the world. And neither time nor circumstances wrought a change in Paul's mind on this point. What he was in Macedonia, when he wrote these words to the Corinthians, that he was in Rome, when suffering imprisonment on behalf of the Gentiles. To the Philippians he wrote, "Yea, and if I be offered (poured out as a libation) on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all." (Chap. ii. 17.) "Communicating with his affliction"—they had sent help to Paul by Epaphroditus. He regarded it as a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God. And now that they had, as they were able, taken part in the work with him, he was ready, if need be, to be poured out as a libation on the sacrifice and service of their faith. He had spoken before (chap. i. 25) of his conviction that he would live, but only to serve and minister to others. He desired to depart and to be with Christ, but cheerfully remained on earth for their furtherance and joy of faith. Yet if death was to follow, he expressed himself ready for it. He had a desire, and he stated it. He had no will of his own in the matter, so could seek the welfare of others. If he

lived, it was for service. If he died, it would be as a libation poured out on the sacrifice. Whether life or death was his immediate portion, he was content. Happy Paul, we may surely say, to be thus willing to live or die, as the glory of God and the wellbeing of His saints required.

But here he speaks of death only as a contingency. "If I be," &c. Could he face the certainty of it with the same equanimity? Further on in his career, when admonished that his end was near, we find the same spirit that characterized him in his earlier days manifested still. Again at Rome, and this time for death, he writes of it to Timothy as certain. "Make full proof of thy ministry; for I am ready to be offered (rather, I am already being poured out as a libation) and the time of my departure is at hand." Between his first and second imprisonment at Rome he had not changed. To spend and be spent for others was still his joy. And in accordance with this spirit he could deprive himself of the presence and service of Epaphroditus, if thereby the Philippian saints should be comforted. The prisoner at Rome would gladly resign one of his few comforts

that they should be made glad. So caring for them, not for himself, he sent Epaphroditus back to them that they might be comforted, and he be the less sorrowful. Many were the sorrows which pressed on him in his prison, yet he could think of the sorrows of others; and if theirs were removed, his were lightened.

But not only in Paul was this spirit displayed, Epaphroditus shewed it likewise. He, too, had received the spirit of Christ, and exhibited it. He could risk his life for Paul, he could be filled with heaviness for the Philippians. For the work of Christ he was nigh unto death, not regarding [or, as some read, venturing] his life, to supply their lack of service towards Paul. Though brought down nigh to death from his labours in Rome, his unselfish love for others was not quenched. The Philippians he heard were sorrowful at the report of his sickness; he was immediately full of heaviness that they had heard it.

A third example of the same spirit is introduced in this chapter. Timothy sought not his own; he, too, cared for others; and showed that spirit

of subjection and affection manifested in perfection in One only—the Son of God. “Ye know the proof of him,” wrote the apostle, “that, as a child with the father, he hath served with me in the gospel.” Filial obedience combined with cheerful service was exhibited in Timothy. Counting on him, knowing him, Paul hoped shortly to send him unto them. For, unselfish in his behaviour towards and with Paul, he would also interest himself in others. “I have no man like-minded,” was the apostle’s judgment of him, “who will naturally (or, with genuine feeling) care for your state; for all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ’s.” Here the secret comes out. It was not mere natural amiability of character, but a heart which sought for the things of Christ, which made Timothy such a valuable and true servant.

Such were the companions Paul wrote of in the Epistle to the Philippians, men of a congenial spirit, like-minded with himself, because caring with him for the Lord and the Lord’s work. There are, however, others mentioned, of whom it can be said, they did what they could. God took

notice of their work, and the Spirit has recorded it. For, done to the saints as saints, it was done to Christ, and so was precious in God's sight. The Hebrews had ministered to the saints, and continued to do so. (Heb. vi. 10.) They had compassion, too, of those in bonds. (Heb. x. 34.) Such service was not, it will not be, forgotten. Onesiphorus, when in Rome, sought Paul out very diligently, though all of Asia had turned away from him. He, who had formerly ministered to him at Ephesus, continued unwearied in that service still. Though a prisoner, he was not ashamed to own him; and the apostle, who could help others, received refreshment from this humble yet true servant of Christ. (2 Tim. i. 16.) No difficulty did Onesiphorus allow to stand in his way. He sought Paul out, and that diligently. How the Lord loves to dwell on the acts of His servants! Aquila and Priscilla, too, hesitated not to endanger their lives to save Paul's (Rom. xvi. 4); and Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus contributed, when at Ephesus, to refresh the apostle, ministering to his wants it would appear. (1 Cor. xvi. 17.)

But not only was service rendered to those in bonds, or to such as laboured hard for the Lord ; there were other opportunities for exhibiting the spirit of Christ. Whilst Stephanas was refreshing Paul at Ephesus, his household at Corinth had addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints. (1 Cor. xvi. 15.) Those, too, who had houses suitable opened them for the service of the Church. Some, as Philemon at Colosse (Philem. 2), and Nymphas at Laodicea (Col. iv. 15), threw them open for the assembly to meet in. In this work Aquila and Priscilla took part. At Corinth they had opened their house for this purpose (1 Cor. xvi. 19), and, when they removed to Rome, saints there found a suitable room under their roof. (Rom. xvi. 5.) Others, where such a service was not needed, welcomed brethren and strangers within their doors. Gaius, of Corinth, was Paul's host and the host of the whole Church (Rom. xvi. 23), shewing true and large-hearted hospitality to all who had need of it. Another Gaius, in Asia probably, acted in a similar manner, receiving strangers and forwarding them on their way. (3 John.)

If these openings for service were from any cause denied them, saints could still help others, and even those at a distance. They could send of their abundance to minister to the poor (of which more hereafter ; or, like Epaphras, who at Rome laboured fervently in prayer for the Colossians, help the saints of God by intercessions carried on even at a distance. (Col. iv. 12.)

Thus, whether at home or abroad, in the closet or in the household, in the prison or in the assembly, believers found a sphere of service suited to their capacity, and occupied it. Speaking a word to a prisoner for Christ's sake, giving a bed to a saint, helping labouring servants on their way, throwing open their houses for the accommodation of the assembly, or on their knees in their chamber alone on behalf of others ; in these, and in various other ways, doubtless, service for the Lord's sake was carried on. Nothing was too small to be noticed ; even the washing of the saint's feet, so grateful to travellers in hot countries, the Spirit of God can mention. Grace had made them prodigal of what they had, and they freely gave of it for the glory of the Lord and the comfort and sustainment of His people.

