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Miscellaneous Writings of

C. H. MACKINTOSH

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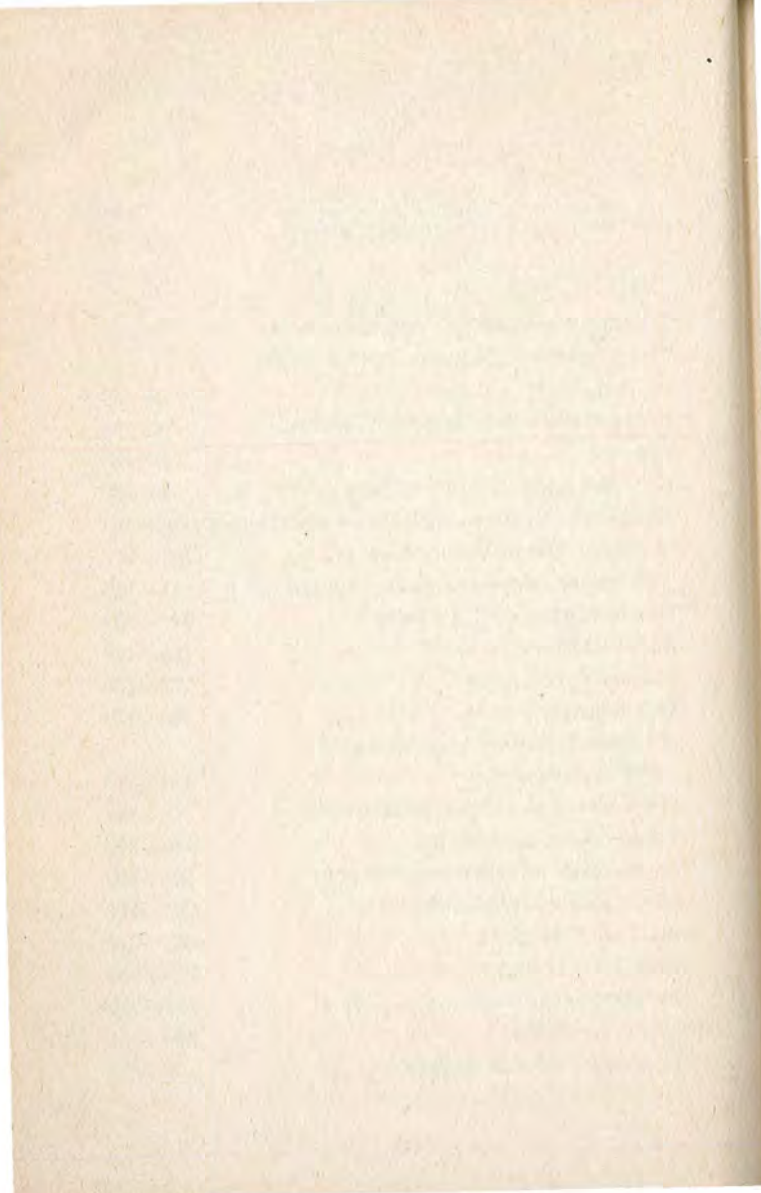
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GOD'S FULNESS FOR AN EMPTY VESSEL

(Read 1 Samuel 4 and 7.)

THE two chapters given above furnish a most impressive illustration of a principle which runs all through the inspired volume, namely, that the moment man takes his right place, God can meet him in perfect grace—free, sovereign, unqualified grace: the fulness of God waits on an empty vessel. This great principle shines everywhere from Genesis to Revelation. The word “principle” hardly expresses what is meant; it is too cold. We would speak of it as a grand, living, divine fact, which shines with heavenly lustre in the gospel of the grace of God and in the history of God’s people collectively and individually, both in the Old and New Testament times.

But man must be in his right place. This is absolutely essential. It is only there he can get a right view of God. When man as he is, meets God as He is, there is a perfect answer to every question, a divine solution of every difficulty. It is from the standpoint of utter and hopeless ruin that man gets a full, clear, delivering view and sense of God’s salvation. It is when man gets to the end of himself in every shape and form—his bad self and his good self, his guilty self and his righteous self—that he begins with a Saviour-God. This is true at

the starting-post, and true all along the way. The fulness of God ever waits on an empty vessel. The great difficulty is to get the vessel empty: when that is done, the whole matter is settled, because the fulness of God can then flow in.

This surely is a grand, fundamental truth; and in the chapters which stand at the head of this paper we see it in its application to the Lord's earthly people of old. Let us turn to them for a moment.

In the opening of chap. 4 we find Israel defeated by the Philistines; but instead of humbling themselves before the Lord, in true contrition and self-judgment because of their terrible condition, and accepting their defeat as the just judgment of God, there is utter insensibility and hardness of heart. "And when the people were come into the camp, the elders of Israel said, Wherefore hath the Lord smitten us to-day before the Philistines?" Now it is very evident from these words that the elders were not in their right place. The word "wherefore" would never have dropped from their lips had they but realized their moral condition. They would have known too well why it was. There was shameful sin in their midst—the vile conduct of Hophni and Phinehas. "Wherefore the sin of the young men was very great before the Lord; for men abhorred the offering of the Lord" (chap. 2: 17).

But alas! the people had no true sense of their terrible condition, and, as a consequence, they had no true sense of the remedy. Hence they say, "Let

us fetch the ark of the covenant of the Lord out of Shiloh unto us, that, when *it* cometh among us, *it* may save us out of the hand of our enemies." What a delusion! What utter blindness! There is no self-judgment, no confession of the dishonor done to the name and worship of the God of Israel, no looking to Jehovah in true brokenness and contrition of heart. No; there is the vain notion that the ark would save them out of the hand of their enemies.

"So the people sent to Shiloh, that they might bring from thence the ark of the covenant of the Lord of hosts, which dwelleth between the cherubim: and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God." What a fearful condition of things! The ark of God associated with those ungodly men whose wickedness was about to bring down upon the whole nation the just judgment of a holy and righteous God. Nothing can be more dreadful, nothing more offensive to God, than the daring attempt to connect His name, His truth, with wickedness. Moral evil, under any circumstances, is bad enough; but the attempt to combine moral evil with the name and service of Him who is holy and true, is the very highest and darkest form of wickedness, and can only bring down the heavy judgment of God. Those ungodly priests, the sons of Eli, had dared to defile the very precincts of the sanctuary with their abominations; and yet these were the men who accompanied the ark of God into the field

of battle. What blindness and hardness of heart! That one sentence, "Hophni and Phinehas were there with the ark of the covenant of God," embodies in its brief compass the terrible reflection of Israel's moral condition.

"And when the ark of the covenant of the Lord came into the camp, *all Israel shouted with a great shout*, so that the earth rang again." How vain was the shout!—how hollow the boast!—how empty the pretension! Alas, alas! it was followed, as must ever be the case, by humiliating defeat. "The Philistines fought, and Israel was smitten, and they fled every man into his tent: and there was a very great slaughter; for there fell of Israel thirty thousand footmen. And the ark of God was taken, and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were slain."

What a condition of things! The priests slain; the ark taken; the glory departed. The ark in which they boasted, and on which they confidently built their hope of victory, was actually in the hands of the uncircumcised Philistines. All was gone. That one terrible fact—the ark of God in the house of Dagon—told the melancholy tale of Israel's complete failure and ruin. God must have reality, truth and holiness in those with whom He deigns to dwell. "Holiness cometh Thy house, O Lord, forever." It was a privilege of the very highest order to have Jehovah dwelling in their midst; but it demanded holiness. He could not connect His name with unjudged sin. Impossible.

It would be a denial of His nature, and God cannot deny Himself. He must have the place where He dwells suited to His nature and character. "Be ye holy, for I am holy." This is a grand, fundamental truth, which must be tenaciously held and reverently confessed. It must never be surrendered.

But let us glance for a moment at the history of the ark in the land of the Philistines. It is at once solemn and instructive. Israel had signally failed and shamefully sinned. They had proved themselves wholly unworthy of the ark of the covenant of the Lord; and the Philistines had laid their uncircumcised hands upon it, and actually presumed to bring it into the house of their false god, as if the Lord God of Israel and Dagon could be in the same house! Blasphemous presumption! But the glory which had departed from Israel was vindicated in the darkness and solitude of the temple of Dagon.

God will be God, however His people may fail; and hence we see that when Israel had utterly failed to guard the ark of His testimony, and allowed it to pass into the hands of the Philistines,—when all was lost in man's hand,—then the glory of God shone out in power and splendor: Dagon fell, and the whole land of the Philistines was made to tremble beneath the hand of Jehovah. His presence was intolerable to them, and they sought to get rid of it as soon as possible. It was proved beyond all question to be utterly impossible that Jehovah and the uncircumcised could go on together. Thus it was, thus it is, and thus it ever must be. "What

concord hath Christ with Belial? . . . And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols?" None whatever.

Let us now turn for a few moments to chap. 7. Here we find another condition of things altogether. Here we shall find something of the empty vessel, and, as is ever the case, the fulness of God waiting upon it. "And it came to pass, while the ark abode in Kirjath-jearim, that the time was long; for it was twenty years: and *all the house of Israel lamented after the Lord.*" In chaps. 5 and 6 we see that the Philistines could not do *with* Jehovah. In chap. 7 we see that Israel could not do *without* Him. This is striking and instructive. The world cannot endure the very thought of the presence of God. We see this from the very moment of the fall, in Gen. 3. Man fled away from God ere God drove him out of Eden. He could not endure the divine presence. "I heard Thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself."

Thus it has ever been, from that moment to the present. As some one has said, "If you could put an unconverted man into heaven, he would get out of it as soon as possible." What a telling fact! How it stamps the whole human race, and accounts for any depth of moral pravity into which a member of that race may sink! If man cannot endure the presence of God, where is he fit for, and what is he capable of? Weighty and solemn questions!

But "all the house of Israel lamented after the Lord." Twenty long, dreary years had rolled on

without the blessed sense of His presence ; “ And Samuel spake unto all the house of Israel, saying, If ye do return unto the Lord *with all your hearts*, then put away the strange gods, and Ashtaroth, from among you, and *prepare your hearts* unto the Lord, and serve Him *only*, and HE ”—not the ark—“ will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines. Then the children of Israel did put away Baalim and Ashtaroth, and served the Lord only. And Samuel said, Gather all Israel to Mizpeh, and I will pray for you unto the Lord. And they gathered together to Mizpeh, and drew water, and poured it out before the Lord, and fasted on that day, and said there, We have sinned against the Lord ” (chap. 7 : 2-6.)

