

THE "HOLD-FAST" BOOKLETS.

The Building of the Wall:

BEING THE SUBSTANCE OF AN ADDRESS
ON NEHEMIAH.

BY
ALEXANDER STEWART.

"Prove all things; Holdfast that which is good."

GLASGOW:
PICKERING & INGLIS, 73 BOTHWELL STREET.
LONDON:
S. BAGSTER & SONS, Ltd., 15 Paternoster Row, E.C.
12 for 1/; 50, 4/; 100, 7/; post free.

ONE PENNY.



THE BUILDING OF THE WALL:

THE SUBSTANCE OF AN ADDRESS ON

NEHEMIAH.



THIS is one of two special opportunities that we have in the year of bringing before you truth concerning the Church of God. We have among us, from week to week, the preaching which has regard to individual salvation, but we are not merely saved units, we are members of a body; and I wish to speak now of what concerns us as such.

It is true that young believers are occupied, almost exclusively, with the great deliverance they have just realised. They see the blood of the Lamb, and little more. But we are not all young believers; and while we firmly hold, and greatly rejoice, in the salvation of God, we should understand that salvation is, in one sense, but the beginning of our course, and be reaching forward to those things

which are before. We should not be sitting on the doorstep. We should be taking our place in the house, and at the table. We have been introduced into a new family, and we ought to be inquiring how we should conduct ourselves therein.

OUR POSITION.

Suppose a man shipwrecked, and cast on an island. He crawls up the sand, and lays himself down exhausted. There is room in his mind for only one thought. He is filled with an overwhelming sense of deliverance. But let this man have a sound night's rest, and be told on awaking that the island on which he has been thrown is his own, we shall not expect him to go down and lie on the sand, hugging the rocks of the shore. We may be sure he will be found exploring this possession into which no merit of his own has brought him, inquiring as to its resources, and seeking to know how it should be governed.

We are somewhat in the position of such a man. God in His grace has awaked us from our sleep of death, and shown us Jesus on the Cross, a sacrifice for sin. He has taught us, that through His precious blood we have redemption, and has made us to joy exceedingly in the knowledge that our sins are forgiven. But He has further taught us.

that being saved, we are become members of the body of Christ, and led us to inquire how we ought to behave ourselves in His house, in the Church of the living God.

Here perplexity begins. What are we to do? Where are we to go? We see around us confusion : the Church, so-called, overrun by the world, using unscriptural practices, and departed from scriptural order. We find ourselves, in fact, very much in the condition of Israel in the last chapter of 2nd Chronicles, their temple burned, their city overthrown, and themselves captives in a strange land.

ISRAEL'S HISTORY.

The history of that nation is a great lived-out parable, in which we may see, not obscurely, the history of the Church of God. Having been brought out of Egypt, and into the land of promise, they rejected God from being their king, and desired a king to judge them, like the nations. This was in the days of Samuel. God fulfilled their desire, by giving them Saul, but afterwards brought David, the man after His own heart, to the throne. Kingly rule continued, with many vicissitudes, for a long period, but miserably ended, as narrated in the chapter to which I have referred—2 Chron. xxxvi. There we read (ver. 1-4)—“Then the people of the land took Jehoahaz, the son of Josiah, and made

him king in his father's stead in Jerusalem, Jehoahaz was twenty and three years old when he began to reign; and he reigned three months in Jerusalem. And the king of Egypt put him down at Jerusalem, and condemned the land in an hundred talents of silver and a talent of gold. And the king of Egypt made Eliakim, his brother, king over Judah and Jerusalem, and turned his name to Jehoiakim. And Necho took Jehoahaz, his brother, and carried him to Egypt."

The ruler of God's people is put down by the king of that land from which long ago Israel had been delivered. More than this, his successor is appointed, and the very name of that successor changed, by the same foreign power. Is it necessary to point out a parallel to this, in what is called the Church?