PART VI.

REMEMBERING THE POOR.

II. COR., viii., ix.

EIGHTEEN centuries have elapsed since the Gospel of God's grace was first preached among the Gentiles. In this, the nineteenth century of our era, with the light of God's truth shining around us more brightly, must we not admit, than in any age since apostolic days, what, it may be asked, is the result? Have believers, in the main, in proportion as truth has been recovered, risen up to the standard of walk and practice of the early Christians, or do we not fall far short, too often and too generally, of what was seen in the first century? The doctrines then first taught, the mind of God then first fully unfolded, have reached to our times; and the divine Teacher, the other Comforter, abides with us as He abode with them. Miracles are no longer witnessed, nor tongues heard; but prophesyings and preaching yet remain; and we gather from the pages of

inspiration what that revelation was which acted so powerfully on the hearts of the first converts, drawing together Jew and Gentile into one common bond of brotherhood, to be henceforth not in name only but in reality, one body on earth in Christ. They did not make the bond, they did not organise a brotherhood; they owned the first, they manifested the second.

And how fully! Prayer for one another, a longing after those in the Lord known to them, a generous hospitality to individuals, the opening of houses where suited and needful for the accommodation of the Church, and acts of special service to saints characterized believers of that age, and proved that they owned their oneness in Christ. To a beautiful example and illustration of this, furnished by the facts narrated in 2 Cor. viii.-ix., we here invite our readers' attention. A season of want in Judea gave occasion for the display of this oneness, which only needed circumstances to manifest it. The cause of the distress, the social condition, the names of those needing succour, have not come down to us. Probably those who succoured them knew little

of their personal history. The names of those, who subscribed in Macedonia and Achaia to the fund raised for their relief, have not been recorded. Enough, however, about them we do know. They heard that some of God's saints, who believed on the Lord Jesus, were in pecuniary straits. That was for them sufficient. As believers on the same Lord, they owned the tie; as their fellow-believers in want, they claimed the privilege of helping them.

The *saints in want* were of Jewish origin, the saints who helped them were, for the most part certainly, of Gentile extraction. How completely in their case, the enmity between Jew and Gentile had ceased to exist! Had the apostle solicited alms from the frequenters of the Areopagus would his purse have been filled? Would Epicureans and Stoics have been moved to benevolence on behalf of distressed Jews at Jerusalem? The Greeks, whilst boasting of their supposed divine origin, would have received, doubtless with coldness, any appeal to aid Barbarians they had never seen. Still less could it have been expected that any in Macedonia would have impoverished them-

selves for the sake of famishing crowds afar from their shores. Yet these converts liberally contributed in aid of the saints in Judea.

Poor in themselves they gave what they could, up to their measure and beyond it; for "the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality." That the rich should give was not so surprising, but, that the poor should contribute liberally of their poverty, was something new to witness amongst those who had but recently been heathens. Paul had not urged them to this as a duty; no prophetic announcement from God impelled them; God's love acted on their hearts as new creatures in Christ, and beyond their power they gave for this purpose. Nor this only. So urgent were these Macedonian brethren about it, that they entreated of the apostle the grace and the fellowship of the ministry to the saints, for so we should read the passage (viii. 4)—"beseeching of us with much entreaty the grace and the fellowship of the ministry to the saints." They esteemed it a favour to share in this ministry. The forwardness of the assemblies in Achaia in this may have provoked

their zeal, but their contributions surpassed the apostle's most sanguine expectations. The favour was not in giving when asked, but in being allowed to help in the matter at all. The favour, they felt was conferred on them, when the apostle accepted their participation in this ministry. "And, not as we hoped," he writes, "but first gave their own-selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God." Herein lies the secret of ready service. The Lord had their hearts first, then all they had was for Him.

But what could be said about the assemblies in Achaia? Those in Macedonia had by this time contributed; would those in Achaia help? The question was already answered, for "Achaia," he writes, "was ready a year ago, and your zeal hath provoked very many." (ix. 2.) They had promised beforehand to contribute the bounty, *lit.* blessing. A command to such Paul had none to give. He could only advise that their contributions should be ready against the arrival of the Macedonian brethren with him, because of the forwardness of others, and to prove the sincerity of their love. A year ago, he writes, they were ready to contri-

bute, nor this only ; they were also willing. It was not forced work with these believers. Their willingness was most manifest. As a willing offering he desired their help as each was disposed in heart : for God, he reminds them, loves a cheerful giver. It was not to be a burden on any, nor a regular tribute exacted ; but saints were to help saints as each needed ; their abundance at that time should be a supply for the wants of the poor saints in Judea, as the abundance of those in Judea at another time should be a supply for the wants of the poor among the Gentiles. The stream of abundance should be directed into the channels which were most empty, "that there may be equality ; as it is written, He that had gathered much had nothing over, and he that had gathered little had no lack." How really believers on the Lord were then regarded as one body, so that what was true of Israel in the wilderness, could be true of those who belonged to different nations, and were descended from different ancestors. Israel were as one family in the wilderness, the manna was for them all. Believers in the world now form one brotherhood, so the

need of those afar off was to be ministered to as God should prosper their brethren. But observe, we have not community of goods enjoined, nor socialist principles advocated. The apostle calls the contribution "a blessing;" the Macedonians regarded the permission to join in it as a favour, and each one was asked to help as he was disposed. As God's children they were to act as God acts, bestowing blessing on those in need of it.

The collection was for the poor Hebrews, but Paul sent a Greek to get it ready. If we turn to the Acts for a list of those who accompanied him on this occasion to Jerusalem, we shall find that most were Gentiles by birth. There was something very suitable in this, and Titus, whom the apostle asked to go beforehand to Achaia, needed no pressing to undertake this work. The Achaians were ready to promise: Titus was ready to go; and, if he went it was only to finish what he had begun before, when last with them, for so we should translate, "as he had before begun, so he would also finish." (viii. 6.) He went then when asked by Paul, but he went of his own accord.