Here we have a different condition of things altogether from that presented in chap. 4. Here we see the empty vessel getting ready to receive the fulness of God. There is no hollow assumption, no looking to an outward form for salvation. All is reality, all heart-work here. Instead of the boastful shout, there is the outpoured water—the striking and expressive symbol of utter weakness and good-for-nothingness. In a word, man is taking his right place ; and that, as we know, is the sure precursor of God taking His place. This great principle runs like a beauteous golden line all through the divine volume, all through the history of God's people, all through the history of souls. It is wrapped up in that brief but comprehensive clause, “ Repentance and remission of sins.” Repentance is man's true

place. Remission of sins is God's response. The former is the empty vessel; the latter, the fulness of God. When these meet, all is settled.

This is very strikingly presented in the scene now before us. Israel having taken their true place, God is free to act on their behalf. They had confessed themselves to be as water poured upon the ground—perfectly helpless, perfectly worthless. This was all they had to say for themselves, and this was enough. God can now enter the scene and make short work with the Philistines. "If God be for us, who can be against us?"

"And Samuel took a sucking lamb, and offered it for a burnt offering wholly unto the Lord: and Samuel cried unto the Lord for Israel; and the Lord heard him. And as Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to battle against Israel"—How little they knew whom they were coming against, or who was about to meet them! "But the Lord thundered with a great thunder on that day upon the Philistines, and discomfited them; and they were smitten before Israel. . . . Then Samuel took a stone, and set it between Mizpeh and Shen, and called the name of it Eben-ezer (the stone of help), saying, Hitherto hath the Lord helped us."

What a contrast between Israel's boastful shout in chap. 4 and Jehovah's thunder in chap. 7! The former was human pretension; the latter, divine power. *That* was instantly followed by humiliating defeat; *this*, by splendid triumph. The Philistines

knew nothing of what had taken place—the water poured out, the penitential cry, the offering up of the lamb, the priestly intercession. What could uncircumcised Philistines know about these precious realities? Just nothing. When the earth rang with Israel's pretentious shout, they could take cognizance of that. The men of the world can understand and appreciate self-assertion and self-confidence; but these are the very things that shut out God. On the other hand, a broken heart, a contrite spirit, a lowly mind, are His delight. When Israel took the low place, the place of self-judgment and confession, then Jehovah's thunder was heard, and the host of the Philistines was scattered and confounded. The fulness of God ever waits on an empty vessel. Blessed, precious truth! May we enter more fully into its depth, fulness, power, and scope!

Ere closing this brief paper, I would just observe that 1 Sam. 4 and 7 remind us of the churches of Laodicea and Philadelphia, in Rev. 3. The former presents to us a condition which we should sedulously avoid; the latter, a condition which we should diligently and earnestly cultivate. In that, we see miserable self-complacency, and Christ left outside. In this, we see conscious weakness and nothingness, but Christ exalted, loved, and honored; His Word kept, and His Name prized.

And be it remembered that these things run on to the end. It is very instructive to see that the last four of the seven churches give us four phases

of the Church's history right on to the end. In Thyatira, we find Romanism; in Sardis, Protestantism. In Philadelphia, as we have said, we have that condition of soul, that attitude of heart, which every true believer and every assembly of believers should diligently cultivate and faithfully exhibit. Laodicea, on the contrary, presents a condition of soul and an attitude of heart from which we should shrink with godly fear. Philadelphia is as grateful as Laodicea is loathsome to the heart of Christ. The former, He will make a pillar in the temple of His God; the latter, He will spew out of His mouth, and Satan will take it up and make it a cage of every unclean and hateful bird—Babylon! An awful consideration for all whom it may concern. And let us never forget that for any to pretend to be Philadelphia is really the spirit of Laodicea. Wherever you find pretension, assumption, self-assertion or self-complacency, there you have, in spirit and principle, Laodicea—from which may the good Lord deliver all His people!

Beloved, let us be content to be nothing and nobody in this scene of self-exaltation. Let it be our aim to walk in the shade, as far as human thoughts are concerned, yet never be out of the sunshine of our Father's countenance. In a word, let us ever bear in mind that "*the fulness of God ever waits on an empty vessel.*"

C. H. M.

DIVINE TITLES.

IT is at once interesting, instructive and edifying to mark the various titles under which God appears in the Holy Scriptures. These titles are expressive of certain characters and relationships in which God has been pleased to reveal Himself to man; and we are persuaded that the Christian reader will find solid profit and real spiritual refreshment and blessing in the study of this subject. We can do little more in this brief paper than offer a suggestion or two, leaving the reader to search the Scriptures for himself, in order to a full understanding of the true meaning and proper application of the various titles.

In the first chapter of Genesis we have the first great title—"God" (Elohim): "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." This presents God in unapproachable, incomprehensible Deity. "No man hath seen God at any time." We hear His voice and see His work in creation; but Himself no man hath seen or can see. He dwelleth in the light which no man can approach unto.

But in Gen. ii. we have another title added to God, namely, "Lord" (Jehovah). Why is this? Because man is now on the scene, and "Lord" is expressive of the divine relation with man. Pre-

cious truth! It is impossible to read these two chapters and not be struck with the difference of the titles "God" and "the Lord God"—"Elohim" and "Jehovah Elohim"; and the difference is at once beautiful and instructive.*

Gen. vii. 16 presents an interesting example. "And they that went in, went in male and female of all flesh, as *God* had commanded him: and the *Lord* shut him in." God, in His government, was about to destroy the human race, and every living

* We shall here give the various divine titles given in Scripture; and the reader can, if so led, examine for himself the passages in which they occur, and see the way in which they are applied.

"Elohim"—God. "Jehovah"—Lord. "Adonai," also rendered Lord; see Ps. xvi. 2. Adonai, or Adon, has been taken to mean *Ruler*, or *Sovereign*, from the root "Dan," to judge. In some English Bibles, Jehovah is rendered in capital letters, LORD; Adonai, Lord. Thus the distinction is easily seen. "O my soul, thou hast said, Jehovah, Thou art my Adonai" (Ps. xvi. 2). This is very striking, and most beautiful.

Then, in Gen. xiv. 22, we have "Elion"—the Most High God. This is His millennial title. And in chapter xvii. 1 we have "Shaddai"—the Almighty. "I am the Almighty God: walk before Me, and be thou perfect." In Psalm xci. 1, 2, we have a very beautiful application: "He that dwelleth in the secret places of Elion shall abide under the shadow of Shaddai. I will say of Jehovah, He is my refuge and my fortress; my Elohim; in Him will I trust." All this is full of precious instruction; and we trust the reader may be led to pursue the study for himself. It is hardly needful to add that, for the ineffable title and relationship of "Father," we must turn to the New Testament.

thing. But Jehovah, in infinite grace, shut Noah in. Mark the distinction. If a mere man were writing the history, he might transpose the titles, not seeing what was involved. Not so the Holy Spirit. He brings out the lovely point of Jehovah's relationship with Noah. Elohim was going to judge the world; but as Jehovah He had His eye upon His beloved servant Noah, and graciously sheltered him in the vessel of mercy. How perfect is Scripture! How edifying and refreshing to trace the moral glories of the divine volume!

Let us turn to a passage in 1 Sam. xvii., where we have the record of David's encounter with Goliath. He boldly tells the giant what he is about to do, both to him and to the host of the Philistines, in order "that all *the earth* may know that there is a *God* (Elohim) in Israel. And all this assembly shall know that the *Lord* (Jehovah) saveth not with sword and spear: for the battle is Jehovah's, and He will give you into our hands" (vers. 46, 47).

"All the earth" was to know and own the presence of God in the midst of His people. They could know nothing of the precious relationship involved in the title "Jehovah." This latter was for the assembly of Israel alone. They were to know not only His presence in their midst, but His blessed mode of acting. To the world He was Elohim, to His beloved people He was Jehovah.

Well may these exquisite touches command our hearts' admiration. Oh, the living depths, the moral glories, of that peerless Revelation which our

Father has graciously penned for our comfort and edification! We must confess it gives us unspeakable delight to dwell on these things and point them out to the reader, in this infidel day when the divine inspiration of Holy Scripture is boldly called in question, in quarters where we should least expect it. But we have something better to do just now than replying to the contemptible assaults of infidelity. We are thoroughly persuaded that the most effective safeguard against all such assaults is to have the word of Christ dwelling in us richly, in all its living, formative power. To the heart thus filled and fortified, the most plausible and powerful arguments of all infidel writers are but as the pattering of rain on the window.

We shall give the reader only one more illustration of our subject from the Old Testament. It occurs in the interesting history of Jehoshaphat (2 Chron. xviii. 31). "And it came to pass, when the captains of the chariots saw Jehoshaphat, that they said, It is the king of Israel. Therefore they compassed about him to fight: but Jehoshaphat cried out, and *the Lord* (Jehovah) helped *him*; and *God* (Elohim) moved *them* to depart from him."

This is deeply affecting. Jehoshaphat had put himself into an utterly false position. He had linked himself with the most ungodly of Israel's kings. He had even gone so far as to say to the wicked Ahab, "I am as thou art, and my people as thy people; and we will be with thee in the war." No marvel, therefore, if the Syrian captains mistook

him for Ahab. It was only taking him at his word. But when brought down to the very lowest point—into the very shadow of death—“he cried out;” and that cry went up to the gracious and ever-attentive ear of Jehovah, who had said, “Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee.” Precious grace!

But mark the lovely accuracy in the use and application of the divine titles—for this is our thesis. “He cried out, and Jehovah helped him;” and—what then? A mere human author would doubtless have put it thus: “Jehovah helped him, and moved them.” But no; Jehovah had, as such, nothing to do with uncircumcised Syrians. His eye was upon his dear, though erring, servant; His heart was toward him, and His everlasting arms around him. There was no link between Jehovah and the Syrians; but Elohim, whom they knew not, moved them away.

Who can fail to see the beauty and perfection of all this? Is it not plain to the reader that the stamp of a divine hand is visible upon the three passages which we have culled for his consideration? Yes, and so it is upon every clause, from cover to cover, of the divine volume. Let no one suppose for a moment that we want to occupy our readers with curious points, nice distinctions, or learned criticisms. Nothing is further from our thoughts. We would not pen a line for any or all of these objects. As God is our witness, our one great object in writing this paper is to deepen in

the hearts of our readers the sense of the preciousness, beauty and excellency of the Holy Scriptures, given of God for the guidance, help and blessing of His people in this dark world. If this object be gained, we have our full reward.

