

The Kingdom and the House.

Notes of an Address at Highgate.

By S. J. B. CARTER.

G. MORRISH,
20, PATERNOSTER SQUARE,
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(ECCLES. IV. 4-16 ; V. 1-7.)

I WANT to speak a little on the kingdom and the house, presenting it in a somewhat new setting. One might think the Book of Ecclesiastes a strange book to go to concerning the kingdom and the house ; but as regards quotations in the New Testament, nothing is more striking than the way in which the Spirit of truth searches, as it were, the Old Testament to find in some out-of-the-way corner that which shall illustrate New Testament life and doctrine. So we can learn something about the kingdom and the house even from such a unique book as the Book of Ecclesiastes.

THE KINGDOM.

“ Better is a poor and a wise child than an old and foolish king, who will no more be admonished.” There you get the thought of the kingdom suggested. We know who the poor and wise child was, we know how poor He was ; born in a manger, working at the humble trade of a carpenter. “ The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests ; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.” That is what He said. When He wanted a

penny He had to ask for it—"Shew me a penny." We know how He became afterwards the "poor, wise man," spoken of later on in this book, who by His wisdom delivered the city in which He dwelt. He was not only poor, but He was wise. He was the living exemplification of the wisdom of God. Wise He was, yet how poor! He was born poor in His kingdom (see New Trans.) and yet we have Him coming out of the prison house—out of hades—"to reign."

We know too who "the old and foolish king" was, "who will no more be admonished." I daresay all of us have tried our hand, more or less, at admonishing him, but we have found out that he "will no more be admonished." The cross proved that sad fact. For four thousand years God was testing man in the flesh, but in the death of Christ he proved himself to be hopelessly incorrigible. "Our old man has been crucified with him," says the apostle—there you get the old and foolish king—"that the body of sin [there you get it again, sin in its totality] might be annulled, that we should no longer serve sin." The old and foolish king who will no more be admonished is very much in evidence around us in the world system. He is a tyrant outside. The apostle says, "Sin hath reigned unto death" (Rom. v. 21), and then he goes on to say, "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof." (Rom. vi. 12.) He may and does reign without,

but he must not reign within. Let us then deal with him as God has dealt with him, write the judgment of God upon him. "Our old man has been crucified with him, that the body of sin might be annulled, that we should no longer serve sin"; that is doctrine or light, but when we come to the experimental side, to our side, what does the apostle say? "They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts." (Gal. v. 24.) This means painful experience. But we must learn what the flesh is through such exercises.

The poor wise child is seen in prison and death. Then He comes out in glory to take His kingdom. He comes out of His prison to reign, that is what is going to be by-and-by. What comes in between? "The second child that shall stand up in his stead." The second child is the assembly. A child suggests a new generation altogether. The assembly is composed of a new genus, and takes the place of the poor and wise child who has been cast out of His kingdom, for which He was born. This is what is going on now. The only moral representation of the poor and wise child is found in the saints. The assembly may have failed as a whole, yet it remains for those who are in the light of it to seek to perpetuate the Christ. We need to remember that we are here in His stead; we are here to represent Him. The apostle, you know, in writing to the Corinthians, speaks of "the Christ" (1 Cor. xii.)—the anointed Vessel. The moral,

beautiful features of Jesus should come out in the anointed vessel.

Now Solomon "considered all the living which walk under the sun, with the second child that shall stand up in his stead," and he found that there was no comparison whatever—no comparison at all! All under the sun cannot be compared with the second child. There is nothing here like the church. The saints are still the delight of the heart of Christ, they are the excellent of the earth, in whom He finds His good pleasure. Beloved brethren, let us make very much of the saints, very much of the church, that is to say, of *Christ in the saints*. The assembly is here, the "one basket" (Exo. xxix. 1-3) is here, and there is no comparison between the vessel of testimony and all others under the sun. Should we put all under the sun, the wisest and the most excellent the world can produce, with the saints of God, they can bear no comparison.