His heart anticipated the apostle's request. "He accepted the exhortation, but being more forward, of his own accord he went unto you." What joy must have filled the apostle's heart as he witnessed the forwardness of these converts.

Whence did this readiness spring? Was it the natural benevolence of the human heart bubbling up? The apostle traces it all to its right source—God. It was the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia. It was God who put the same earnest care in the heart of Titus for the Achajians, and the saints at Jerusalem would give thanks for the exceeding grace of God in their brethren in Greece. And, where all were ready about him for this good work, Paul was ready to take charge, in company with others, of their gifts, to the glory of the Lord Himself, and a witness of our [not, your] ready mind. And the motive which thus moved in concert all hearts in Greece to aid those in want in Judea was simply this, that the Lord had impoverished Himself for them. "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His

poverty might be rich." That was enough for them. What is a sufficiently powerful motive for us?

PART VII.

THE SERVICE OF WOMEN.

“IT is not good that the man should be alone ; I will make him a help meet for him,” (*lit.* a help answering to him) was the first announcement of the Lord Jehovah relative to woman’s creation, and the place she was designed to fill. Brought by God to Adam, she took her place at his side, as the helpmate of God’s providing. The fall came, and she, who was created to be man’s partner, was in consequence to be subject to her husband’s rule. From Eden they went forth, with the original relation between man and woman unchanged, and the subjection to her husband in consequence of her sin unreversed. She was, she is, man’s helpmate, however much the original reason of her creation has been lost sight of.

From the fall to the cross we hear nothing of woman’s right place in creation. The heathen

had degraded her into being man's slave. By the law she was protected from being trampled on under certain circumstances (Exod. xxi. ; Lev. xviii. 18) ; yet she never had, under the Mosaic economy, her proper place with man. But after the manifestation of the Second man, and the accomplishment of His work of atonement, the original order of creation is again adverted to, and woman regains her true place with man.

As the glory of man, she has her place by his side, who is the image and glory of God. And, though in Christ Jesus there is neither male nor female, it must be remembered that the distinction of sexes, and God's own order of creation respecting them whilst on earth, remains ever the same. "The man is not of the woman, but the woman of the man." Yet she is not to be treated as inferior to man, unfit to be his companion, unsuited for his helpmate ; for "as the woman is of the man, so is the man by the woman." Taken out of man at the first, man ever since has been indebted to her for his existence on earth. How these simple statements

of the Word, if duly pondered, would teach both their true place in relation to each other ; and, delivering the woman from that misdirected energy we see around us, lead her to fill that place intended for her by God. In personal service she finds her peculiar sphere, as in public ministry and rule the man has his place ; for, the head of the woman being the man, she is not to dishonour her head (*i.e.*, the man) by obliterating the distinction between them ; her hair given her for a covering being a standing proof, as we learn from scripture (1 Cor. xi.), of woman's due subjection to man. Into what minute points can the Spirit enter, commenting even on woman's hair, when God's order is contravened, or the welfare of God's saints imperilled.

In personal service she finds her special sphere. So when the Lord was on earth, whilst He chose His apostles, and the seventy disciples, and gave them authority respectively to go out and preach, He accepted the uncommanded and unasked ministrations of women. They ministered to them of their substance. (Luke viii. 3.) He called His disciples to public service, and made

them distribute the bread as they received it from Him. He received the proffered service of women, and was ready, though Lord of all, to be indebted to them for the supply of His own and His disciples' bodily wants. As love prompted, they rendered this service, and He as readily accepted it. After his departure we find men as sent by Him were engaged in preaching and teaching, whilst women found an ample sphere in personal service in their families, among the saints, or in helping those who were labouring in the work of God.

Do any ask what were the family duties of Christian women whether young or old? We have only to turn to Timothy and Titus to find out. (1 Tim. v. 14; Titus ii. 3—5.) If we desire to know how faithful women of old employed themselves, we have several examples handed down to us in the word. The married woman had duties to her husband and children, besides engaging in any labour of love for the saints or the Lord. The unmarried were more free to devote themselves to the things of the Lord. Beyond the range of family ties the sympathies of both could extend

themselves. In Jerusalem, Mary, the mother of John, opened her house for prayer on that memorable evening when Peter was miraculously brought out of prison. At Philippi, Lydia of Thyatira hospitably entertained Paul and his company, whilst the elect lady of 2 John received into her house those brethren that went about ministering the word. Then there was Mary who bestowed much labour on Paul, and those two women at Philippi who laboured (rather, contended) with him in the gospel. There were Tryphena and Tryphosa who were labouring in the Lord, and the beloved Persis who had laboured much in the Lord. These holy women, living in that age, and working under the immediate eye of the apostles, found plenty of scope for their energies, and plenty of opportunities for working for their Lord, without forgetting their true place with reference to their head. It was no idle life with them. They were in earnest: they were active. Mary, like her namesakes of the gospel, was forward in personal service: Persis had laboured much, and those women of Philippi worked zealously with Paul. Exactly what each did is

not recorded. Can we not see a reason for this? The service of love may vary in different places and different ages. What is needed at one time may not be needed at another. To wash the feet of the traveller in the East is grateful to the wayworn one; in the West such service is not required. Had the special work of each been enumerated, other kinds of service, rendered so willingly, and accepted gratefully, might have been thought unsuited for devoted, godly women. The special work of one is recorded—a labour in season as much in our days as in that of Peter—Tabitha made garments and coats. Of others it is only recorded that they laboured much. These received the commendation of the apostle, and along with Tabitha have their names preserved in the inspired record. Theirs was service done for the Lord's sake, and accepted by Him.

For those who could engage in a wider field of service than the home circle, or such work as Mary took up, opportunities did not fail them. They might expend time, means, and strength in serving more directly the Church. Phœbe, a servant of the church at Cenchrea, "a succourer

of many, and of myself also," as Paul writes, is an example of such. Probably a person of means, from his description of her, with time, too, at her disposal, she had addicted herself to ministering to the wants of the church at Cenchrea, and the need of individuals who might visit it. Others found a different yet equally wide sphere in which to manifest their womanly devotedness and true Christian love. The labours of such are described in 1 Timothy v. 10. Following the example of the Master they found no service too menial, if done to His saints for His sake. How refreshing to see the activity of love displaying itself in these different outlets. Love is inventive and fertile in resources, and adapts itself to all that is required.