Again we read (ver. 5-7)—"Jehoiakim was twenty and five years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem; and he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord his God. Against him came up Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, and bound him in fetters, to carry him to Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar also carried off the vessels of the house of the Lord to Babylon, and put them in his temple at Babylon." And to crown the whole (ver. 16-20)—"They mocked the messengers of God, and despised His words, and misused His prophets, until

the wrath of the Lord arose against His people, till there was no remedy. Therefore He brought upon them the king of the Chaldees, who slew their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion upon young man or maiden, old man, or him that stooped for age; He gave them all into his hand. And all the vessels of the house of God, great and small, and the treasures of the house of the Lord, and the treasures of the king, and of his princes; all these he brought to Babylon. And they burnt the house of God, and brake down the walls of Jerusalem, and burnt all the palaces thereof with fire, and destroyed all the goodly vessels thereof. And them that had escaped from the sword carried he away to Babylon, where they were servants to him and his sons, until the reign of the kingdom of Persia."

This is the end of rule in Israel. One king carried to Egypt, another to Babylon, and finally, the people themselves carried into captivity.

Now, under the names of these three places—Egypt, Sodom, and Babylon—we may see the *world* set forth typically in the Scriptures. In Egypt we may perceive the world as we speak of it, pure and simple—the worldly world—wise, rich, and well fed, encompassing us on every side; in Sodom, the unclean, sensual world; in Babylon,

beautified with the vessels of God's house, the religious world.

THE PRESENT CONDITION OF THE CHURCH.

What, then, is the present condition of the Church of God? It is at once in Egypt and Babylon. It is overflowed by the world. Egyptians appoint its rulers, and its holy ordinances are adopted by Babylon. The house of God is burnt, *i.e.*, the true worship is overthrown. The walls of Jerusalem are broken down, *i.e.*, the ancient order is abolished. The children of God themselves are captives, and in bondage to the powers of this world.

What is to be done? The two books that follow fully answer the question.

In these books—Ezra and Nehemiah—we behold a faithful remnant coming up from Babylon to build the house of God—to restore the true worship—as in Ezra; and to build the wall and set up the gates—to re-establish the ancient *order*—as in Nehemiah.

Now, these men may have had counsellors who said to them, "Be content where you are; build a synagogue in Babylon; do all the good you can in the place where you find yourselves"—just as in this day certain advisers may say to us, "Stay where you are; there are a great many of God's children in Babylon; remain there, and influence them

for good." But these were men of a different spirit from this—even the spirit of those who said, "How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land? If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning." They turned their backs on the land of bondage, and went up to the city of God.

OUR RESOURCE.

Our resource in these days is not to build synagogues in Babylon, or remain in association with the ungodly, religious or otherwise, but to go back, like these true-hearted Israelites, to the place where God has set His name, to the place where, in association with His people, we may worship Him as He would have us, and go in and out under the Government He has appointed. If it be asked, where has God set His name? I answer, Jesus said, "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst." We have to consider no longer a locality in the earth; we are to go forth *unto Him* without the camp, bearing His reproach—to gather around our Living Head. The question is not so much "where?" as "to whom?" and the answer is, "Jesus."

We must come back to the original ground, back past doctors and fathers of the Church, to the place in which God's apostle stood, when on the first day of the week he

assembled with the disciples at Troas. Our worship must be in the spirit, and our order after the pattern taught us in New Testament Scripture, by God.

THE BOOK OF ESTHER.

There is a third book, which I shall not stay to consider, but remark in passing, that the Book of Esther, to which I allude, shows us a faithful Jew still in captivity, but who has learned one lesson, viz., that God will have war with Amalek from generation to generation, and so refuses to bow his head to the Agagite. In him we may see those true children of God—still in bondage in unscriptural systems—who yet have learned the difference between flesh and spirit, and understand that they must not give way to that which is carnal. There are, doubtless, many such who might put to the blush emancipated and more enlightened brethren. Let us respect and esteem them. Nevertheless, Shushan is not Jerusalem. It is not the true place of the seed of Abraham.

THE BOOK OF EZRA.

The Book of Ezra, then, shows us the building of the house of God, the temple where His service was maintained. The first thing is the restoration of worship. In the beginning of the Book three men are

prominent—Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah; Joshua, the son of Josedech, the high priest; and Haggai, the prophet—the representatives of teaching, worship, and rule.