But we cannot close without referring, for a moment, to the precious pages of the New Testament. We shall ask the reader to turn to Rom. xv., in which we have God presented to us under three distinct titles, each one of which is in perfect and beautiful keeping with the immediate subject in hand. Thus, in the opening verses of the chapter, which properly belong to chapter xiv., the inspired apostle is urging upon us the necessity of patience, forbearance, and kindly consideration one of another. And to whom does he direct us for power to respond to those holy and much-needed exhortations? "To the God of patience and consolation." He presents God in the very character in which we need Him. Our small stock of patience would soon be exhausted in seeking to meet the varied characters which cross our path, even in intercourse with our brethren. There are constant claims upon our patience and forbearance; and most surely others have need of patience and forbearance with us. Where are we all to get the means of meeting all these claims? At the exhaustless treasury of "the God of patience and consolation." Our tiny springs would soon dry up if not kept in unbroken connection with that ever-flowing Fountain. The weight of a feather would be an overmatch for *our* pa-

tience; how much more the ten thousand things that come before us even in the Church of God!

Hence the need of the beautiful prayer of the apostle, "Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another, according to Christ Jesus; that ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God."

Here lies the grand secret, the divine power of receiving one another, and going on together in holy love, heavenly patience, and tender consideration. We cannot get on otherwise. It is only by habitual communion with the God of patience and consolation that we shall be able to rise above the numberless hindrances to confidence and fellowship that continually present themselves, and walk in fervent love to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.

But we must draw this paper to a close, and shall merely glance at the other divine titles presented in our chapter. When the apostle speaks of the future glory, his heart at once turns to God in the very character suited to the subject before him. "*Now the God of hope* fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost." If we would have the hope of glory heightened in our souls—and truly we need it—we must turn our eyes to "the God of hope."

How marked and striking is the application of the divine titles, wherever we turn! Whatever may be the character of our need, God presents Himself to our hearts in the very way adapted to meet it. Thus, at the close of the chapter, when the apostle turns his eyes towards Judea, and the difficulties and the dangers awaiting him, his heart springs up to "*the God of peace.*" Precious resource in all our varied exercises, anxieties, sorrows, and cares!

In a word, whatever we want, we have just to turn in simple faith to God, and find it all in Him. God—blessed forever be His name—is the one grand and all-sufficient answer to our every need, from the starting-point to the goal of our Christian career. Oh for artless faith to use Him!

A HELP OR A HINDRANCE: WHICH?

(A Question for All in the Assembly.)

OF the many favors conferred upon us by our ever-gracious Lord, one of the very highest is the privilege of being present in the assembly of His beloved people, where He has recorded His name. We may assert with all possible confidence that every true lover of Christ will delight to be found where He has promised to be. Whatever may be the special character of the meeting; whether it be round the Lord's table, to show forth His death; or round the Word, to learn His mind; or round the mercy-seat, to tell Him our need, and draw from His exhaustless treasury, every devoted heart will long to be there: and we may rest assured that any one who wilfully neglects the assembly is in a cold, dead, dangerous state of soul. To neglect the assembling of ourselves is to take the first step on the inclined plane that leads down to the total abandonment of Christ and His precious interests. See Heb. x. 25-27.

And here, at the very outset, we would remind the reader that the object of this brief paper is not to discuss the oft-raised question, "How are we to know what meeting to go to?" This is, assuredly, a question of cardinal importance, which every Christian—man, woman, and child—is bound and

privileged to have divinely settled ere he takes his place in an assembly. To go to a meeting without knowing the ground on which such meeting is gathered, is to act in ignorance or indifference wholly incompatible with the fear of the Lord and the love of His Word.

But we repeat, this question is not now before us. We are not occupied with the ground of the meeting, but with *our state and conduct on the ground*—a question, surely, of vast moral importance to every soul professing to be gathered in or to the name of Him who is holy and true. In a word, our thesis is distinctly stated at the head of this article. We assume that the reader is clear as to the ground of the assembly, and hence our immediate business with him just now is to raise the solemn question in his heart and conscience, “Am I a help, or a hindrance, to the assembly?” That each individual member is either the one or the other is as clear as it is weighty and practical.

If the reader will just open his Bible, and read, thoughtfully and prayerfully, 1 Cor. xii., he will find most clearly established the great practical truth that each member of the body exerts an influence on all the rest; just as, in the human body, if there be anything wrong with the very feeblest and most obscure member, all the members feel it, through the head. If there be a broken nail, a broken tooth, a foot out of joint; any limb, muscle or nerve out of order, it is a hindrance to the whole body. Thus it is in the Church of God, the body of Christ: “If

Am I A help or a hindrance
 one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or if one member be honored, all the members rejoice with it." The state of each member affects the whole body. Hence it follows that each member is either a help or a hindrance to all. What a profound truth! Yes, and it is as practical as it is profound.

And be it remembered that the apostle is not speaking of any mere local assembly, but of the whole body, of which, no doubt, each particular assembly ought to be the local expression. Thus he says, in addressing the assembly at Corinth, "*Now ye are the body of Christ*, and members in particular." True, there were other assemblies; and had the apostle been addressing any of them on the same subject, he would have used the same language; for what was true of each was true of all; and what was true of the whole was true of each local expression. Nothing can be clearer, nothing simpler, nothing more deeply practical. The whole subject furnishes three most precious and powerful motives for a holy, earnest, devoted life—namely, first, that we may not dishonor the Head to whom we are united; secondly, that we may not grieve the Holy Spirit by whom we are united; and, thirdly, that we may not injure the members with whom we are united.

Can anything exceed the moral power of such motives as these? Oh that they were more fully realized among God's beloved people! It is one thing to hold and teach the doctrine of the unity of

the body, and quite another thing to enter into and exhibit its holy formative power. Alas, the poor human intellect may discuss and traffic in the highest truths, while the heart, the conscience and the life have never felt their holy influence! This is a most solemn consideration for every one. May we ponder it in our hearts, and may it tell upon our whole life and character. May the truth of the "one body" be a grand moral reality to every member of that body on the face of the earth.

Here we might close this paper, feeling, as we do, that if the glorious truth on which we have been dwelling were held in the living power of faith by all the Lord's beloved people, then, assuredly, *all* the precious practical results would follow. But in sitting down to write, there was one special branch of the subject prominently before the mind; and that is, the way in which the various meetings are affected by the condition of soul, the attitude of heart, and the state of mind, of all who attend. We repeat, and with emphasis, all who attend—not merely all who audibly take part, but all who form the meeting.

No doubt a special and very weighty responsibility rests on those who take any part in the ministry, whether it be in giving out a hymn, engaging in prayer or thanksgiving, reading the Word, teaching, or exhortation. All who do so should be very sure that they are simply the instruments in the hand of the Lord for whatever they undertake to do. Otherwise they may do serious damage to the

meeting. They may quench the Spirit, hinder the worship, interrupt the communion, mar the integrity of the occasion.

All this is most serious, and calls for holy watchfulness on the part of all who engage in any branch of ministry in the assembly. Even a hymn may prove a hindrance; it may interrupt the current of the Spirit in the assembly. Yea, the precious word of God may be read out of place. In short, whatever is not the direct fruit of the Spirit can only hinder the edification and blessing of the assembly. All who take part in the ministry should have the distinct sense that they are led by the Spirit in what they do. They should be governed by the one commanding, absorbing object—the glory of Christ in the assembly, and the blessing of the assembly in Him. “Let all things be done unto edifying” (1 Cor. xiv. 26). If it be not thus, they had better be quiet, and wait on the Lord. They will render more glory to Christ and more blessing to the assembly by quiet waiting than by restless action and unprofitable talking.

But while feeling and owning the gravity of all that has to be said in reference to the holy responsibility of all who minister in the assembly, we are thoroughly persuaded that the tone, character and general effect of public meetings are very intimately connected with *the moral and spiritual condition of all*. It is this, we confess, that weighs upon the heart, and leads us to pen this brief address to every assembly under the sun. Every soul in the

meeting is either a help or a hindrance, a contributor or a waster. All who attend in a devout, earnest, loving spirit; who come simply to meet the Lord Himself; who flock to the assembly as the place where His precious name is recorded; who delight to be there because He is there—all such are a real help and blessing to a meeting. May God increase their number. If all assemblies were made up of such blessed elements, what a different tale would have to be told!

And why not? It is not a question of gift or knowledge, but of grace and godliness, true piety and prayerfulness. In a word, it is simply a question of that condition of soul in which every child of God and every servant of Christ ought to be, and without which the most shining gifts and the most extensive knowledge are a hindrance and a snare. Mere gift and intelligence, without an exercised conscience and the fear of God, may be, and have been, used of the enemy for the moral ruin of souls. But where there is true humility, and that seriousness and reality which the sense of the presence of God ever produces, there you have what will most surely, gift or no gift, impart depth of tone, freshness, and a spirit of worship, to an assembly.

There is a vast difference between an assembly of people gathered round some gifted man, and one gathered simply to the Lord Himself, on the ground of the one body. It is one thing to be gathered *by* ministry, and quite another to be gathered *to* it. If people are merely gathered to ministry, when the

ministry goes they are apt to go too. But when earnest, true-hearted, devoted souls are gathered simply to the Lord Himself, then, while they are most thankful for true ministry when they can get it, they are not dependent upon it. They do not value gift less, but they value the Giver more. They are thankful for the streams, but they depend *only* upon the Fountain.

It will invariably be found that those who can do best without ministry, value it most when they get it. In a word, they give it its true place. But those who attach undue importance to gift, who are always complaining of the lack of it, and cannot enjoy a meeting without it, are a hindrance and a source of weakness to the assembly.

And, alas, there are other hindrances and sources of weakness which demand the serious consideration of all. We should, each one of us, as we take our places in the assembly, honestly put the question to our hearts, "Am I a help, or a hindrance—a contributor, or a waster?" If we come in a cold, hard, careless state of soul—come in a merely formal manner, unjudged, unexercised, unbroken; in a fault-finding, murmuring, complaining spirit, judging everything and everybody except ourselves—then, most assuredly, we are a serious hindrance to the blessing, the profit and the happiness of the meeting. We are the broken nail, the broken tooth, or the foot out of joint. How sorrowful, how humiliating, how terrible is all this! May we watch against it, pray against it, firmly disallow it.