In such different ways did Christian women find abundant occupation. Real work, healthy activity, untiring devotion, was found perfectly compatible with due subordination to her head, and the keeping in the place assigned her by God. As man's helpmate she found work to be done. At home, abroad, or in the Church, woman found a place which otherwise would have been but

indifferently provided for ; and she performed duties, suited to her nature, which none but those of her sex could so well discharge. As in Eden, so now in the work of the Lord, and in care of the saints, as well as in domestic life, the helpmate God provided is the fitting help still. Eve was not wanted to take Adam's place, but to be his help. She was not a substitute, but a partner. So women laboured with Paul in the Gospel, but not in Paul's place. Here, however, we are touching on a question which must be postponed to another time. We have briefly shewn what women did ; we hope to point out what they were forbidden to undertake.

PART VIII.

THE PUBLIC MINISTRY OF WOMEN.

“ I WILL pour out my Spirit upon all flesh : and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions. And also upon the servants, and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my Spirit.” (Joel ii. 28, 29.) Such was the language of Joel, which Peter quoted on the day of Pentecost, to shew that what took place had been foretold : not that the prophecy was fulfilled. He does not say that. He introduces it as “ This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel.” For, whilst in several places the outpouring of the Holy Ghost on Israel is predicted (Isaiah xxxii. 15 ; xliv. 3 ; Ezek. xxxix. 29), in Joel only are the Gentiles included, and that in the term “ all flesh.” And, as the Church was to be composed of souls from Jews and Gentiles made one new man in Christ, the words of the prophecy of Joel

alone explained what men that morning had witnessed.

Man, however highly favoured of God, proves himself unfit for His gifts. He receives them and misuses them. Of the misuse of temporal favours Israel is the example, who poured out on the altars of Baal what God had given them. Of the abuse of spiritual gifts the Church furnishes a proof. What patience and long-suffering mercy are manifested on the part of our God when dealing with a redeemed nation, or correcting and teaching the assembly of His saints, the Church! That sinners should abuse His gifts is not surprising; but that saints should misuse His greatest favours, shews up in a strong light what man really is. In the Romans we learn what the sinner is before God; in the Corinthians we see to what saints can descend. Coming behind in no gift, so richly endowed, they used what they had received for the display of themselves, and permitted, nay encouraged, disorders in the assembly of God.

Moral evil was allowed among them unrebuked, and a litigious spirit was unchecked. Self ram-

pant was manifested in eating of things offered to idols, and in their meetings for the Lord's supper. Spiritual gifts too were abused, and even the resurrection of the dead was denied by some. And besides these grievous disorders, women took a prominent part in the assembly, speaking in the Church, and were supported in this by some of the brethren. What is man, whether saint or sinner, when he acts according to his will? Questions once authoritatively settled are re-opened to be discussed as still undecided, and to be settled according as each one, or each school of thought, or denomination, may conclude is fitting. And scripture is unheeded, or at all events its plain decisions are set at nought, if they square not with the thoughts and wishes of the disputants.

The public ministry of women is an example of this. In evangelizing publicly the world, in teaching the Church, in leading the assembly in prayer, or in discharging the office of an elder, men were recognised in the early Church as qualified for and called to such service. Not that every man was qualified and called to such work ; but it was everywhere owned to be the work of

the men. Were women ever acknowledged and sanctioned if engaging in such service? Throughout the Acts and the Epistles there is not a hint of a woman being sent of God to preach to the world, or of hands being laid on her to have fellowship in such work. Gaius (3 John) shewed hospitality to those who went forth to preach, taking nothing of the Gentiles [or, as some would read, heathen], but those labourers are described as men. The language in which the elect lady is addressed (2 John) leads to the conclusion that men only were in contemplation; and Jude, who speaks of the apostasy, speaks clearly only of male teachers. (Ver. 4.)

As in Christ all, both men and women, shared in the outpouring of the Holy Ghost. As in the Church all were to be in subjection to the Head. Both men and women were endowed with the spirit of prophecy. Agabus and others amongst men, the four daughters of Philip the evangelist amongst women, are illustrations of this sovereign favour of God. But the possession of a gift, and the right use of it, are different things. The manifestation of the Spirit was given to every

man to profit withal; and to each the Holy-Ghost divided severally as He would. It was sovereign favour at the outset to receive any manifestation of the Spirit; and, received by those in union with the risen Head, each was to be regulated, in the assembly at least, by the commands of the Lord.

It has been observed that women were employed as the first heralds to announce the Lord's resurrection. Granted. But they were never commissioned to preach to the world about it. We know that Mary was sent by the Lord to tell His disciples of His approaching ascension. We know that the women were commissioned by the angel to advise the eleven of the empty tomb. We know that they discharged their mission faithfully. (Luke xxiv. 23.) We know that the Lord appeared to them on their way to the city, and entrusted them with a message to His brethren. (Matt. xxviii. 9, 10.) Yet we receive not the authoritative announcement of that wonderful event on the word of women. It was gracious that, since Eve was the first who gave ear to the serpent, women should be the first to announce the Lord's victory over death; but in 1 Cor. xv.

all mention of their testimony is omitted, and the proof of His resurrection is made to rest on what Cephas, James, others, and, last of all, Paul saw. Is not this silence about the women expressive? Was it forgetfulness on the part of Paul, or design on the part of the Spirit of God?

Again, the language of Psalm lxviii. 11 has been relied on to authorize female evangelists for the world. "The Lord gave the word; great was the company of those (*lit.*, the women) who published it." It will be sufficient here to remark that this psalm has reference to a future day and to a different dispensation, as it looks to the establishment of the kingdom in power through victory gained by the Lord over His enemies; and though the apostle quotes part of it in Ephesians iv. 8, his application of the words quoted, whilst shewing how much is contained in them, brings out the contrast between our time and the future which the Psalmist has in view.