Now the kingdom comes before the house. It has been well said that the kingdom is the bulwark of the house. David established the kingdom, and then Solomon built the house. What would have been the use of Solomon building the house if the kingdom had not been established? It would have been at the mercy of every foe who might come against the house. So we must in our own soul's history be established in the kingdom before we can come into the good and gain of the

house. There is the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God. The kingdom of heaven is the kingdom viewed dispensationally, and the kingdom of God is the same kingdom viewed morally. The greater is the kingdom of God. (1 Cor. xv. 28.) Generally speaking the kingdom of God is more inward and the kingdom of heaven is more outward. The kingdom of heaven now is for us the practical recognition by us of the rule of the Man in the heavens. That Man has been rejected and cast out of His kingdom down here. But if we are in the reality of the kingdom, we own His sway. Then the kingdom of God is always connected with the Spirit. It is very noticeable that the kingdom of God is not mentioned unless the Spirit is brought in. It means the sway of the Spirit of God in our souls. If we enjoy the blessedness of the kingdom, we shall stand for the rights of Christ here; we shall stand for those rights day by day; we shall shew to others whose we are and whom we serve. In a scene of anarchy and lawlessness we shall not be afraid of putting on our uniform, and of shewing our colours, and that although the world may reject Him, yet we still own the authority of the Man in the heavens. When that takes place, then when we touch the house, when we come together, we have wonderful times.

But there is another kingdom here (solemn thought) besides the kingdom we have spoken about. The Lord called it Satan's kingdom.

“If Satan . . . be divided against himself, how shall his kingdom stand?” said Jesus. Satan has his kingdom here. He has his agents here too, and we need to take account of the moral elements that come out in his emissaries. We need not go very far in order to find them. We find them in ourselves, and we must write death upon them. So Solomon speaks here of four men. He speaks of the *emulative* man, of the *idle* man, of the *contentious* man, and of the *isolated* man. These men are the base tools of the old and foolish king who will no more be admonished, and we must deal with them as we deal with him, and write death upon them.

THE EMULATIVE MAN.

Solomon looked round and he saw success, worldly success, but he said that his conclusion of the matter was this, that it was all based on selfishness and jealousy. “That for this,” said he, “a man is jealous of his neighbour.” (New Trans.) We know how true this is. We know business men try to get the best of one another. It is inherent in the world system. One of the “works of the flesh” is emulation. (Gal. v. 20.) F. E. R. used to say, “The world system is based upon selfishness.” Now, this spirit of emulation, the desire to get to the top, should not come in amongst us. The man who wants to get to the top in the assembly is not fit to be there. There are three powers that may give a man

a place in the assembly of God—money power, mental power, moral power. It is the last that counts with God.

A man may get a place in the assembly because he has money. Then there is mental power. A man may have ability, may have a good memory, be able to pick up things very quickly, and have a ready tongue, able to give them out. Money power and mental power may get a man a place in the assembly, but sooner or later each finds his moral level. There is no place like the assembly of God to bring us down to our true moral level. It is what is moral that counts with God. So let us guard against emulation and seeking to be somebody or everybody. Let us be content to be nobody. Beloved brethren, let us not seek to get to the top, let us be content, like Jacob, to lie at the foot of the ladder, and then by-and-by we shall get to the top, but it will be God who will put us there. In those memorable verses in the second chapter of Paul's letter to the Philippians, we have seven downward steps that Jesus took. He went down, down, down until He came to death, even the death of the cross. If it is a question of going down, we must, like Him, do it of our own accord, for "*He humbled himself.*" Then if we take the "lowest seat" He may say, "Friend, go up higher." Christ always knows where to find His friends. He finds His friends in the lowest seats. Said the Lord, "Sit down in the lowest room ["seat" it means]; that

when he that bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee, Friend, go up higher."

But when it is a question of *exaltation*, then it is what God does. "Wherefore *God* also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow." You get seven steps in His exaltation, and God does it all for Him. So that if it is exaltation, I have got to leave myself in the hands of God. "Humble yourselves . . . under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time." We need more of the spirit of a little child.