But, on the other hand, those who present themselves in the assembly in a loving, gracious, Christ-like spirit; who delight to meet their brethren, whether round the Table, round the fountain of Holy Scripture, or round the mercy-seat for prayer; who, in their hearts' deep and tender affections, embrace all the members of the beloved body of Christ; whose eyes are not dimmed, nor their affections chilled by dark suspicions, evil surmisings, or unkindly feelings toward any around them; who have been taught of God to love their brethren, to look at them "from the top of the rocks," and see them "in the vision of the Almighty;" who are ready to profit by whatever the gracious Lord sends them, even though it may not come through some brilliant gift or favorite teacher—all such are a divinely sent blessing to the assembly, wherever they are. Again we say, with a full heart, may God add to their number. If all assemblies were composed of such, it would be the very atmosphere of heaven itself; the name of Jesus would be as ointment poured forth; every eye would be fixed on Him, every heart absorbed with Him, and there would be a more powerful testimony to His name and presence in our midst than could be rendered by the most brilliant gift.

May the gracious Lord pour out His blessing upon all His assemblies throughout the whole earth. May He deliver them from every hindrance, every weight, every stumbling-block, every root of bitterness. May the hearts of all be knit together

in sweet confidence and true brotherly love. May He crown with His richest blessing the labors of all His beloved servants at home and abroad, cheering their hearts and strengthening their hands, giving them to be steadfast and unmovable, always abounding in His precious work, in the assurance that their labor is not in vain.

THE DISCIPLINE OF THE ASSEMBLY;

ITS GROUND, NATURE, AND OBJECT.

“Thy testimonies are very sure: holiness becometh Thy house, O Lord, for ever” (Ps. xciii. 5).

HERE we have, plainly set before us, the real ground of discipline in the assembly. The place of God's presence must be holy: “Be ye holy, for I am holy.” It is not upon the miserable principle of “stand by thyself, I am holier than thou.” No, thank God, it is not this. It is not upon the ground of what we are, but what God is, that discipline is exercised. To allow unjudged evil, either in doctrine or practice, in the assembly, is tantamount to saying that God and evil can go on together—which is simply wickedness.

But some persons maintain that we are not to judge, and Matthew vii. 1 is quoted in proof. We reply that the passage has nothing to say to the assembly; it simply teaches us, as individuals, not to judge motives. Further on in the chapter, we are told to beware of false prophets. How can we beware, if we are not to judge? “By their fruits ye shall know them.” So that, even as individuals, we are to judge conduct. We are not to judge *motives* but *fruits*. In 1 Corinthians v., the assem-

bly is peremptorily called to judge and put away an evil doer. "In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." And then, at the end of the chapter, we read: "Do not ye judge them that are within? But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person."

This is clear and conclusive. The assembly is solemnly bound to exercise discipline—bound to judge and put away evil-doers. To refuse to do so is to become a leavened lump; and, most assuredly, God and unjudged leaven cannot go on together.

Mark, we speak of *unjudged* leaven. We know, alas, that there is evil in every member of the assembly; but if it is judged and refused, it does not defile the assembly, or hinder the enjoyment of the divine Presence. It was not the evil in the man's nature that caused him to be put away, but the evil in his life. If he had judged and refused the sin in his nature, the assembly would not have been called to judge and refuse him. All this is as simple as it is solemn. An assembly that refuses to judge evil, in doctrine or morals, is not an assembly of God. There may be children of God in it, but they are in a false and dangerous position; and if the assembly persists in refusing

to judge the evil, they should, with firm decision, turn away from it. They are solemnly called upon to do so: "Let every one that nameth the name of the Lord depart from iniquity."

But there are many who do not understand the truth as to the assembly, or its discipline, and they bring forward Matthew xiii. 30 as a proof that evil-doers are not to be put away from the assembly, or the Lord's table. The tares and the wheat are to grow together until the harvest, they say. Yes; but where? In the assembly? Nay; but in the field, and "the field is the *world*"—not the Church. To argue that, because the tares and wheat are to grow together in the world, therefore evil-doers are to be knowingly allowed in the assembly, is to place the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ, in Matthew xiii., in direct opposition to the teaching of the Holy Spirit in 1 Corinthians v. Hence, this argument cannot stand for a moment, but must be flung to the winds. To confound the Kingdom of Heaven, in the Gospel of Matthew, with the Church of God, in the epistles of Paul, is to mar the integrity of the truth of God, and plunge the Lord's people into utter confusion. Indeed, no human language could adequately set forth the deplorable consequences of such a system of teaching. But this is a digression from our subject, to which we must return.

Having proved from the plainest statements of Holy Scripture that the assembly is solemnly bound to judge those that are within, and put away

evil-doers, we shall now proceed to consider the nature, character, and spirit of the discipline which the assembly is called to exercise. Nothing can be more solemn or more affecting than the act of putting away a person from the Lord's table. It is the last sad and unavoidable act of the whole assembly, and it should be performed with broken hearts and weeping eyes. Alas how often it is otherwise! How often does this most solemn and holy duty take the form of a mere official announcement that such a person is out of fellowship. Need we wonder that discipline, so carried out, fails to tell with power upon the erring one, or upon the assembly?

How then should the discipline be carried out? Just as 1 Corinthians v. directs. When the case is so patent, so clear, that all discussion and deliberation is at an end, the whole assembly should be solemnly convened for the special purpose—for, most assuredly, it is of sufficient gravity and importance to command a special meeting. All should, if possible, attend, and seek grace to make the sin their own, to go down before God in true self-judgment, and eat the sin offering. The assembly is not called to deliberate or discuss. If there is any demand for discussion, the assembly is not called to act. The case should be thoroughly investigated, and all the facts collected by those who care for the interests of Christ and His Church; and when it is thoroughly settled, and the evidence perfectly conclusive, then the whole assembly is

called to perform, in deep sorrow and humiliation, the sad act of putting away from among themselves the evil-doer. It is an act of holy obedience to the Lord's command.

We cannot but feel that, were the assembly's discipline carried out in this spirit, we should see very different results. How different is this from the formal reading out of a notice in the course, or at the close, of an ordinary meeting—a notice often unheard by many. It is an entirely different thing, and it would be attended with very different results, both as to the assembly and the person put away. There would be a much more profound sense, on all hands, of the gravity and solemnity of the assembly's discipline. And oh, what urgent need there is of this in all our assemblies! We are sadly prone to be light and trifling.

We would repeat, and emphasize the statement, that the putting away of a person from the Lord's table, as well as the reception, must be the act of the whole assembly. No one has any right to tell another to remain away from the table. If I know of any brother who is living in sin, I should seek to exercise his conscience in a pastoral way. I should warn him, and seek to lead him to self-judgment. If he persists, I should bring his case before those who really care for the honor of Christ and the purity of His assembly. Then, if there be no hope, and no possible ground for demur, the assembly should be called together to act, and the occasion might be used for setting before the con-

sciences of all the solemnity of the ground occupied by the assembly, and the holiness that becometh the house of the Lord forever.

We cannot too strongly protest against the idea of the whole assembly being called to discuss cases of discipline. We may well say, "Doth not even nature itself teach" the unseemliness of bringing the details of a case of immorality, for example, before a promiscuous assembly? It is contrary to God, and contrary to nature.

And now, in conclusion, one word as to the object of the assembly's discipline. The inspired apostle tells us, in Cor. v., that it is salvation—"that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." This is very precious. It is worthy of the God of all grace. The man is delivered to Satan for the destruction of that odious thing which has caused his humiliating fall, *that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.*

Let us never forget this. We should ever be on the lookout for this precious result when any one has to be put away. We should wait much on the Lord to own the action of the assembly in this way. We should not put away evil-doers in order to get rid of a disgrace or a trouble to us, but to maintain the holiness of the Lord's house, and for the ultimate salvation of those put away.

And here we may remark that the discipline of the assembly can never interfere with the unity of the body. Some persons speak of cutting off the

members of the body of Christ, when any are refused or put away by the assembly. This is a grave mistake. The man in 1 Cor. v. was a member of the body, and nothing could touch that blessed membership. He was put away, not because he was unconverted, but because he defiled the assembly. But the discipline was used for the ultimate blessing of a member of the body. No member of the body can ever be cut off. All are indissolubly joined to the Head in heaven, and to the members on earth, by the Holy Ghost. "By one Spirit we are all baptized into one body."

This is divinely simple and clear, and moreover it is a conclusive answer to the statement so constantly made, namely, that, provided a person is a Christian, he ought not to be put away or refused by the assembly. No such question is ever raised. To put away a person for not being a Christian is opposed to the spirit and teaching of the word of God. Even under the Old Testament economy people were not put outside the camp for not being the seed of Abraham, or circumcised members of the congregation, but because they were ceremonially defiled. See Num. v.

P. S.—There is a character of discipline presented in 2 Thess. iii. which demands our serious attention: "Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye *withdraw yourselves* from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received

of us. . . . If any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother."

This is what we may call personal discipline in private life—a very important thing, much needed, alas, but not generally understood. It is not a case calling for the action of the assembly, but for faithful personal dealing. The disorderly walking referred to is a brother not working, but going about as an idle busybody. Such a one was to be admonished, and avoided. Now we cannot help thinking that this form of discipline is much called for. There are many whose ways, though not of such a character as to call for excommunication, do, nevertheless, demand faithful dealing: for example, persons going in debt, living beyond their means, dressing in a vain, fashionable style, unbecoming a Christian; and many other things inconsistent with the holiness, purity and solemnity of the Lord's table and the assembly. If all such cases were dealt with according to the apostolic command in 2 Thess. iii., we believe it would prove a real blessing to many.

We need hardly add that it needs much grace, much spiritual wisdom, much of the mind of Christ, much nearness to God, to carry out this sort of discipline; but we are persuaded it demands the prayerful attention of Christians; and we may confidently count on the grace of God to enable us to act for Him in this matter.

THE CHRISTIAN'S MISSION:

AND HOW TO FULFIL IT.*

“**I**N those days the multitude being very great and having nothing to eat, Jesus called his disciples unto Him, and saith unto them, I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now been with Me three days, and have nothing to eat: and if I send them away fasting to their own houses, they will faint by the way; for divers of them came from far. And His disciples answered Him, From whence can a man satisfy these men

* This little book is sent forth to the Church of God—“to all that, in every place, call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both theirs and ours”—with earnest prayer that it may be used of the Holy Spirit to awaken in the hearts of all who may read it a true sense of the Christian's mission, and a fixed purpose to seek, by the grace of God, to fulfil it.

We need to be reminded, in days like the present, that every child of God, every member of the body of Christ, whatever be his position or sphere of action, has a mission to fulfil—a work to do for Christ. He may not be called to be an evangelist, a pastor, or a teacher: but he is called to live Christ—to represent Him—to be a channel of communication between His loving heart and every form of need, in this poor dark, cold, selfish world. This is the Christian's mission; may every Christian seek to fulfil it!

with bread here in the wilderness? And He asked them, How many loaves have ye? And they said, Seven. And He commanded the people to sit down on the ground; and He took the seven loaves, and gave thanks, and brake, and gave to His disciples to set before them; and they did set them before the people. And they had a few small fishes; and He blessed, and commanded to set them also before them. So they did eat, and were filled; and they took up of the broken meat that was left, seven baskets. And they that had eaten were about four thousand, and He sent them away" (Mark viii. 1-9).