If woman has no scripture authority for publicly evangelizing the world, what place has she as a teacher or speaker in the assembly of the saints? Women could prophesy, but not in the assembly

when gathered together. 1 Corinthians xi. tells us what she did, and that she should have a covering on her head when doing it. 1 Cor. xiv. tells us when she should not prophesy in any sense of the word. "Let your women keep silence in the churches; for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but let them be in subjection, as also saith the law . . . for it is a shame for a woman to speak in the church." (1 Cor. xiv. 34, 35.) It is not permitted unto them to speak, is one reason; it is a shame for them to speak in the Church, is another. How far these Corinthians had got astray! They were allowing what was unlawful; they were suffering what was shameful. Some might have pleaded ignorance of what was unlawful. Could any have pleaded ignorance of what was shameful? Here, however, men have endeavoured (where have they not?) to evade the direct teaching of the Spirit by interpreting "in the church" of what are called church meetings. To those subject to the Word such an interpretation can have no weight. The tenor of the chapter, and the use of the word "church" throughout it, forbid all thought of such a meaning. To explain

away in such a manner the apostle's injunctions is a perilous thing. On some matters mentioned in this epistle he gave his advice ; on this he made known the commandment of the Lord (ver. 37).

It is well to remark the place accorded to revelation, when the assembly met together. It took precedence of everything. If a prophet was speaking, and the Spirit revealed something to another, the first was to hold his peace. A fresh revelation from God at any moment was in season, and opportunity was to be offered for its promulgation. Yet women, even if prophets, were to be silent in the assembly. Philip's four daughters, whilst prophesying outside of the meeting, would have been disorderly if attempting to speak within it. And no plea of a divine revelation would have availed them to have averted the censure of the assembly, or of the apostle ; the Word clearly shewing that the Holy Ghost would at such a time use only the men.

Besides assembling for worship and edification, believers met for prayer. What place had the women in the general prayer meetings? That women might pray, 1 Cor. xi. tells ; but that

women must be silent in the general prayer meetings, 1 Tim. ii. makes clear. For as 1 Cor. xiv. gives us the assembly met for edification, 1 Tim. ii. gives us saints met for prayer. For whom they might pray outside the range of the Church, and their perfect freedom in prayer having been first mentioned, we have next stated who should lead in prayer, and who are to be silent. "I will therefore that the men pray everywhere." And as to public teaching before men he is equally explicit. "Let the woman learn in quietness, with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority (or, to have dominion) over the man, but to be in quietness." (1 Tim. ii. 8, 11, 12.) In the assembly she was to be silent; elsewhere, before men, to be in quietness. In such terms does he regulate such meetings. And from such we learn, that he would have regarded a female leading in prayer before men as usurping, or exercising authority over the man. How differently he viewed this from what some do in these days! But he goes further, and assigns reasons for what he has said, carrying us backward in thought to the creation, and then leading us

onward to the fall. "For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression." The very order of creation forbids her acting in such a way, as well as what took place at the fall. We should learn from the fall her unfitness for such a place; we should see from the history of creation that it never was her place.

As in public ministry, so in the ruling of a local assembly, or the ordering of things in the Church, we gather women had no place. Of local charges there were two kinds—eldership and deaconship. Both elders and deacons were to be married men, husbands of one wife. The qualifications of an elder are stated in 1 Tim. iii., and the character of such as should be appointed to the office in Titus i. In neither passage have we any mention of their wives; yet, when the qualifications of a deacon are enumerated in 1 Tim. iii., the fitting demeanour of their wives* is described. Why this difference, this silence in the one case, and the mention of them

* Some view these as deaconesses, and not necessarily the wives of deacons. Which ever view is taken, what is said above will hold good. There was a sphere in which woman could serve. There was one in which she had no part.

in the other? Was it not because in ruling the Church the elders' wives could not take part, but in the duties of a deacon, caring for the temporal wants of the saints, she could help her husband, and find herself quite at home in that work.

Again, we gather that many of the apostles were married men (1 Cor. ix.), but we have no hint in either the Acts or the Epistles of anything their wives did. They were surely a comfort and help to their husbands as they laboured ; but both apostles and elders were discharging duties in which they could not share.

As Paul suffered not a woman to teach, so none of the other apostles hint at any divergence from this order being allowed. At Corinth he corrected the evil, and we hear no more of it till we read the epistle to the angel of the church in Thyatira ; none surely will make that example a precedent for such a thing now. At Corinth, and at Thyatira, such a custom was reproved, and disallowed. Shall the commandment of the Head of the Church be set at nought? Shall the injunctions of the apostle writing under the guidance of the Holy Ghost be unheeded? Private service in

helping only the Word does not forbid. Priscilla with her husband helped Apollos. Amongst her own sex also, woman has a sphere. Only before men, and in the assembly, her place is to be kept, and God's order to be conformed to.

CONCLUSION.

IN the preceding pages it has been attempted to trace out in some slight degree the activities of a nature, foreign to man as a child of Adam, but inseparable from the one who is a child of God. It is the going forth of a new nature—the divine nature displayed in its perfection in the Lord Jesus (in whom alone it was not new) as He walked on earth, and seen in some measure in those, who by the Jews were called Nazoræans, by the Gentiles Christians, and by each other Brethren. (Acts xxiv. 5 ; xi. 26, 29.)

To deny self, to do good to their enemies, to reward good for evil, to manifest what divine love really is in their behaviour to sinners and to saints, this was the spectacle men could witness—a new, a strange, a welcome sight. But whence came this mighty change, and how was it wrought? Let us turn to the history of one who exemplified it so fully.

“Haling men and women, and committing them to prison,” had been at one time the work of Saul, his service, as he conceived it, well pleasing to God. A prisoner for the Gentiles; meeting, too, with coldness, indifference and rejection from some of those for whom he had laboured, was the portion assigned him in after years. Toil, trouble, fatigue, danger, exposure, with all these was he familiar; stripes, imprisonments, popular fury, and stoning he had experienced; yet the activity of the new nature—love—was in him unquenched, and he went forth willing to be spent on behalf of others, though the more abundantly he loved the less he was loved. Nothing could be less like the meek and lowly Son of Man than Saul on his way to Damascus; none more closely resembled the Master than Paul in his after career. He started forth on that journey from Jerusalem a child of Adam, he entered Damascus a child of God.