How instructive it is that the system, the organism, that is spoken of as standing up in the stead of the poor and wise child is spoken of as "the second child." When the Lord wanted to teach a lesson of humility, He called a little child unto Him and set him in the midst. He put him in the place that He Himself had occupied, or as another gospel has it, "He set him *by him*"—identified him with Him. There you get the second child, as it were, standing up in the stead of the poor and wise child. He set him in the midst. Christ took a living text. If needs be He could have gone to the Old Testament scriptures and He could have gathered together a score or more of written texts to illustrate the lesson of humility He wanted to inculcate. But He wanted a living text, and He wants it still. Suppose He were to come into this hall to-night and desire

to illustrate before our eyes what true humility really is, whom would He choose? Would He choose me? I am afraid not. I should go right into the back. Whom would He choose? I will tell you. He would choose the one who is the least of the least in his own eyes; that is the one He would choose.

Jesus, before He started His little sermon, took the little child in His arms. Why did He do that? I think the little boy began to weep. He was in the midst of a big crowd. He felt strange, he began to weep. The Lord dried his tears and hushed his fears by taking him into His arms. Oh, he was at rest there. I feel quite certain that if he had shed tears before, those tears were dried when he found himself in the arms of Jesus. We can know what it is to be "safe in the arms of Jesus" now, but we must become as the little child. The Lord could not have taken a big man into His arms, could He? That little child represents the one the Lord still takes in His arms—the living text He needs.

THE IDLE MAN.

Now we pass on from the emulative man, the man who wants to be big and who wants to be thought much of, and who may be jealous if a brother comes along and gets his place. We pass on from him to the *idle* man. "The fool," says Solomon, "foldeth his hands together and eateth his own flesh." If we do that, we need not think that heaven

will drop down into our laps. If we are to enjoy heaven now, it must be the result of exercise. If we fold our hands together, that will shew that we are not diligent. "He eateth his own flesh"—a kind of hyperbole, but very telling. Suppose you were to starve yourself, you might live for a week, or weeks, but you would get thinner and thinner. How would you live? By eating yourself. You would be feeding upon that which was produced in you by past nourishment. It is a poor thing if we are feeding upon what we have had in the past. We need a present ministry. We need something fresh for our souls every day. So day by day we must get food; day by day we must get nourishment. We ought to get something fresh.

My brother, my sister, what have you got fresh from God to-day? Have you got anything out of your Bible or from some fresh manifestation of Jesus. (John xiv. 21.) We believe in ministry, past and present, we value it, but a simple saint, however simple, who goes to his knees, or to his Bible and opens it in dependence upon the Spirit of truth, will get something direct from God for his soul. Have you ever known what it is to tingle from tip to toe because you have seen something in the scripture you never saw before? Have you got on your knees and seen in a vision some fresh beauty and glory in Jesus? Oh, we need to guard against the idle man, who kneels listlessly or opens the Bible with a

yawn and reads it as a task, and closes it, maybe, with a sense of relief. No, that will not do. We must have diligence, as the apostle says to Timothy: "*Meditate* upon these things" (there you get the feeding), "give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting [or progress] may appear to all." If my progress appears to myself, it will soon cease to be progress. Others ought, however, to notice our progress, and they will if we are diligent.

THE CONTENTIOUS MAN.