In the third chapter, we read that the altar was set up, and burnt-offerings offered, and that they kept the Feast of Tabernacles, but the foundation of the temple of the Lord was not yet laid. The order of this is instructive. It is here just as in our experience as Christians; the sacrifice is first seen; then we joy before the Lord, as Israel did at the Feast of Tabernacles (Lev. 23-40), and all this before we know our place and standing as worshippers. That comes afterwards.

At length the building is finished and dedicated, and Ezra goes up to "beautify the house of the Lord" (chaps. vi. and vii.)

Two things we read about Ezra. He was "Ezra the priest" (chap. x. 10), and he was "a ready scribe in the law of Moses, which the Lord God of Israel had given" (vii. 6). He represents to us the Christian in communion with God—the man who realises his priestly character, and dwells in the secret place of the Most High. These are the men who restore the true worship, and these are they of whom in times of difficulty we should ask counsel. "The priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth" (Mal. ii. 7). When you are in perplex-

ity, and would have counsel, go to the man who walks with God. "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him." Such men have His mind, and in His light see light clearly.

Speaking generally, we may say that grace is exemplified in Ezra, righteousness in Nehemiah. The one is the "priest," the other is the "Tirshatha" (*i.e.*, the governor—Neh. viii. 9). Each was fitted for the work he had to do. The house of the Lord was the place of the one, the wall of the city was the place of the other.

THE BOOK OF NEHEMIAH.

Let us turn now to the Book of Nehemiah. It is noteworthy that at the very outset we see him in connection with Judah. While he was in Shushan, he says (chap. i. 2), "Hanani, one of my brethren, came, he and certain men of Judah, and I asked them concerning the Jews that had escaped, which were left of the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem."

Now, when God says Judah, it is not all the same as if he had said Reuben, or Gad, or Naphtali, or Dan. Every word of God is pure. And we may be sure this word is significant. Judah was the royal tribe. "Judah is my lawgiver" (Ps. cviii. 8). Out of Judah was to come the governor, who should rule God's people Israel (Matt. ii. 6). The censer might belong to Levi; the sceptre belonged to Judah (Gen. xlix. 10). If it were

allowable to guess to which tribe Nehemiah belonged, we should say to this one. At all events, he was the Tirshatha—the governor—the man of righteousness and order.

THE WALL AND THE GATES.

In answer to his inquiry, he is told (ver. 3), “The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach; the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire.”

Mark these words, “the wall” and “the gates.” They occur again and again, and give us the key-note of the book.

The wall represents the order of the city. The gate is the place of judgment. We read in 2nd Samuel xv. 2, for instance—“And Absalom rose up early, and stood beside the way of the gate; and it was so, that when any man that had a controversy came to the king for judgment, then Absalom called unto him, and said, Of what city art thou? And he said, Thy servant is one of the tribes of Israel.” And again in Gen. xix. 1, that Lot “sat in the gate of Sodom.” He appears to have been judging Sodom. He ought to have been judging Lot. The Christian is called to judge himself. He is not to antedate the Lord’s coming, and judge the world. I allude to this subject by the way. I shall have occasion to speak on it farther afterwards.

BY PERMISSION OF THE KING.

On hearing of the state of the remnant and of the city, Nehemiah weeps, fasts, and prays. He seeks from God mercy, in the sight of the king, whose cup-bearer he was ; and eventually, by the king's permission, and even with his good will, he goes up to Jerusalem.

Are we sufficiently thankful that we are allowed to worship God and keep His ordinances, under the protection of the Gentile power? Do we pray as often as we should, in our assemblies, for kings, and for all that are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life, in all godliness and honesty? We may not always be suffered to serve God in peace. Darker days may be at hand. While these last, let us be thankful.

THE CALL OF GOD.

Nehemiah comes to Jerusalem, and we read (ver. 12)—“ And I arose in the night, I and some few men with me ; neither told I any man what my God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem ; neither was there any beast with me, save the beast that I rode upon.” He did not confer with flesh and blood. He went under the power of the call of God. And if any man is to be a Nehemiah, he must do likewise. “ Whatever this blessed word tells me,” said a negro preacher, “ I am going to do. If it tells me to jump through a stone wall, I am going to do it.