What wrought this change in him? Had he been fascinated with the unselfish life (as men would speak) of Him who had died on the cross? Nothing that till then he had heard of Christ, or

witnessed in His followers, had wrought any change in him. Attraction by sympathy, so as to make him unselfish like the Lord, was not the means of his conversion ; the effort of an iron will, to repress and stamp out tendencies of his heart, was not the power employed. We learn on divine authority what he had been, and he tells us himself ; we see what the change was, and he acquaints us with the manner of it. He was arrested in his mad career of persecuting the saints by the voice of Jesus Himself. That was the turning-point in his life, as he learnt that the crucified one, against whose followers he was so bitter, was in the highest glory, and knew all about him. His past and his present courses were laid bare by that searching question, which penetrated the convicted rebel's heart, "Why persecutest thou me?" To persecute and kill, had been his aim ; to seek for souls, and labour for their blessing, was henceforth his object, for he was now God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works. God's workmanship tells of a divine work, and his life ever after witnessed to the reality of it. He was changed, he was

converted, he was a new creature in Christ. What he now was, that others were also. Speaking thus of himself, he classes all believers together ; as, speaking of his natural state before conversion, he classes himself with Jews and Gentiles, as all children of wrath. “ *We are His workmanship,*” whether converted Jew or Gentile, “ *created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.*” (Eph. ii. 3—10.)

To bestow, not to receive ; to benefit others, not to be benefited by them, was the settled purpose of their life. As the Son of Man came, not to be ministered unto, but to minister, these true disciples spent themselves, their time, their energies, their substance for the welfare of others, and the advancement of the Lord’s work. Called by His name, they followed Him ; believing on Him they became like Him, being partakers of the divine nature, and indwelt by the Holy Ghost. May any unconverted soul, reading these lines, learn what is needed for this work ; and every child of God who peruses them be watchful, that the activity of the divine nature, of which

he has been made partaker, be not stifled or cramped within him.



The Sufficiency of the Written Word and the Use of It.

2 PETER III.

GOD never leaves His people without light sufficient for their way. To the patriarchs He appeared from time to time, to direct them in their pilgrim journeys : in visions too and by dreams He communicated to them His will. He appears to Isaac to forbid his contemplated descent into Egypt. He spake in visions of the night unto Jacob, to encourage him to sojourn in it. Under the law, by dreams or visions, by Urim and Thummim, or by prophets, the people of Israel received divine guidance for the circumstances in which they were placed. The law pointed out what they ought to do ; but when declension came in, prophets were raised up, to recall the people to their allegiance, to direct them at the time, and to tell them of the future. The written Word of God, as they received it, was liable at any time to be supplemented by fresh revelations communicated to a prophet, who might be of humble origin, as Amos, one of the herdmen of Tekoa ; or a member of the family of Aaron, as Jeremiah, or Ezekiel. Such a condition of things, whilst serving to impress them

with a sense of the Lord's constant care for their well-being, must have tended to keep them looking around to discover who in their midst might be next used to reveal still further His mind. The written Word was then manifestly an incomplete revelation of God's will, though, as far as it went, the people had to give heed to it, and obey it. It had an authority which none other could have, for it was God's word; yet they might lawfully look for fresh additions to be made.

With us the case is different. With the departure of the Apostles from earth all additions to the word of God ceased. All that God would have unfolded before the Lord comes for His Church has been for nearly eighteen centuries in the hands of His saints. "He who is the truth has been manifested, and has revealed the Father" (John xiv. 6). The Spirit of truth, who is the truth, is here to guide us into all the truth (John xvi. 13; 1 John v. 6); so a complete revelation it is that we possess. The word of God has been fulfilled, and none have authority to add to it; hence the marked difference between the closing injunctions of Moses and Malachi to Israel, and the last directions of the Apostles to us. Moses, in the land of Moab, near Jordan, spoke of secret things then hidden in the bosom of God, and directed the people to await the coming of the prophet like unto himself, to whom they were to hearken in all that he should say unto them. Malachi, the last prophet of the Old Testament, closes with an announcement of the coming of Elijah, the prophet, before the great and terrible day of the Lord shall come, thus intimating that fresh communications might be made from God to Israel. Paul, on the other hand, at the close of his life, bids Timothy hold fast the form of sound words which he had heard of him; advises as the corrective for the errors which were, and should be

prevalent, the preaching the Word ; and provides for the transmission of the truth, already communicated, to those who should come after. Jude exhorts believers to contend earnestly for the faith once for all delivered to the saints, in view of the approaching apostasy ; reminds them of the words before spoken by the Apostles as to the persons who would be found in the assemblies of the saints ; and brings forward a prophecy of Enoch, not before recorded in the Word, with respect to the judgment that would fall on these men. The prophecy delivered before the flood, and the teaching of the Apostles already known, were sufficient to warn the faithful as to these men and their end. John, writing to the babes in Christ, urges them to let that abide in them which they have heard from the beginning : if that abides in them they shall abide in the Son and in the Father. James, whilst adding to our knowledge of Elijah, hints not at any further revelations to be afterwards vouchsafed. And Peter says he writes "to stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance, that ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandments of us the Apostles (*or*, of your Apostles) of the Lord and Saviour." They all turn the thoughts of their converts to what has been revealed as sufficient for guidance, and all that is requisite for communion with the Father and the Son in the end, and to the end of the days.

The possession, then, of the full unfolding of God's mind from the first century of the dispensation is a feature peculiar to Christianity. Those by whom God's truth began first to be fully declared were those by whom the revelation was completed. As they passed away revelations ceased to be vouchsafed, though providential guidance, as often as needed, the child of God may reckon on receiving. A reason for

this will readily suggest itself. The proper position of the Church on earth is that of expectancy—not of a fresh prophet to arise, but of the Lord Jesus to come at any moment into the air. Though the nearness or remoteness of that hour is known only to God, it is plain such a hope could never be really embraced as imminent, if we might lawfully look for fresh messengers to be sent to reveal still more of His will. Yet the Apostles do speak of the closing days of Christendom. The future was before them, and formed the subject of most earnest and inspired exhortations, not to bid saints wait for one who would be sent to communicate wisdom and Divine guidance in times of declension, but to insist on the sufficiency of the truth then communicated to meet the errors that would be rife. After the present parenthetic period of time has passed away—after the Lord's descent into the air for His saints—God will again deal directly with the Jews, the Gentiles, and the earth, and fresh revelations will be made by the instruments of His choice (Joel ii. 28; Rev. xi. 3). Till then the written Word is the perfect directory and repository for His people. From it we learn how to live, to walk, and to fight: in it we find all the truth God is pleased to lead us into whilst on earth.