Now we come to the *contentious* man. What does Solomon say about him? "Better is an handful with quietness, than both the hands full with travail and vexation of spirit." The thought of the meat offering comes in here. (Lev. ii.) The hand may be small or medium-sized or large, but it ought to be full—the hand that is stretched forth in order to get Christ. "Better is an handful with quietness, than both the hands full with travail and vexation of spirit." The Corinthians had both hands full. They were a richly endowed assembly, but there was travail and vexation of spirit. Why? Because the contentious man was there: "If any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God." (1 Cor. xi. 16.) And why was the contentious man there? Because the contentious woman was there. "It is better to dwell in a corner of the house-top," says Solomon, "than with a brawling woman and in

a wide house." Brawling there means "contentious." (New Trans.) Corinth was a wide house. It was a very big meeting, but the brawling woman was there. The woman represents what is *subjective*. We are not talking literally now about women or about men; we are talking in figures. The man represents what is objective, he is responsible, but then in the woman we get the innate and inward principle that prompts what is outward and objective. In Corinth there was the spirit of contention. So when the saints came together they could not eat the Lord's supper, because there were contentions among them. The contentious man was there. Let us guard against that man.

"The servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men." As soon as ever I begin to strive about a matter I cease to contend for the truth, and I really begin to contend for myself. It is useless to strive, it is most unseemly. I have had men come up to me, dear men connected with meetings that we cannot walk with, and they have wanted to argue the point. "No," I have said, "I cannot argue. If you come to me in an inquiring spirit and ask me about my position and the way the Lord has led me, I will endeavour, in deep humility of spirit, to shew you; but if you come to me and say, 'Now we will join issues, which is right and which is wrong?' I say, 'No, we cannot go on those lines.'" But there is prone to be contention

amongst *us*, is there not? There has not been for years amongst us such perfect oneness about doctrine and ministry as now. But the enemy attacks locally and morally, seeking to bring in contention—the contentious man—into local companies.

THE ISOLATED MAN.

Now we come to the isolated man. Oh! this man is a wretched man. He is the man who stands alone. Perhaps he boasts that he stands alone. One said to me not long ago: “I stand alone; I believe that everything is rack and ruin in the church, and that now it is simply an individual pathway.” I said to him, “My dear fellow, do you not know that nine-tenths of the exhortations contained in Christianity have to do with our relations one with another?” He said, “What do you mean?” I said, “Take this, ‘Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace,’ how can you obey that exhortation if you stand alone?”

But we must beware of isolating ourselves, even if we do not go out of fellowship, as the expression goes. We must beware of keeping at a distance from our brethren. They may give us some hard knocks. I know I have had some. But we need them. Everything does us good, even though it be unjust censure, if we take it in the right spirit. I was reading a little bit by J. B. S. in which he said he traced many of his failures in his christian

career to this, "That I have kept at a distance from my brethren, and from the basin and the towel." If such a man could talk in that way, surely it ought to be a lesson for us.

"There is one alone, and there is not a second; yea, he hath neither child nor brother." This means that he has none to lavish his affections upon. How crude, not to say hard, a man gets who isolates himself from his brethren. He has none to expend his affections upon, neither brother nor child, for he keeps them both at a distance, "yet there is no end of all his labour," that is to say, there is really no purpose in it. "Neither is his eye satisfied with riches"—he is just like the miser gloating over his gold, but he does not use it for the good of others. But the worst of it is he will not own it: "Neither saith he, For whom do I labour, and bereave my soul of good? This is also vanity, yea, it is a sore travail."

Now we come to something better: "Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour"—there you get *service*. Then we have *walk*: "If they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up." The brother who stands alone goes down; he has no one to help him up. How blessed to help a brother up when he falls. I think that one of our most humiliating failures is this, the lack that exists amongst us of *restorative grace*! So that if a man goes outside, in nine cases out of ten

he is lost to us for all time. How sad! We ought to seek to help a brother up when he is in a ditch. Perhaps he is young yet, he has been getting on too quickly, and lo! he stumbles—"overtaken *in* a fault." (Gal. vi. 1.) He has learnt scripture and truth. He has a good memory, able to retain ministry, and able to give it out too. But he has got on too quickly. The head has inclined beyond the feet. By-and-by down he goes, there he is in the ditch, and he has to remain there till "the spiritual" overtake him. Then what do they do? Full of priestly grace, they restore such an one in the spirit of meekness, considering themselves.