Going at it belongs to me, going through belongs to the Lord." This is what we want—to feel the power of the call of God. The voice that speaks to us is the voice of Him that quickeneth the dead, and calleth the things that be not as though they were—the same voice that shall yet bid men rise to judgment, though they were entombed beneath mountains, or buried in the depths of the sea.

"RUINED JERUSALEM."

The ruined state of the gates and walls occupies him. We read further (ver. 16, 17)—"And the rulers knew not whither I went, or what I did, neither had I as yet told it to the Jews, nor to the priests, nor to the nobles, nor to the rulers, nor to the rest that did the work. Then said I unto them, ye see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lieth waste, and the gates thereof are burned with fire; come and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach." One good man stirs up others. Where there is grace, there is something to work upon. If, in the power of God's call, we call upon others, we may get a larger response than we look for. But we cannot stir up good men, without stirring up something else—the opposition of the devil through his instruments; and so we find it here (ver. 19)—"But when Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, and Geshem the

Arabian, heard it, they laughed us to scorn. and despised us, and said, What is this thing that ye do? will ye rebel against the king?"

THE ENEMIES OF THE LORD'S WORK.

Here we have the enemies of the Lord's work—the evil trinity that uphold the power of the king. We, too, as is sometimes remarked, have a trinity of evil to contend with—the devil, the world, and the flesh. This may be mentioned without seeking to show that there is an actual correspondence between our enemies and the persons spoken of here. If we get the victory, it must be as Nehemiah got it. His eye was on God. He looks above the earthly to the heavenly king. "The God of heaven," he says, "He will prosper us ; therefore we, His servants, will arise and build : but ye have no portion nor right, nor memorial in Jerusalem." What a commotion it would make to-day, if it were said to every one not a child of God by faith in Christ Jesus, "You have no portion, nor right, nor memorial with God's people ; you have no place at His table, and with His work you have nothing to do."

The third chapter gives us the details of the building. The fourth chapter shows us the wrath of the adversaries, and the precautions taken by Nehemiah against them.

"But it came to pass, that when Sanballat heard that we builded the wall, he was wroth,

and took great indignation, and mocked the Jews. And he spake before his brethren and the army of Samaria, and said, What do these feeble Jews? will they fortify themselves? will they sacrifice? will they make an end in a day? will they revive the stones out of the heaps of the rubbish which are burnt?" (chap. iv. 1, 2).

A truth slips out of the mouth of the enemy, in the uttering of that word "revive." We cannot revive that which never existed. The stones were there though among rubbish, and perhaps hardly distinguishable from it. The work of these feeble Jews (hanging, in their weakness, on Almighty God) appears to have been to re-erect the stones already hewn, and lying to their hands. And what do we seek now but to place those who are the true stones upon the wall. Jerusalem is not built up with rubbish. The Church of God is not built up with the unregenerate. We do not wish to gather in assembly the unconverted. To them we present the gospel, that they may embrace it and be saved. They are outside, and should be outside, till they have done that. It is those who are saved—the true children of God—that we would fain see separated from the ungodly, and gathered around the Lord Jesus. We do not wish rubbish; we wish stones.

"But," says some one, "you cannot have a perfectly pure church." If this means,

"You cannot have a perfectly pure church, and therefore you should not try," it is an argument of which the man who sets it forth should be ashamed. Advance it on another platform—apply it to the individual instead of to the corporation—and look it fairly in the face. "I cannot be a perfectly holy man, therefore I will not try." Surely the stating of it is enough.

We read further on (ver. 3), "Now Tobiah the Ammonite was by him, and he said, Even that which they build, if a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall." Tobiah hits on an appropriate expression. It is the fox that is the enemy of Israel. It was the very similitude applied long after by the Lord Jesus to Herod (Luke xiii. 32). "That fox," He calls him, and immediately afterwards says of Himself in relation to Jerusalem, "How often would I have gathered thy children together as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings?"