Is this word sufficient for our wants? Can we rest on it as supplying all the guidance we require? Does it so anticipate the times in which we live as to equip us to cope with the errors of the day? Some who have turned to other sources for help would answer in the negative. If we give heed to Peter we shall answer in the affirmative, and learn from the use of it, in his second Epistle, what a richly stored armoury the Bible is; for, as inspired by the Holy Ghost, in anticipation of his decease, cognisant of the errors that would be rife before the Lord's return, he not only commends the Word of God to the saints as

their guide, but shows them how to make use of it.

There is a future for God's saints as well as for the ungodly : there will be a melting of the elements by heat. He keeps these things before them. For the saints the future he speaks of is the kingdom ; for the ungodly there remains judgment and perdition ; whilst dissolution will be the end of the material creation. All these events are intimately connected with the Lord's return to earth. Now the scoffers of the last days will openly deny the coming of the Lord. Peter, looking forward by the spirit of prophecy, admonishes his readers of that which will surely come to pass, and arms them for the teaching that will be prevalent by directing them to that Word of which these scoffers are wilfully ignorant. "Where is the promise of His coming?" they will ask. In speaking thus, they turn from God's Word to His works, and draw conclusions from what they observe in opposition to what they read. "Where is the promise of His coming?" Then there is a promise. The Word in which it is preserved is acknowledged as existing, but credence to what God has said is refused. "For since the fathers fell asleep all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation." Creatures of a day, they set up their ideas as conclusive evidence of what they wish to be true. The course of nature, since the fathers fell asleep, has remained unchanged, they say ; and it must remain unchangeable is the thought of their heart. Now such reasoning may seem to some unanswerable, and the conclusions drawn from the examination of God's works irresistible ; but most material points are omitted in their calculation, viz., the origin of creation, and the power of Him who made the heavens and the earth, the sea and the fountains of waters : "For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens

were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water." Created things took their form by the fiat of the Almighty. There was a beginning to the heavens and the earth; there may surely be an end. But further, "The world that then was (the orderly arrangement of things on earth) being overflowed with water, perished." Such is the history of the past recorded in the Word. The order of nature, as men speak, has been interrupted; it may be, therefore, again.

These scoffers, reasoning from what they see, draw conclusions about what must be. The present stability of created things is for them an indication of what must ever be. We may be sure, they would say, of what must be from what has been. They speak of the beginning of creation, of the unvarying condition of things from that time to this. Peter here meets them on their own ground, and thus enables us to challenge their conclusions. He, too, can speak of the beginning of creation, and bear witness to the possibility of an interruption, as they would call it, of the unvarying order of nature. God has before interposed in judgment; He will, He must again if men refuse to hearken to His Word, and to submit to His Son. Is it strange that He should act in judgment, though it is His strange work? "He spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered into chains of darkness to be reserved unto judgment." Nor is it angels only who have felt the power of His anger, for He has dealt judicially with man also. He spared not the angels. "He spared not the old world, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly." And again, at a later date, "turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrha into ashes, He condemned them with an overthrow, making them an example unto those that after should live ungodly." These interpositions of judgment

have been, for the Word records them, and no other source of information is open to us from which to learn about them. The value of God's Word, then, is great, and just meets the silly conclusions of misguided men. What took place before the flood, and unseen by man, is first narrated by Peter and Jude. What happened when Noah was alive is circumstantially and truthfully only to be found in the Bible. The catastrophe of the days of Abraham has found no historian to record it but the lawgiver of the former dispensation.

These acts of judgment attest the power and unchangeableness of the Almighty; but the example of Sodom and Gomorrha will be lost on these foolish reasoners—scoffers at God's truth. He has punished both angels and men; no creature endowed with intelligence is beyond the reach of His arm; the fallen angels and lost souls alike await their final doom. Concerning those beings who fell—the reason of it, their present condition and future prospects, all are related clearly though concisely. What a rebuke to man's self-conceit is this account of the angels that sinned! Man thinks he knows, or can find out everything, and reasons as if he must be right, even at the expense of God's faithfulness and truth. An event of great importance is related centuries after it had occurred, and then not as a discovery just made, but as something with which the writer is quite conversant, and which men should be acquainted with, as a sure indication of God's action in the future.

If we think of this judicial intervention of the Almighty, all the oft-repeated assertions that mercy and love are attributes of the Divine Being at variance with the thought of God as a judge, are at once shown to be worthless; and, if we remember His statements about the flood, and the destruction of the cities of the plain, all the reasoning of ungodly

men from the supposed unchangeableness of created things is immediately refuted. We cannot read Peter or Jude and believe that God is too merciful to act in judgment. We cannot accept God's account of the flood and the cities of the plain, and affirm that the order of nature cannot be subjected to any deviation from its accustomed path.

But we rest not here, nor stand on deductions, however clear and true. We have not only discovered to us (in Gen. i.) what took place when the creation of man was still a thing of the future, but we have revealed, in this same Word, the coming judgment, and the manner and extent of it. "By the Word of God were the heavens of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water." Peter never witnessed this, yet he speaks of it as fully competent to declare it, and as perfectly acquainted with the subject in hand. He wrote these words, yet they are not his; he was the scribe, but the Holy Ghost is the Author, who sets forth what really was, and what will yet be seen. By the Word of God the heaven and the earth were created; by "that same Word are they kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men." How the littleness of man is at once made apparent when these subjects are brought forward! He can discover, for that is within the range of his mental powers, that vast changes have passed over this globe; but its origin and destined end are both equally beyond his ken; for his knowledge of both the one and the other he must consent to be indebted to revelation. There are subjects with which a child may be familiar, which all the learning of man could never find out. Thus Peter takes us to the written Word—the weapon given us to wield under the teaching of the Spirit. We need weapons when in conflict, and we need to learn how to use them. Peter here shows us what

the weapon is, and showing us, too, how to wield it, *makes plain the value of the sword which is put into our hand.* Like the smooth stone of David's choice—a missile of God's providing—instead of the armour of Saul (instruments of man's devising), we have, in the Word of God, a sword which demolishes at one stroke all the finely-spun web of the enemy. The heavens and the earth will pass away when the fire of Divine judgment shall be kindled. At the flood, the world that then was perished. By and by the earth and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Nothing that has been seen could lead man to look for this. As ever with God, He has resources within Himself, and methods of acting peculiar and unthought of by us.