Now we have *fellowship*: "Again, if two lie together, then they have heat"—that is fellowship surely, the warmth of divine affections. "How can one be warm alone?" "If one prevail against him [that is, alone (New Trans.)], two shall withstand him; and a three-fold cord is not quickly broken." So we have this three-fold cord, we have one, we have two, and we have three. Three means fulness, divine fulness, in testimony. When we get a three-fold cord, it is not quickly broken.

THE HOUSE.

Now a few words on the house. The first mention of the house was in the case of Jacob. "This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven," said he. The house of God is not heaven, is it? but it is

the nearest place to heaven. When we get into the house we are very near to heaven. It only needs a step and we find ourselves inside. It is very noticeable that in Jacob's case there was no material structure, and there was no company. Jacob was there alone. God always keeps to His original thought as regards every truth, and the original thought of the house of God was intensely spiritual. Jacob felt, God is here. So you know Peter speaks of the house of God as "a spiritual house." But then, long before Jacob spoke of the house, we find Enoch predicting the kingdom. "Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, to execute judgment upon all," and so the kingdom comes before the house. The Melchisedec priesthood, the royal priesthood connected with the kingdom, was existent centuries before the Aaronic priesthood, the holy priesthood connected with the house, came into being. And so again we say, the kingdom always comes before the house.

"Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God"—not when you get inside, but when you go to it. The assembly now is provisionally the house of God. It is the church in its broadest character. But the thought of the house of God can surely be localised. Normally speaking, the mind and purpose of God in the house universally should be reflected in any and every assembly of the saints locally. (1 Tim. iii. 15.) So that, al-

though we have nothing material before us, yet we imbibe the spirit of the Psalmist, do we not, on Lord's day morning. "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord." But we need to watch our feet: "Keep thy foot." The foot, mark you, the walk. Then the ear, "Be more ready to hear than to give the sacrifice of fools." Then the mind—"consider." The lips too—"Be not rash with thy *mouth*." Then the heart, "and let not thine *heart* be hasty to utter anything before God."

Now we are viewing the house locally. I think it is admissible to view it locally, as the apostle does in writing to Timothy. He says, "that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth." In the Greek there are no articles before any of the nouns except in the last instance. Timothy had to learn how to behave himself when he found himself among the assembly of the saints. Paul speaks of the house characteristically—the local characterised by the whole.

Like Jacob we can get a vision in the house. We have it here spoken of as a dream. "A dream cometh through the multitude of business," or exercise. That is how God communicated His mind to saints in the days of old. Now, with God's mind made known in His word, it is not exactly that, although I am quite sure that the mind of God is learnt from

God by divine intuition. It is very blessed indeed to be able to give out in ministry what one has learned in one's soul in that way. "A dream"—you get into an ecstasy, you get into an out-of-the-world condition, you get in touch with the oracle, you are in the holiest, you "behold the glory of the Lord." Thank God for His word. Everything must be tested by it. Yet sometimes we get in communion with God when the Bible is shut, that which we did not get when the Bible was open. Scripture is a check upon our thoughts, otherwise we may wander into the sphere of imagination—a real danger of pious souls. So it is written again that "In the multitude of dreams and many words there are also divers vanities." We have to beware of these divers vanities and keep close to our Bibles. "Many words"—that is ministry. How important what James says, "Be not many teachers, my brethren, knowing that we shall receive the greater judgment. For we all often offend." How slow one ought to be to minister. I do not mean as regards time, I mean as regards the state of one's soul. One feels it; every brother who is constantly ministering feels it. The danger is that we may traffic in unfelt truth, and many vanities come in. I like to apply all I say to others to myself. Let us realise more and more that in many things we all offend.