PRAYER AND WATCHFULNESS.

Nehemiah's answer (as I remember once hearing a brother solemnly point out) is an appeal to God. "Hear, O our God," he says. His eye is ever on God. He commits himself to Him that judgeth righteously. Let us take example by him. When the enemy reviles, let us not return railing for railing, but stretch out our hand to the Lord.

But Nehemiah does more than pray ; he sets a watch. The enemies conspire to fight against Jerusalem, and we read (ver. 9)—“ Nevertheless, we made our prayer unto God, and set a watch against them day and night, because of them.” A Christian who does not watch as well as pray is like the bird with one wing, or a boat with one oar. How much communion with God we lose, simply through being unwatchful. Away down round Cape Horn, in the Southern Seas, it is not enough that the vessel should have a vigilant captain and a well-disciplined crew. All night long the look-out paces the fore-castle, peering into the darkness, watching for ships or floating ice. We have need to hear that word, “ Be sober, and watch unto prayer.”

THE SWORD AND THE TROWEL.

Farther, the builders of the wall were armed. “ They which builded on the wall, and they that bare burdens, with those that laded, every one with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other hand held a weapon. For the builders every one had his sword girded by his side, and so builded. And he that sounded the trumpet was by me” (ver. 17, 18). Compare with these verses, Acts xx. 28, 29, and observe how they correspond. Paul says to the elders of Ephesus—“ Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock over which the

Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the Church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock." The flock must be fed; the wolves must be resisted. The wall must be built; the adversary must be repelled. We need both the "sword" and the "trowel." Evil men, scattering evil doctrines, are abroad, and gracious brethren who seek the welfare of the flock, must be ready to withstand them. No doubt many shrink from this. They would rather pursue their blessed work of nourishing those who have been purchased with the blood of Jesus. But while this is undoubtedly a more grateful task, it is also needful that adversaries from without, and factious brethren within, should be faithfully dealt with, and, if need be, withstood to the face.

The fifth chapter answers, we may say, to the sixth chapter of Acts. It shows us trouble within the walls and among brethren. Nehemiah administers rebuke, and his faithfulness has the desired effect.

THE DEVICES OF THE ENEMY.

The sixth chapter shows us the devices of the enemy without; and here also the man of God triumphs.

There are two ways of taking a fortress. One is to lure the garrison outside the walls,

that they may fall into an ambush ; the other is to carry the place by assault. The devil has two characters : he is the crooked serpent, he is also the roaring lion. Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem try first to seduce, then to terrify Nehemiah. They begin, as we might expect, by seduction. It is the same devil who came smoothly to the woman at the first, repeating himself continually, as he will to the end. Let us mark well his plans, that we be not ignorant of his devices.

“Now it came to pass when Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem the Arabian, and the rest of our enemies heard that I had builded the wall, and that there was no breach left therein that Sanballat and Geshem sent unto me saying, Come, let us meet together in some one of the villages in the plain of Ono. But they thought to do me mischief” (ver. 1, 2).

The device is a conference in the plain. Jerusalem is high ground. We read always of “going up” to Jerusalem. The enemy’s purpose will be well served if he can get the servant of God to “come down.” But Nehemiah is not to be trapped. We read (ver. 3, 4)—“And I sent messengers unto them, saying, I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down : why should the work cease, whilst I leave it and come down to you? Yet they sent unto me four times after this sort : and I answered them after the same manner.”

Perhaps he remembered how it was written in the Book of Genesis, that while yet the earth was of one language and one speech, men journeyed from the East, and found a plain in the land of Shinar, and dwelt there, and began to build, and the result was Babel. For when we go down to the plain, we soon settle and begin to build, and what we build is not the city of God. Babylon and Sodom both stand in the plain. Jerusalem is built above. Thither the tribes "go up."

And have we never heard in these days of a proposed conference to stay, in certain departments, the work of the Lord? Has not something like this been said to God's workers?—"Do the work of an evangelist, but restrict yourself to that. Preach the gospel to sinners; we will even give you facilities for doing so; but do not attempt to build. Can we not thus arrange the matter." No, we cannot thus arrange the matter. According to our ability, we must go on with the work. We cannot "come down."