The ungodly were willingly ignorant of the Word. Peter would not let the saints be ignorant of this one thing—that years with the Eternal One are as a moment. "One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." If the disobedient deny the possible fulfilment of His promise, believers must remember that it is His promise (ver. 9). And here the Apostle reminds us of what is involved in the assertion of these scoffers, as he takes up the language of the prophetic scriptures, and connects His coming, which these will deny, with the day of the Lord—a theme so frequently dwelt on. Are the statements of the Old Testament as to that day to be discarded? Impossible! "The day of the Lord will come as a thief, in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat: the earth also, and the works that are therein shall be burned up." Such, in substance, have been the predictions of the prophets (Psalm cii. 26; Isaiah li. 6, lxvi. 22), which the Apostle affirms will have a most literal accomplishment. He had spoken, in the first chapter of

this epistle, of the prophetic scriptures of the Old Testament as a light shining in a dark place, to which they should give heed, till the day dawn and the day star arise in their hearts. If they hearkened to these scoffers they must abandon all this, and be as a vessel on the ocean, without a rudder or a compass. It might seem but a little thing to give up one point about the future. But surrendering one is really surrendering all, because each prophecy is but a link of one great chain. If the promise of His coming was given up, the hopes of the day of the Lord and all connected with it must be abandoned likewise. It is well to see this, and learn what really is involved in the question of these unbelievers.

Keeping to the written Word we can meet these men, and resist them; but we can do more. Amid the dissolving of the heavens by fire, and the melting of the elements by fervent heat, we can, by faith, descry new heavens and a new earth, taking shape according to the will of the Creator. "We, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth." He has promised to come; He has promised new heavens and a new earth. God has graciously engaged Himself, in an immutable way, to perform what the Word speaks of. How far from God must souls be when they throw discredit on His promises.

But the Word proceeds further, and gives us the characteristic of that blessed future, abiding righteousness. Injustice, fraud, oppression, lawlessness, characterise our day; abiding righteousness will characterise the eternal state, "according to His promise." Here is a foundation for the soul to stand on. Created things, however stable they may appear, will be dissolved and burnt up, for He has promised to return to earth, after which these judgments will be executed. New heavens and a new earth shall be made and

remain for ever, for He has promised this likewise (Isaiah lxvi. 22). And here is the true solution of what would otherwise be incomprehensible. Could we suppose Satan could mar God's fair creation, and thwart His designs for ever? That would be to exalt Satan above God. So, if any are stumbled by the present success of the enemy, they have only to turn to the Word, and there learn the end of it all. He who once created the heavens and the earth will act again. He who was seen in the beginning by His works to be God will be seen at the end to be the same. Divine power will again be put forth, and new heavens and a new earth appear, never to be defiled by the hateful presence of the evil one.

As to the past and the future, our only guide is the written Word. But what of the present? Shall these scoffers ensnare souls because the Lord tarrys, and use with success the fact of the delay as an argument which shall throw the unwary off their balance? Here, too, the Word comes in, and Peter shows us the value of it. It reveals the reason of the delay. The Apostle states it in verse 9, and refers to the epistles of Paul in confirmation of it (verse 15). It is not to tradition, or the voice of the church, or the deductions of men, however holy they might be, that he would direct us; but as he has taught us the value of the written Word he would still direct us to it, as he adduces the writings of Paul in witness of the truth, "that the long-suffering of the Lord is salvation." It is not slackness to fulfil His promise that causes the apparent delay, not indifference, but long-suffering—not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. This is the true key to His long tarrying, to which all would do well to take heed. For whilst of the fallen angels we read of none that were spared, God did preserve Noah and his family through the flood, and delivered Lot and

his two daughters, and would have saved all his family if they had been willing. For fallen man there is a way of escape from the impending doom, and hence the Lord tarries. Thus not only the acts of God are the subjects of revelation, but His motives too; for, as we could not divine beforehand how He would act, nor discover without a revelation what He did before man was created, we should never have discerned the real reason of the continuance of the Lord's absence. Of the past, the present, and the future, we learn from the written Word; and the past affords a clue to the future, because it is the acting of God, not of man, the sport of circumstances, with which we are concerned.

And, as this Word is a guide to God's counsels, so, when speaking of these scoffers, it furnishes us with the explanation of their opposition; they walk after their own lusts—self, not the Lord Jesus, is their object. The Lord shut out of their heart, they would exclude Him from His place on earth, and persuade others that His coming, taught by the Apostles, cannot take place. The secrets of their actions being exposed, the needed corrective is supplied to the saints. Seeing that the dissolution of created things will take place, holy conversation and godliness should be manifested. The scoffers may scoff at the thought of His return; the righteous should look for and hasten His coming, and, forewarned of the errors that would be abroad, they should grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Thus using the Word, as Peter teaches us, what a thought it suggests of the wisdom, power, and grace of God. He knew eighteen hundred years ago what Satan would suggest to men in the end of the days, and supplied His people, by the written Word, with the fitting armcur. His power as exercised, His power as it will be exercised, are traced out before us,

and the reason of His apparent non-intervention in the affairs of earth is made known.

Outside the limits of revelation we need not travel for weapons with which to contend with these enemies to the truth, nor for a shield with which to defend ourselves from their assaults: all has been foreseen and provided for. With such a guide, the living and abiding Word of God, whilst we can track God's steps in the past, and learn the reason of the Lord's continued absence, we await with fullest confidence and certainty God's action in the future; and, where all is dark to the man of the world, there is light for the simple believer.