But then we have something else in connection with the house of God, and that is a

vow. "When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it." Three times we read of paying it. The principle of the vow comes into Christianity, do you not think so? How many resolutions have you made when you have got before God? How many have you broken? God always holds us to our resolution. He held Jacob to it. Jacob at Bethel said if God would bless him as He desired to bless him, "then shall the Lord be my God . . . and of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee." God held him to it, and when he got back to Bethel twenty years afterwards, that vow was renewed. And so with Peter, he told the Lord that he was ready to go to prison and to death. Well, the Lord held him to that, and you know what his end was, he did go to prison and to death for Christ's sake. "Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself." The original expression used by John, according to the Septuagint, means a vow of abstinence, like the Nazarite vow.

There are two sacraments in Christianity which partake of the nature of a vow—baptism, and the Lord's supper. Bear with me if I speak of them as sacraments. A sacrament of old was the oath that a Roman soldier took to his flag, an oath of fealty. So we can well understand that in those persecuting days baptism and the Lord's supper got to partake of the character of a sacrament. If you do not like the word, use another. Let us say that both

in baptism and the Lord's supper there is the thought of *committal*. In baptism some one else commits me to the death of Christ. When I arrive at responsible years and I learn the truth of baptism, then I am responsible. In the Lord's supper I commit myself. It is very solemn. Have we been baptised? I suppose the great mass of us have been baptised. Do we feel that in our baptism there was committal? In baptism we are buried before we die. In the ordinary case of nature, we die before we are buried, but the apostle says, "Buried with him by baptism unto death." When we were baptised we were committed to the death of Christ. We were buried in order to die, in order to absolutely refuse everything that is morally inconsistent with the death of Christ. How solemn! Have you got a family? Your boy or girl comes to you and wants to go somewhere or do something that is not right. Can you say: "In your baptism I committed you to the death of Christ, and so, my dear child, while you are under my authority, I must refuse for you everything that morally I refuse for myself which is not consistent with His death." I am referring to moral questions of right or wrong. Children have their own pursuits. We know that Puritanic or legal piety will not do in our households. At the same time, we need to hold our children as we hold ourselves.

In the Lord's supper there is committal

likewise, only we commit ourselves. We commit ourselves to His death. His death lies heavily upon our souls when we come together to eat the supper. We commit ourselves to the fellowship of His death. Oh! let us day by day be consistent with it. Let us not compromise that fellowship. The supper teaches us even more keenly than baptism, for it is a week by week committal.

Now just a word on the house adornments. Piety adorns the house. "Fear thou God" (chap. v. 7)—that is *piety*. It is what the Apostle Peter calls godliness. In Timothy J. N. D. translates the original word, "piety"; and in Peter, "godliness," shewing that the two things are really one and the same. Well, we need piety, do we not? It does not matter how big a meeting may be, how much gift and intelligence there are, and how much the saints may be thought of elsewhere, if there is not piety, sooner or later the "biting and devouring" will take place. If the "staff, Beauty" (piety) is broken, the "staff, Bands" (unity) is soon snapped, and the brotherhood between Judah and Israel is lost. (Zech. xi.) "Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us," says the Psalmist. If the beauty of Christ is not resting upon us, if there is not piety or godliness, we shall prove that when the staff of beauty is broken, the staff of bands soon follows, and the biting and devouring of one another. (Zech. xi. 9; Gal. v. 15.)

Supporting Solomon's temple (1 Kings vii.)

there were two mystic pillars, "Jachin" and "Boaz." "He shall establish," and "In him is strength"—Christ, you say? Yes, but Christ in the saints, for the house represents the saints.

On the summit of those pillars were the "two chapters of molten brass," beautifully adorned. There was the "*lily* work," indicative of stateliness and uprightness, and Christ-like purity; the "*network*," what would cover and be *protective*; the "*chain* work"—that which binds saints together, the chains of love; and we have also the "*checker* work," the lovely and all-varied moral graces of Jesus coming out in His loved ones. What a privilege it is to be able to beautify the house of God, and, like the pillars of old, to help to hold it up to be seen and admired by others. When the Lord comes He will indeed be "admired IN [not only by, but *in*] all them that believe." (2 Thess. i. 10.) But surely His divine handiwork *in* the saints now should in some measure be admired—and it is!

S. J. B. C.