The foregoing passage presents a very striking and beautiful illustration of one special feature of the Christian's mission in this world, which the reader will do well to ponder. It is of immense importance, and of universal application. It concerns every child of God. We have each one to remember, that we are sent into this world to be a channel of communication between the heart of Christ and every form of need that may cross our path from day to day.

This is an interesting and lovely feature of the Christian's mission. True, it is only one of the many features, but it is one of exceeding preciousness and beauty. It is pre-eminently practical too, as we shall see.

Of course, of necessity, it assumes that I am a Christian. If I do not know that I have eternal life, if I am at all doubtful as to my eternal salvation, if I do not know Christ as my own precious

Saviour and Lord—the portion, the object, and the resting-place of my heart—to occupy myself with the Christian's mission is simply to deceive myself, and blind my eyes to my true condition. A known and enjoyed salvation, and a known and enjoyed Saviour and Lord, are absolutely essential conditions for it.

Having said thus much, to guard the reader against self-deception, as also to guard our subject against any misapprehension, we shall look, for a few moments, at the lovely passage which stands at the head of this paper. May the blessed Spirit open and apply it to our hearts!

“In those days, the multitude being *very great*, and having *nothing to eat*.” Here was the state of the case—great need, and no apparent resources to meet it. But Jesus was there—blessed be His holy name!—in all the love of His heart, and the almighty power of His hand. He was there who, of old, had fed three millions of people, in a vast howling wilderness, for forty years. Yes, He was there, and, of course, He could at once, and directly, have met the need without calling His poor unbelieving and self-occupied disciples into the scene at all. He could have summoned angelic messengers from heaven to wait upon those hungry thousands.

But He did neither the one nor the other, because it was His gracious purpose to use His disciples as channels of communication between Himself and that vast hungry multitude. Not merely

as instruments of His *power*, which angels might be, but the very expression of His *heart*.

And let us note *how* He did this. Had He merely intended to use them as instruments of His power, it would have sufficed to put the ways and means into their hands. But no; He wanted to make them channels through which the tender compassion of His heart might flow out. And how was this to be done? Thus: "He called his disciples unto Him, and saith unto them, *I* have compassion on the multitude, because they have now been with Me three days, and have nothing to eat; and if I send them away fasting to their own houses they will faint by the way; for divers of them came from far."

Here, then, we have the true secret of preparation for our high and holy mission. Our blessed Lord first gathers His disciples round Himself, and seeks to fill their hearts with His own feelings and thoughts ere He fills their hands with the loaves and fishes. It is as if He had said, "I have compassion, and I want you to have it also. I want you to enter into all my thoughts and feelings, to think as I do, and feel as I do. I want you to look with mine eyes at this hungry multitude, in order that you may be in a moral condition to be My channels."

This is uncommonly fine. A person may say, "I long to be a channel, but it seems quite too high, quite beyond me. How could I ever attain to such a height?" The answer is, Get near

enough to Christ to think as He thinks, to feel as He feels. Drink into His spirit. This, be assured of it, is the true, the only way to be a channel of communication. If I say, "I must try and be a channel," I shall make a fool of myself. But if I drink at the fountain of Christ's heart, I shall be filled to overflowing, my whole moral being will be permeated by His spirit, so that I shall be in a fit condition to be used by Him, and I shall be sure to make a right use of—that is, to use for Him—whatever ways and means He may put into my hands. If I get my hands full of means, before my heart is full of Christ, I shall not use the means for Him, I shall use them for my own glory, and not for the glory of God.

Brethren, let us ponder this. Let us consider our mission, and the true secret of fulfilling it. It is a grand point to have the heart impressed with the fact, that we are called to be channels through which the heart of Christ may flow out to His own, and to a needy world. It is wonderful, it seems too good to be true; but, blessed be God, it is as true as it is wonderful. Let us only seek to take it in—to believe it, to make it our own. Let us not content ourselves with admiring it as a beautiful theory, but seek to have it wrought into our souls by the mighty power of the Holy Spirit.

But mark how slow the disciples were in responding to the desire of the heart of Christ respecting them. It was His gracious purpose to use them as His channels, to bestow upon them this

immense privilege; but they, like ourselves, were little able to appreciate it, simply because they failed to enter into His thoughts, and to apprehend the glory of His Person. "His disciples answered Him, From whence *can a man* satisfy these men with bread here in the wilderness?" On another occasion they said, "We have here but five loaves and two fishes." Did they not know, or had they forgotten, that they were in the immediate presence of the Creator and Sustainer of the universe? True, He was there in the lowly form of Jesus of Nazareth. His divine glory was hidden from nature's view behind the veil of humanity. But they ought to have known better who and what He was, and how to avail themselves of His glorious presence, and of His unsearchable riches. Surely, had their hearts at all apprehended the glory of His Person, they could never have asked such a question as, "Whence can *a man* satisfy these men with bread here in the wilderness?" Moses, of old, had asked, "Whence should *I* have flesh to give to all this people?" God is shut out by the poor unbelieving heart. Did Jehovah ask Moses to provide flesh? Surely not. No mere man could do it. Neither could a mere man feed four thousand in a desert place.

But God was there. Yes, it was God, speaking through human lips, who had said, "I have compassion on the multitude." It was God who took account of all the circumstances of each individual in that vast multitude of hungry fainting people.

He knew the exact distance each one had travelled, and the length of time each one had been fasting. He took account of the sure consequences of their being dismissed without food. It was God who gave utterance to those touching words, "I cannot send them away fasting, lest they faint by the way, for divers of them came from far."

Yes, God was there, in all the tenderness of a love, which could take account of the most minute details of a creature's weakness, and a creature's necessity. There, too, in His almighty power and exhaustless resources, and there to enable His poor disciples to be the depositaries of His thoughts, the vessels of His goodness, the channels of His grace. And what did they want, in order to be able to fulfil their mission? Did they want to be, or to do, anything? No; they simply wanted to see Him, and to use Him. They wanted to exercise that simple faith which counts on God for everything, and finds all its springs in Him.

Thus it was with the disciples, and thus it is with us. If we want to act as the channels of the grace of Christ, we must have to do with Him in the deep secret of our own souls. We must learn of Him; we must feed upon Him; we must know the meaning of communion with His heart; we must be near enough to Him to know the secrets of His mind, and carry out the purposes of His love. If we would reflect Him, we must gaze upon Him. If we would reproduce Him, we must feed upon Him, we must have Him dwelling in our hearts by faith.

We may depend upon it, that what is really in our hearts will come out in our lives. We may have a quantity of truth in our heads, and flippantly flowing from our lips, but if we really desire to be channels of communication between His heart and the needy ones in the scene through which we are passing, we must habitually drink into His love. It cannot possibly be in any other way. "He that believeth on Me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water" (John viii. 38).

Here lies the grand secret of the whole matter: "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink." If the rivers are to flow, we must drink. It cannot be otherwise. If every member of the Church of God were in the power of this great principle, what a very different state of things we should witness! And where lies the hindrance? We are not straitened in our adorable Lord and Saviour. It is His desire to use us, just as He used His disciples on the occasion before us. He gathered them round Himself, and graciously sought to pour into their hearts the compassion of His own heart, in order that they might feel with Him, as the moral qualification for acting *for Him*. We may always feel assured that where the heart is full of Christ, the power to act will not be lacking.

But, alas! as it was with the disciples, so it is with us. They failed in appreciating and using the power that was in their midst. They said,

"Whence can a man?" when they ought to have said, "We have Christ." They practically ignored Him, and so do we. We make excuses for our poverty, our indolence, our coldness, our indifference, by the plea that we have not got this, and that, and the other; whereas, what we really want is a heart full of Christ—full of His thoughts, full of His love, full of His kindness, full of His tender consideration for others, full of His beautiful self-forgetfulness. We complain of our want of ways and means, when what we really want is the right condition of soul—the true moral attitude of the heart, and this can only spring from close intimacy with Christ, communion with his mind, and drinking into His spirit.

We would very earnestly press this subject upon the Church of God. We long to see every member of the body of Christ acting as a channel through which His precious grace may flow out in living streams to all around, shedding freshness and verdure in its course—and not a stagnant pool, so strikingly illustrative of a Christian out of communion.

NOTE.—We should ever remember, that we are not to be *expectants* from the scene around us, but *contributors*. A true contributor never complains of want of love. He walks in love and manifests love: and his language is, "I have all and abound." Oh, that it were thus with us all!

EPAPHRAS;

OR,

THE SERVICE OF PRAYER

Colossians iv. 12.

THERE is a very striking difference between the inspired records of the people of God and all human biographies. The former may truly be said to be "*much in little*;" while many of the latter may as truly be said to be "*little in much*." The history of one of the Old Testament saints—a history stretching over a period of 365 years—is summed up in two short clauses—"Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him" (Gen. v. 24). How brief! but yet how full, how comprehensive! How many volumes would man have filled with the records of such a life! And yet, what more could he have said? To walk with God comprehends all that could possibly be said of any one. A man may travel round the globe; he may preach the gospel in every clime; he may suffer in the cause of Christ; he may feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the sick; he may read, write, print and publish; in short, he may do all that ever man could or did do; and yet it may be all summed up in that brief clause, "He walked with God." And right

well it will be for him if it can be so summed up. One may do nearly all that has been enumerated, and yet never walk with God one hour; yea, one may not even know the meaning of a walk with God. The thought of this is deeply solemnizing and practical. It should lead us to the earnest cultivation of the hidden life, without which the most showy services will prove to be but mere flash and smoke.