Then comes a truly devilish shaft. "Then sent Sanballat his servant unto me in like manner, the fifth time, with an open letter in his hand, wherein was written, It is reported among the heathen, and Gashmu (or Geshem, a proper witness) saith it, that thou and the Jews think to rebel: for which cause thou buildest the wall, that thou mayest be their king, according to these words. And thou

hast also appointed prophets to preach of thee at Jerusalem, saying, There is a king in Judah : and now shall it be reported to the king according to these words. Come now therefore, and let us take counsel together."

"You are rebelling against the powers that be, and you are doing this work for your own glory and not for God. When you have gathered these converts, you mean to be ruler over them yourself." This is satanic. The workman needs to be fortified in God to resist this. Still Nehemiah triumphs, and the enemy fails. Ver. 8—"Then sent I unto him, saying, There are no such things done as thou sayest, but thou feignest them out of thine own heart." Not, as we should have said, out of thine own head. The Scripture looks deeper.

Now comes the third attack (ver. 10)—"Afterward I came unto the house of She-maiah the son of Delaiah the son of Meheta-beel, who was shut up ; and he said, Let us meet together in the house of God, within the temple, and let us shut the doors of the temple : for they will come to slay thee ; yea, in the night will they come to slay thee."

If they cannot draw him out to the plain, they will drive him into the temple. If they cannot act upon his feelings, they will upon his fears. But the man of God is prepared (ver. 11) —"And I said, Should such a man as I flee? and who is there that, being as I am, would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in."

Now, if a man cannot be drawn down from his high standing, may he not be driven to content himself with the enjoyment, in communion with God, of the precious truth he has learned, and to rest in that? Can he not be frightened into leaving the wall, and made to take himself up with worship—the service of the Lord in the secret place? Lay down the trowel; fling the sword away. Worship if you will, but quit the wall. My friends, if such language be addressed to us, I trust we shall know how to answer it. God has taught us the blessedness of those that dwell in His house. The building of the temple comes before the building of the wall, as we have seen; and the enemy might possibly be content, if we were to be satisfied with that which we already have; but we must attend not only to the worship, but to the order of the Church of God. We stand for the feeding of the flock, as well as for the service of the sanctuary.

INTERNAL EVILS.

The last chapter of the book shows us Nehemiah dealing not with enemies from without, but with internal evils. He rebukes, contends with, and smites the wrongdoers among the people. He is acting in righteousness, and sets his face like a flint against sin.

The truth is that we do not get out of trouble by getting into our right place. Israel, delivered from bondage, sang of God's salva-

tion on the shore of the Red Sea, but the bitter waters of Marah soon drew forth another utterance. They were done with the sorrows of Egypt only to begin with the trials of the wilderness. Young believers are apt to make a mistake here. When they have emerged from their soul-trouble, and found peace with God, they think that henceforth all will be smoothness. The Lord keep such, when the roughness of the "right way" that leads home to God begins to be felt. Trouble we must have; but it is better that it should find us in our true place—better in the wilderness than in Egypt—better in the City of God than in the house of bondage.

Nehemiah found four great evils among the Jews in the city, and he addressed himself with vigour to the work of removing them.

1. Eliashib the priest who was allied to Tobiah had had the hardihood to prepare him a chamber in the courts of the house of God. The enemy had been brought, so to speak, into the very citadel. Nehemiah deals unhesitatingly with the case. We read (ver. 8, 9)—"It grieved me sore; therefore I cast forth all the household stuff of Tobiah out of the chamber. Then I commanded, and they cleansed the chambers; and thither brought I again the vessels of the house of God, with the meat-offering and the frankincense." The rank of the offender makes no difference to him. He respects not the person of Eliashib, and

exhibits no tenderness to his ally. Tobiah's stuff is cast out, and the Lord's stuff is brought in; the chambers having first been cleansed to receive it.

2. He "perceived that the portions of the Levites had not been given them; for the Levites and the singers that did the work were fled every one to his field" (ver. 10); and we read (ver. 11)—"Then contended I with the rulers and said, Why is the house of God forsaken? And I gathered them together and set them in their place."