There is something peculiarly touching in the mode in which the name of Epaphras is introduced to our notice in the New Testament. The allusions to him are very brief, but very pithy. He seems to have been the very stamp of man which is so much needed at the present moment. His labors, so far as the inspired penman has recorded them, do not seem to have been very showy or attractive. They were not calculated to meet the human eye or elicit human praise. But oh, they were most precious labors—peerless, priceless labors! They were the labors of the closet, labors within the closed door, labors in the sanctuary, labors without which all beside must prove barren and worthless. He is not placed before us by the sacred biographer as a powerful preacher, a laborious writer, a great traveler, which he may have been, and which are all truly valuable in their place. The Holy Ghost, however, has not told us that Epaphras was any of the three; but then, my reader, He has placed this singularly interesting character before us in a manner calculated to stir the depths of our moral and

spiritual being. He has presented him to us as *a man of prayer*—earnest, fervent, agonizing prayer; prayer not for himself, but for others. Let us harken to the inspired testimony:

“Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always laboring fervently (agonizing) for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. For I bear him record, that he hath a great zeal for you, and them that are in Laodicea, and them in Hierapolis” (Col. iv. 12, 13). Such was Epaphras! Would there were hundreds like him in this our day! We are thankful for preachers, thankful for writers, thankful for travelers in the cause of Christ; but we want men of prayer, men of the closet, men like Epaphras. We are happy to see men on their feet preaching Christ; happy to see them able to ply the pen of a ready writer in the noble cause; happy to see them making their way, in the true evangelistic spirit, into “the regions beyond”; happy to see them, in the true pastoral spirit, going again and again to visit their brethren in every city. God forbid that we should undervalue or speak disparagingly of such honorable services; yea, we prize them more highly than words could convey. But then, at the back of all we want a spirit of prayer—fervent, agonizing, persevering prayer. Without this, nothing can prosper. A prayerless man is a sapless man. A prayerless preacher is a profitless preacher. A prayerless writer will send forth barren pages. A prayerless evangelist will do but little

good. A prayerless pastor will have but little food for the flock. We want men of prayer, men like Epaphras, men whose closet walls witness their agonizing labors. These are, unquestionably, the men for the present moment.

There are immense advantages attending the labors of the closet, advantages quite peculiar, advantages for those who engage in them, and advantages for those who are the subjects of them. They are quiet, unobtrusive labors. They are carried on in retirement, in the hallowed, soul-subduing solitude of the divine presence, outside the range of mortal vision. How little would the Colossians have known of the loving, earnest labors of Epaphras had the Holy Ghost not mentioned them! It is possible that some of them might have deemed him deficient in zealous care on their behalf: it is probable that there were persons then, as there are those now, who would measure a man's care or sympathy by his visits or letters. This would be a false standard. They should see him on his knees to know the amount of his care and sympathy. A love of travel *might* take me from London to Edinburgh to visit the brethren. A love of scribbling might lead me to write letters by every mail. Nought save a love for souls, a love for Christ, could ever lead me to agonize as Epaphras did, on behalf of the people of God, "that they may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God."

Again, the precious labors of the closet demand no special gift, no peculiar talents, no preeminent

mental endowments Every Christian can engage in them. A man may not have the ability to preach, teach, write, or travel; but every man can pray. One sometimes hears of a *gift* of prayer. It is not a pleasant expression. It falls gratingly on the ear. It often means a mere fluent utterance of certain known truths which the memory retains and the lips give forth. This is poor work to be at. This was not the way with Epaphras. This is not what we want and long for. We want a real *spirit* of prayer. We want a spirit that enters into the present need of the Church, and bears that need in persevering, fervent, believing intercession before the throne of grace. This spirit may be exercised at all times, and under all circumstances. Morning, noon, eventide or midnight will answer for the closet laborer. The heart can spring upward to the throne in prayer and supplication at any time. Our Father's ear is ever open, His presence-chamber is ever accessible. Come when or with what we may, He is always ready to hear, ready to answer. He is the Hearer, the Answerer and the Lover of importunate prayer. He Himself has said, "Ask . . . Seek . . . Knock"; "Men ought *always* to pray, and not to faint"; "All things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive"; "If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God." These words are of universal application. They are intended for all God's children. The feeblest child of God can pray, can watch, can get an answer, and return thanks.

Furthermore, nothing is so calculated to give one a deep interest in people as the habit of praying constantly for them. Epaphras would be intensely interested in the Christians at Colosse, Laodicea, and Hierapolis. His interest made him pray, and his prayers made him interested. The more we are interested for any one, the more we shall pray for him; and the more we pray, the more interested we become. Whenever we are drawn out in prayer for people, we are sure to rejoice in their growth and prosperity. So, also, in reference to the unconverted. When we are led to wait on God about them, their conversion is looked for with the deepest anxiety, and hailed, when it comes, with unfeigned thankfulness. The thought of this should stir us up to imitate Epaphras, on whom the Holy Ghost has bestowed the honorable epithet of "a servant of Christ," in connection with his fervent prayers for the people of God.

Finally, the highest inducement that can be presented to cultivate the spirit of Epaphras is the fact of its being so directly in unison with the spirit of Christ. This is the most elevated motive. Christ is engaged on behalf of His people. He desires that they should "stand perfect and complete in all the will of God;" and those who are led forth in prayer in reference to this object are privileged to enjoy high communion with the great Intercessor. How marvelous that poor, feeble creatures down here should be permitted to pray about that which engages the thoughts and interests of the Lord of

glory! What a powerful link there was between the heart of Epaphras and the heart of Christ when the former was laboring for his brethren at Colosse!

Christian reader, let us ponder the example of Epaphras. Let us imitate it. Let us fix our eyes on some Colosse or other, and labor fervently in prayer for the Christians therein. The present is a deeply solemn moment. Oh for men like Epaphras—men who are willing to labor on their knees for the cause of Christ, or to wear, if it should be so, the noble bonds of the gospel. Such was Epaphras. We see him as a man of prayer (Col. iv. 12), and as a companion in bonds with the devoted apostle of the Gentiles (Philem. 23).

May the Lord stir up amongst us a spirit of earnest prayer and intercession. May He raise up many of those who shall be cast in the same spiritual mould as Epaphras. These are the men for the present need.

“READY”

WE want the reader to dwell for a few moments on the little word which forms the heading of this paper. If we mistake not, he will find it to be a word of immense depth and suggestive power, as used by the Holy Ghost in Scripture. We shall just now refer to four passages in which our word occurs; and may the One who penned these passages be pleased to open and apply them in divine power and freshness to the heart of both writer and reader.

1. And first we shall turn to 1 Peter i. 5, where it is used in connection with the word “*salvation*.” Believers are said to be “kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation, *ready* to be revealed in the last time.”

Here, then, we are taught that salvation is ready to be revealed at this moment; for we are, as John tells us, in “the last times.” And be it noted that salvation as here used is not to be confined to the mere matter of the *soul’s* deliverance from hell and perdition: it refers, rather, to the deliverance of the *body* of the believer from the power of death and corruption. In short, it takes in all that stands in anywise connected with the glorious appearing of

our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. We already possess the salvation of our souls, as we are told in the very context from which our text is taken. "Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls. . . . Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you *at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*"

Thus we learn in the clearest way that the "salvation ready to be revealed" is linked on to "the revelation of Jesus Christ." This is confirmed, were confirmation needful, by Hebrews ix. 28, where we read, "So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time, apart from sin, unto *salvation.*"

From all this the reader may learn that the salvation which is *ready* to be revealed is at the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. For this we are taught, as Christians, to look at any moment. There is literally nothing so far as God is concerned, nothing so far as the work of Christ is concerned, nothing so far as the testimony of the Holy Ghost is concerned, to hinder our hearing "the shout of the archangel and the trump of God" this very night, this very hour. All is done that needed to be done. Atonement is made, redemption is accomplished, God has been glorified by the work of Christ, as is proved by the fact of Christ's present place on the throne of the Majesty in the heavens. From the moment that our Lord Christ took His seat upon

that throne, it could always be said that "salvation is *ready* to be revealed."

But it could not have been said before. Salvation could not be said to be ready until the divine groundwork thereof was laid in the death and resurrection of the Saviour. But when once that most glorious work of all works was accomplished, it could at any moment be said that "salvation is ready to be revealed." "The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit Thou at My right hand, until I make Thine enemies Thy footstool" (Ps. cx. 1).

2. But the apostle Peter gives us another instance and application of our word in chap. iv. 5, where he refers to some "who shall give account to Him that is *ready to judge* the quick and the dead."

Here the word stands before us in a form of awful solemnity. If on the one hand it be true that *salvation* is ready to be revealed for the everlasting joy of God's redeemed, it is equally true on the other hand that *judgment* is ready to take its course, for the everlasting misery of those who neglect God's proffered salvation.* The one is as true, and as pointed, and as forcible, as the other. There is nothing to wait for in respect to the judgment,

* As regards the solemn subject of eternal punishment, we shall just refer the reader to three passages of Scripture which establish the truth of it beyond all question: Mark ix. 43-48, the fire is *unquenchable*, and the worm *never dies*; Luke xvi. 26, the great gulfs *fixed*; John iii. 36, the wrath of God *abideth*.

any more than there is in respect to the salvation. The one is as "*ready*" as the other. God has gone to the utmost in demonstrating His grace; and man has gone to the utmost in demonstrating his guilt. Both have reached their climax in the death of Christ; and when we see Him crowned with glory and seated on the throne, we have the most powerful evidence that could possibly be afforded that nothing remains but for salvation to be revealed on the one hand, and for judgment to take its course on the other.

Hence it follows that man is no longer under probation. It is a grand mistake for any one to think so. It falsifies man's entire position and state. If I am under probation; if God is still testing me; if He is even now occupied in testing whether I am good for aught; if I am capable of producing any fruit for Him—if this be indeed the case, then it is not and cannot be true that "He is *ready* to judge." Nature is not ripe for judgment so long as a probationary process is pending, if there is yet something to wait for ere judgment can take its course.

But no, reader; we feel bound to press upon you the fact that the period of your probation is over forever, and the period of God's long-suffering is nearly run out. It is of the utmost importance to seize this truth. It lies at the very foundation of the sinner's position. Judgment is actually impending. It is "*ready*" at this moment to fall upon the head of the unrepentant—the reader of these lines, should he be one of them. The entire history

of human nature—of man, of the world—has been wound up and closed forever. The cross of Christ has made perfectly manifest the guilt and ruin of the human race. It has put an end to man's probationary season; and from that solemn hour until now the true position of the world as a whole, and of each individual sinner—man, woman, and child—has been that of a culprit tried, found guilty, and condemned, but the sentence not executed. This is the present awful position of the unconverted, unbelieving reader.

Dear friend, wilt thou not think of this? Fellow immortal soul, wilt thou not, even this very moment, bend the undivided attention of thy soul to this eternal question? We must speak plainly and pointedly. We feel in some small degree the awfulness of the sinner's state and prospect, in view of these weighty words, "*ready to judge.*" We are convinced that the present is a moment which calls for serious and faithful dealing with the souls of our readers. We do not, as God is our witness, want to write essays or sermons; we want to reach souls. We want the reader to be assured of this; that he is not now reading an article on a religious subject prepared for some literary purpose, but a solemn appeal made to his heart and conscience in the immediate presence of "Him who is ready to judge the quick and the dead."

3. But this leads us to the third passage of holy Scripture in which our weighty motto occurs. The reader will find it in Luke xii. 40: "Be ye therefore

ready also; for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not.”

If salvation is “ready” to be revealed, and if judgment is “ready” to be executed, what becomes us but to be “ready” also?

And in what does this readiness consist? How are we to be ready? It strikes us that there are two things included in the answer.

First, we must be “ready” in *title*; and, secondly, we must be “ready” in our moral *state*—ready in conscience, and ready in heart. The one is founded upon the work of Christ *for* us; the other is connected with the work of the Spirit *in* us. If we are simply resting by faith on the finished work of Christ, if we are leaning exclusively on what He has done and what He is, then are we in very truth ready in title, and we may rest assured of being with Him when He comes.

But, on the other hand, if we are leaning upon our fancied goodness, upon any righteousness which we think we possess, upon not having done any harm to any one, upon our not being worse than some of our neighbors, upon our church-membership, upon our attention to the ordinances of religion;—if we are leaning upon any or all of these things, or if we are adding these things to Christ, then we may be assured we are not ready in title, not ready in conscience. God can accept nothing, absolutely nothing, as a title, but Christ. To bring aught else is to declare that Christ is not needful: to bring aught besides is to affirm that He

is not enough. But God has borne ten thousand testimonies to the fact that we can do with nothing less, and that we want nothing more, than Christ. Hence, therefore, Christ is our all-essential and all-sufficient title.

But, then, there is such a thing as professing to be ready in title while at the same time we are not ready in our moral condition or practical state. This demands our gravest attention. There is a vast amount of easy-going evangelical profession abroad at the present moment. The atmosphere is permeated by the rays of gospel light. The darkness of the Middle Ages has been chased away by the brightness of a free gospel and an open Bible.

We are thankful for a free gospel and an open Bible. But we cannot shut our eyes to the fact that there is a fearful amount of laxity, unsubduedness and self-indulgence going hand in hand with the evangelical profession of the day. We notice with the deepest anxiety many young professors who have, or seem to have, a very clear insight, so far as the intellect goes, into the truth of the sinner's title, who, if we are to judge from their style, deportment, and habits, are not “ready” in their moral condition—in the real state of their hearts. We are at times, we must confess, sadly cast down when we see our young friends decking their persons in the vain fashions of a vain and sinful world; feeding upon the vile literature that issues in such frightful profusion from the press; and actually singing vain songs and engaging in light and frivo-

lous conversation. It is impossible to reconcile such with “Be ye also ready.”

We may perhaps be told that these things are externals, and that the grand point is to be occupied with Christ. It may be said,—it has been said,—“Provided we have Christ in our hearts, it does not matter what we have on our heads or in our hands.” We reply, “If we really have Christ in our hearts, it will regulate what we put on our heads and take into our hands; yea, it will exert a *manifest* influence upon our whole deportment and character.”

We should like to ask some of our young friends this question: “Would you like the Lord Christ to come and find you reading a love-story, or singing a song?” We feel assured you would not. Well, then, let us, in the name of the Lord, see to it that we do not engage in anything which does not comport with our being “*ready*.”

We specially urge this upon the young Christian reader. Let this question be ever before us, “Am I ready?—ready in title, ready in state, ready in conscience, ready in heart?” The times are really very solemn, and it behooves us to think seriously of our true state. We feel persuaded that there is a lack of real, godly heart-exercise amongst us. There are, we fear, many—God only knows how many—who are not ready; many who would be taken aback and terribly surprised by death or the coming of the Lord. There are things said and done by those who occupy the very highest platform

of profession which we dare not indulge in if we are really *looking* for the Lord.

God grant that the reader may know what it is to be ready in title and ready in state; that he may have a purged conscience and a truly exercised heart. Then he will be able to enter into the meaning of the fourth and last passage, to which we call his attention. It occurs in Matt. xxv. 10.

4. "And while they (the foolish virgins) went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were *ready* went in with him to the marriage; and the door was shut."

How solemn! How awfully solemn! Those who were *ready* went in, and those who were not ready were shut out. Those who have life in Christ, who are indwelt by the Holy Ghost, will be ready. But the mere professor—the one who has truth in the head and on the lip, but not in the heart; who has the lamp of profession, but not the Spirit of life in Christ—will be shut out into outer darkness—in the everlasting misery and gloom of hell.

O beloved reader, let us, as we take a solemn leave of you, put this question home to your very inmost soul, "ART THOU READY?"

"HOLY BRETHREN"

"**W**HEREFORE, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, *consider* the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Jesus" (Heb. iii. 1).

"And let us *consider* one another, to provoke unto love and good works" (Heb. x. 24).

The two passages we have just penned, are very intimately connected. Indeed, they are bound together by the simple fact, that the inspired writer makes use of the same word in each; and, further, that this word occurs only in these two places throughout the whole of this marvellous treatise.*

We are to consider Jesus; and we are to consider all those who belong to Him, wherever they are. These are the two grand departments of our work. We are to apply our minds diligently to

* The English word, "consider," occurs four times throughout the Epistle to the Hebrews; but it represents three different Greek words. In chapter vii. 4, "Consider how great this man was." Here the word is *θεωρεῖτε*, which occurs, in its various inflections, about fifty-six times in the Greek Testament, but only in this one instance is it rendered by the word "consider." Its simple and general meaning is to "see" or "perceive."

Again, in Hebrews xii. 3, we have, "Consider Him

Him and to His interests on the earth, and thus be blessedly delivered from the miserable business of thinking about ourselves or our own interests: a morally glorious deliverance, most surely, for which we may well praise our glorious Deliverer.

However, before proceeding to the great subjects which we are called to consider, we must dwell, for a little, on the wonderful title bestowed by the Holy Spirit upon all believers—all true Christians. He calls them, "holy brethren." This, truly, is a title of great moral dignity. He does not say, we *ought to be* holy. No; he says we *are*. It is a question of the title or standing of every child of God on the face of the earth. No doubt, having through sovereign grace this holy standing, we ought to be holy in our walk; our moral condition ought ever to answer to our title. We should never allow a thought, word, or act, in the smallest degree inconsistent with our high position as "holy brethren." Holy thoughts, holy words, holy actings are alone suited to those upon whom infinite grace has bestowed the title of "holy brethren."

Let us never forget this. Let us never say, never think, that we cannot maintain such a dig-

who endured such contradiction," etc. Here the word is ἀναλογισάσθε, which occurs only in this place throughout the entire New Testament, and expresses the idea of comparison or analogy.

But in the two verses which stand at the head of this paper, the word is κατανοέω, which has an intensive force, and signifies an earnest application of the mind.

nity, or live up to such a standard. The very same grace which has bestowed upon us the dignity, will ever enable us to support it; and we shall see, in the progress of this paper, how this grace acts—the mighty moral means used to produce a practical walk in accordance with our holy calling.

But let us inquire on what does the apostle ground the title of “holy brethren?” It is of all possible importance to be clear as to this. If we do not see that it is wholly independent of our state, our walk, or our attainments, we can neither understand the position nor its practical results. We may assert with all confidence, that the very holiest walk that ever was exhibited in this world, the highest spiritual state that ever was attained, could never form the basis of such a position as is set forth in the title of which we speak. Nay, more; we are bold to affirm that not even the work of the Spirit in us, blessedly essential as it is in every stage of the divine life, could entitle us to enter upon such a dignity. Nothing in us, nothing of us, nothing about us, could ever form the foundation of such a standing as is set forth in the title “holy brethren.”

On what then is it grounded? Hebrews ii. 11 furnishes the reply. “For both He that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are *all of one: for which cause He is not ashamed* to call them brethren.” Here we have one of the most profound and comprehensive statements of truth contained

within the covers of the divine volume. Here we see how we become "holy brethren;" even by association with that blessed One who went down into death for us, and who, in resurrection, has become the foundation of that new order of things in which we have our place; the Head of that new creation to which we belong; the Firstborn among the many brethren of whom He is not ashamed, inasmuch as He has placed them on the same platform with Himself, and brought them to God not only in the perfect efficacy of His work, but in all His own perfect acceptability and infinite preciousness. "The Sanctifier and the sanctified are all of one." *

Wonderful words! let the reader ponder them. Let him specially note the vast, yea, the immeasurable difference between these two words "Sanctifier and sanctified." Such was our blessed Lord, per-

* It is a fact of deepest interest, that, to "Mary Magdalene, out of whom went seven devils," was granted the privilege of announcing to the disciples the glad tidings of the new and wondrous relationship into which they were introduced. "Go to *My brethren*," said the risen Saviour, "and say unto them, I ascend unto *My Father* and *your Father*; and to *My God* and *your God*." It is John who, by the Holy Ghost, records this profoundly interesting fact.

Never before had such an announcement been made. But now the great work was done, the battle over, the victory gained, the foundation of the new edifice laid; and Mary Magdalene was made the herald of the most glorious tidings that ever fell on mortal ears.

sonally, intrinsically, in His humanity, that He was capable of being the Sanctifier. Such were we personally, in our moral condition, in our nature, that we needed to be sanctified. But—eternal and universal homage to His name!—such is the perfection of His work, such the "riches" and the "glory of His grace" that it can be said, "As He is so are we in this world"—"the Sanctifier and the sanctified are all of one"—all on one common ground, and that for ever.

Nothing can exceed this as to title and standing. We stand in all the glorious results of His accomplished work, and in all the acceptance of His Person. He has linked us with Himself, in resurrection-life, and made us sharers of all He has and all He is as man—His deity, of course is incommunicable.

But let us note very particularly all that is involved in the fact that we *needed* to be "sanctified." It sets forth in the clearest and most forcible manner the total, hopeless, absolute ruin of every one of us. It matters not, so far as this aspect of the truth is concerned, who we were or what we were in our personal history or our practical life. We may have been refined, cultivated, amiable, moral, and, after a human fashion, religious; or we may have been degraded, demoralized, depraved, the very scum of society. In a word, we may have been morally and socially as far apart as the poles; but inasmuch as all needed to be sanctified, the highest as well as the lowest, ere we could be ad-

dressed as "holy brethren," there is evidently "no difference." The very worst needed nothing more, and the very best could do with nothing less. Each and all were involved in one common ruin, and needed to be sanctified, or set apart, ere we could take our place amongst the "holy brethren." And now, being set apart, we are all on one common ground; so that the very feeblest child of God on the face of the earth belongs as really and truly to the "holy brethren" as the blessed apostle Paul himself. It is not a question of progress or attainment, precious and important as it most surely is to make progress, but simply of our common standing before God, of which the "First-born" is the blessed and eternal definition.