3. He saw that the Sabbath was profaned, and took action in the matter. We are told (ver. 17)—"Then I contended with the nobles of Judah, and said unto them, what evil thing is this that ye do, and profane the Sabbath day?" And he took care that the gates should be shut during the Sabbath, that no burden should be brought in, and that the merchants should not lodge about the wall. Farther, he "commanded the Levites that they should cleanse themselves, and that they should come and keep the gates to sanctify the Sabbath day" (ver. 22).

4. He saw "Jews that had married wives of Ashdod, of Ammon, and of Moab, and their children spake half in the speech of Ashdod, and could not speak in the Jew's language, but according to the language of each people" (ver. 23, 24). And we read—"He contended with them, and cursed them,

and smote certain of them, and plucked off their hair, and made them swear by God saying, ye shall not give your daughters unto their sons, nor take their daughters unto your sons, or for yourselves" (ver. 25). And again—"One of the sons of Joiada, the son of Eliashib the high priest, was son-in-law to Sanballat the Horonite: therefore I chased him from me" (ver. 28).

THE JUDGMENT OF THEM THAT ARE WITHIN.

Now all this was judgment. Righteousness reigned by Nehemiah in Jerusalem. The stuff of the adversary must be cast out of the courts of God's house. The servants of that house must be in their places. The Sabbath—the ordinance of God—must be observed. The people must not ally themselves with the heathen, and even the rank of Joiada who has married a daughter of Sanballat cannot save him from faithful dealing. This, I say, is a picture of righteous judgment. Nehemiah was judging them that were within.

To such judgment we are called. It should be proceeding now in the Church. We are not to judge the world yet a while. (1 Cor. vi.) We shall mistake our place and calling if we do that. "What have I to do," says Paul, "to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within? But

them that are without, God judgeth" (1 Cor. v. 12, 13). And then he goes on to say—"Do ye not know that the saints *shall* judge the world?" and again, "Know ye not that we *shall* judge angels?" (1 Cor. v. 2, 3). The present is the time in which those who are saved should judge themselves and be faithful to one another. When the Lord comes, when the day of grace closes, and the day of judgment begins, they will, as associated with Him, have a like attitude to the world.

And let us consider the fourfold action of Nehemiah. (1.) Let us see to the cleansing of the house; (2.) Let us seek that God's ministers may have their true place; (3.) Let us take care that His ordinances are kept; and (4.) Let it be understood that those whom He has sanctified are to beware of the unequal yoke—to refuse the fellowship of the unbelieving.

We must of course understand that the judgment we are to exercise is spiritual, not carnal. The conduct of Nehemiah, in laying violent hands on the transgressors was in keeping with the character of the dispensation then running its course. He was dealing with a carnal people—a nation which, as a nation *in the flesh*, was in relationship to God. Nehemiah wrestled with flesh and blood; "we wrestle not against flesh and blood" (Eph. vi. 12). It is proper to make

this plain. We are not to take an offending brother by the throat. Our weapon is the Word of God, and we should seek to act with it on the heart and conscience.

In the first chapter of Revelation we read (ver. 12, 13)—“I saw seven golden candlesticks; and in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of Man.” The seven candlesticks are explained (ver. 20) to be the seven Churches; and we are told in the Gospel of John (v. 27) that the Father hath given to the Lord Jesus authority to execute judgment because He is the Son of Man. We see Him here as a judge—not yet judging the world, but the Churches. The second and third chapters give us His deliverance on their state. Is it not clear that we should be in sympathy with His mind now regarding the evils which during the present time show themselves among us, as we shall certainly be in the day when the sins of the world come before Him?

When evils manifest themselves in the assembly, let none suppose that humanly devised machinery is necessary to enable us to deal with them. We may be sure that the Word meets every case. What we need is faithfulness in applying it.

The first epistle to the Corinthians deals with the subject of judgment in the Church. In chap. v. we are shown a man who has indulged the flesh, instead of mortifying it.

But God is not mocked. He will have war with Amalek from generation to generation. Sin must be judged; and if the offender will not deal with it, the Church is required to deal with him. This is the alternative. So they are told (ver. 13)—“Put away from among yourselves that wicked person.”

I do not enter into the question of how much *power* is left in the Church to judge evil. Power depends upon faithfulness. Where there is the fulness of the Holy Ghost evil will hide its head, or if it should show itself, will be easily repressed. Where there is carnality in a Church, as in an individual, Esau will be up, and Jacob will be down. There will not be the spiritual vigour necessary to deal with that which opposes God. To be a Nehemiah one must not only have righteousness, but strength. What if the people he contended with had proved stronger than he? Before taking action we do well to consider that the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power, as to ask ourselves, Is God with us? Is our judgment His? Will he sustain and enforce it?

SELF-JUDGMENT AND INDIVIDUAL FAITHFULNESS.

Let it be noted that it is an extreme case when the assembly as such has to deal with evil at all. Where there is failure on the part of any one to judge himself, faithful (and at the same time gracious) dealing towards him

on the part of individual brethren may be expected to have the effect of restoring his soul, and restoration being effected, the true end of discipline is gained. "The Lord is my shepherd, He restoreth my soul." We are to follow Him. "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted" (Gal. vi. 1). It needs the "spiritual" to perform such a service. And while we want tender, gracious brethren, we want Nehemiahs—men who will not shrink from faithful dealing, but who will be ready to reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all long-suffering and doctrine.

Judgment there must be—either by ourselves or by the Lord. "If we would judge ourselves we should not be judged" (1 Cor. xi. 31). There would be no need for His interposition. But if we do not judge ourselves, we fall into His hands, and it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. Still, they are hands of mercy, for "when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world" (ver. 32). We experience (not the sword—that was the portion of the Man Jehovah's fellow (Zech. xiii. 7)—but) the rod. The character of the discipline is fatherly, and the end is salvation, not condemnation.

We may say, then, that where there is sin—(1) we may judge ourselves; (2) we may ex-

pose ourselves to the rebuke and correction of a brother ; (3) we may render it necessary for the Church to deal with us ; (4) we may fall into the hands of the Lord. Properly speaking, it is God acting throughout—as much in our own conscience when we review ourselves in the light of His presence, or in the faithful dealing of a fellow-Christian, as when, through our own unfaithfulness and that of our brethren, He deals immediately with us Himself.

**“DO YOU WANT TO RESTORE THE
CHURCH?”**

I may now be asked—Do you want to restore the Church as at the beginning? Are we to have again apostles, prophets, miraculous gifts, and so forth. I answer, we are not to pretend anything we have not got ; we are to use what we have, according to Scripture rule. Nehemiah did not pretend that the remnant which went back from Babylon was the twelve tribes of Israel, or had the power which belonged to the undivided nation. What he did was to get into the right place along with the right people, and act there according to the Word of God. He neither remained where he was, nor yet did he make a half-way house. He went to Jerusalem, and in the midst of ruins, and among evils and troubles without and within, he acted a faithful part. He had plenty of scope for “usefulness.” He found work enough in building the wall, notwithstanding

adversaries, and correcting abuses. And, amid all, he had the knowledge that he was in his true place.

THE INDIVIDUALITY OF NEHEMIAH.

And mark this—his individuality was in no way lost. He was a Jew among Jews, but he was a notable and prominent man. He stood firmly in the superior place which he was fitted to hold, and he acted with decision, according to the energy that was in him. It is true that in the Church all are brethren, but it is certain that the powers and qualifications of all are not alike. We shall greatly mistake, if in the contemplation of unity we forget diversity. People use the expression “a one-man ministry.” If they mean to condemn the limiting of ministry in the assembly to one man, they are right enough. But there are two dangers—on the one hand, of bringing the qualified “one-man” down to the level of the unqualified brethren; and, on the other, of raising the unqualified brethren to the level of the qualified “one-man.” If you are a Nehemiah, if, indeed, you have any special ministry in the Church at all, make full proof of it—fulfil it—on your direct responsibility to God. He will own it, and the Church will be served.