But we must here remind the reader of the vast importance of being clear and well-grounded as to the relationship of the "First-born" with the "many brethren." This is a grand foundation-truth, as to which there must be no vagueness or indecision. Scripture is clear and emphatic on this great cardinal point. But there are many who will not listen to Scripture. They are so full of their own thoughts that they will not take the trouble to search and see what Scripture says on the subject. Hence you find many maintaining the fatal error that incarnation is the ground of our relationship with the First-born. They look upon the Incarnate One as our "Elder Brother," who, in taking human nature upon Him, took us into union with Himself, or linked Himself on to us.

Now such an error involves most frightful consequences. In the first place, it involves a positive blasphemy against the person of the Son of God—a denial of His absolutely spotless, sinless, perfect manhood. He, blessed be His name, was such in His humanity that the angel could say to the virgin of Him, "That holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." His human nature was absolutely holy. As a man He knew no sin. He was the only man that ever lived of whom this could be said. He was unique. He stood absolutely alone. There was, there could be, no union with Him in incarnation. How could the Holy and the unholy, the Pure and the impure, the Spotless and the spotted ever be united? Utterly impossible! Those who think or say they could, do greatly err, not knowing the Scriptures or the Son of God.

But further: those who speak of union in incarnation are most manifestly the enemies of the cross of Christ; for what need was there of the cross, the death or the blood of Christ, if sinners could be united to Him in incarnation? Surely none whatever. There was no need of atonement, no need of propitiation, no need of the substitutionary sufferings and death of Christ, if sinners could be united to Him without them.

Hence we see how entirely this system of doctrine is of Satan. It dishonors the person of Christ, and sets aside His precious atonement. And in addition to all this, it overthrows the teach-

ing of the entire Bible on the subject of man's guilt and ruin. In short, it completely sweeps away the great foundation-truths of our glorious Christianity, and gives us instead a Christless, infidel system. This is what the devil has ever been aiming at; it is what he is aiming at still; and thousands of so-called Christian teachers are acting as his agents in the terrible business of seeking to abolish Christianity. Tremendous fact for all whom it may concern!

But let us reverently harken to the teaching of Holy Scripture on this great subject. What mean those words which fell from the lips of our Lord Jesus Christ, and are repeated for us by God the Holy Ghost, "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and *die*, it abideth alone"? Who was this corn of wheat? Himself, blessed be His holy name. He had to die in order to "bring forth much fruit." If He was to surround Himself with His "many brethren," He had to go down into death in order to take out of the way every hindrance to their eternal association on the new ground of resurrection. He, the true David, had to go forth single-handed to meet the terrible foe, in order that He might have the deep joy of sharing with His brethren the spoils of His glorious victory. Eternal halleluiahs to His peerless name!

There is a very beautiful passage bearing upon our subject in Mark viii. We shall quote it for the reader: "And He began to teach them, that the Son of man *must suffer* many things, and be reject-

ed of the elders, and of the chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. And He spake that saying openly. And Peter took Him, and began to rebuke Him." In another Gospel we are told what Peter said: "Pity Thyself, Lord: this shall not be unto Thee." Mark the Lord's reply; mark His attitude: "But when He had turned about and *looked on His disciples*, He rebuked Peter, saying, Get thee behind Me, Satan, for thou savorest not the things that be of God, but the things that be of men."

This is perfectly beautiful. It not only presents a truth to the understanding, but lets in upon the heart a bright ray of the moral glory of our adorable Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, eminently calculated to bow the soul in worship before Him. "He turned and looked upon His disciples." It is as though He would say to His erring servant, "If I adopt your suggestion, if I pity myself, what will become of these?" Blessed Saviour! He did not think of Himself. "He stedfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem," well knowing what awaited Him there. He went to the cross, and there endured the wrath of God, the judgment of sin, all the terrible consequences of our condition, in order to glorify God with respect to our sins, and that He might have the ineffable and eternal joy of surrounding Himself with the "many brethren" to whom He could, on resurrection ground, declare the Father's name. "*I will declare Thy name unto My brethren.*" He looked forward to this from amid

the awful shadows of Calvary, where He was enduring for us what no created intelligence can ever fathom. If ever He was to call us "brethren," He must *all alone* meet death and judgment on our behalf.

Now why all this if incarnation was the basis of our union or association? * Is it not perfectly plain to the reader that there could be no link between Christ and us save on the ground of accomplished atonement? How could there be a link with sin unatoned for, guilt uncanceled, the claims of God unanswered? Utterly impossible. To maintain such a thought is to fly in the face of divine revelation and sweep away the very foundations of Christianity; and this, as we very well know, is precisely what the devil is ever aiming at.

However, we shall not pursue the subject further here. It may be that the great majority of our readers are thoroughly clear and settled on the point, and that they hold it as a great cardinal and essential truth. Still, we feel it of importance just

* We do not mean that union with Christ as Head of the body is taught in Heb. ii. 11. For the unfolding of that glorious truth we must look elsewhere. It comes not within the range of the epistle to the Hebrews. See Eph. i. 22, 23; v. 30. But whether we view Him as Head of the body, or as the First-born among many brethren, Scripture most distinctly and emphatically teaches us that His death on the cross was absolutely essential to our union, or association, with Christ. *No death, no union.* The corn of wheat had to fall into the ground and die, in order to bring forth much fruit.

now to bear a very distinct testimony to the whole Church of God on this most blessed subject. We feel persuaded that the error which we have been combating—the notion of union with Christ in incarnation—forms an integral part of a vast infidel and antichristian system which holds sway over thousands of professing Christians, and is making fearful progress throughout the length and breadth of Christendom. It is the deep and solemn conviction of this that leads us to call the attention of the beloved flock of Christ to one of the most precious and glorious subjects that could possibly occupy their hearts, namely, their title to be called "holy brethren."

We shall now turn for a few moments to the exhortation addressed to the "holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling." As we have already observed, we are not exhorted *to be* holy brethren: we are *made* such. The place and the portion are ours through infinite grace, and it is on this blessed fact that the inspired apostle grounds his exhortation, "Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Jesus."

The titles bestowed on our blessed Lord in this passage present Him to our hearts in a very wonderful manner. They take in the wide range of His history from the bosom of the Father down to the dust of death; and from the dust of death back to the throne of God. As the Apostle, He came from God to us; and as the High Priest, He has

gone back to God for us. He came from heaven to reveal God to us, to unfold to us the very heart of God, to make us know the precious secrets of His bosom. "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in times past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son, whom He hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high."

What a marvelous privilege to have God revealed to us in the person of Christ! God has spoken to us in the Son. Our blessed Apostle has given us the full and perfect revelation of God. "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him." "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (John i.; 2 Cor. iv.).

All this is unspeakably precious. Jesus has revealed God to our souls. We could know absolutely nothing of God if the Son had not come and spoken to us. But—thanks and praise to our God!—we can say with all possible certainty, "*We know* that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know Him that is true: and we are in Him that is true, even in His Son

Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life." We can now turn to the four Gospels; and as we gaze upon that blessed One who is there presented to us by the Holy Ghost, in all that lovely grace which shone out in all His words, and works, and ways, we can say, That is God. We see Him going about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; we see Him healing the sick, cleansing the leper, opening the eyes of the blind, unstopping the ears of the deaf, feeding the hungry, drying the widow's tears, weeping at the tomb of Lazarus, and say, That is God. Every ray of moral glory that shone in the life and ministry of the Apostle of our confession was the expression of God. He was the brightness of the divine glory, and the exact impression of the divine essence.

"Thou art the everlasting Word,
The Father's only Son;
God manifest, God seen and heard,
The heavens' beloved One.

"In Thee most perfectly expressed,
The Father's self doth shine;
Fulness of Godhead too; the Blest—
Eternally Divine."

How precious is all this to our souls! To have God revealed in the person of Christ, so that we can know Him, delight in Him, find all our springs in Him, call Him Abba Father, walk in the light of His blessed countenance, have fellowship with Him and with His Son Jesus Christ, know the love of

His heart, the very love wherewith He loves the Son—what deep blessedness! what fulness of joy! How can we ever sufficiently praise the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ for His marvelous grace in having introduced us into such a sphere of blessing and privilege, and set us in such a wondrous relationship with Himself in the Son of His love! Oh, may our *hearts* praise Him! May our *lives* praise Him! May it be the one grand aim and object of our whole moral being to magnify His name!

But we must now turn for a little to another great branch of our subject. We have to “consider the High Priest of our confession.” This, too, is fraught with richest blessing for every one of the “holy brethren.” The same blessed One who, as the Apostle, came to make Him known to our souls, has gone back to God for us. He came to speak to us about God; and He is gone to speak to God about us. He appears in the presence of God for us; He bears us up on His heart continually; He represents us before God to maintain us in the integrity of the position into which His precious atoning work has introduced us. His blessed priesthood is the divine provision for our wilderness path. Were it merely a question of our standing or title, there would be no need of priesthood; but inasmuch as it is a question of our actual state and practical walk, we could not get on for one moment if we had not our great High Priest ever living for us in the presence of God.

Now there are three most precious departments of our Lord's priestly service presented in the epistle to the Hebrews. In the first place we read, in chap. iv., "Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we have not a high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, except sin." *

Christian reader, only think of the deep blessedness of having One at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens who is *touched* with the feeling of your infirmities, who enters into all your sorrows, who feels for you and with you in all your exercises, trials, and difficulties! Think of having a Man on the throne of God—a perfect human heart, One on whom you can count in all your weakness, heaviness, and conflict; in everything, in short, except sin! With this, blessed be His name, He can have no sympathy.

But oh, what pen, what human tongue, can adequately set forth the deep, deep blessedness of having a Man in the glory whose heart is with us in all the trials and sorrows of our wilderness path! What a precious provision! What a divine reality! The One who has all power in heaven and on earth now lives for us in heaven. We can count on Him

* "Yet without sin," as given in the "Authorized Version," does not convey the correct thought of the original, which is, "tempted in all things in like manner [to us], sin apart," or "sin excepted." Ed.

at all times. He enters into all our feelings in a way that no earthly friend could possibly do. We can go to Him and tell Him things which we could not name to our dearest friend on earth, inasmuch as none but He can fully understand us.

But our great High Priest understands all about us. He has passed through every trial and sorrow that a perfect human heart could know. Hence He can perfectly sympathize with us, and He delights to minister to us in all our seasons of sorrow and affliction, when the heart is crushed and bowed beneath a weight of anguish which only He can fully enter into. Precious Saviour! Most merciful High Priest! May our hearts delight in Thee! May we draw more largely upon the exhaustless springs of comfort and consolation that are found in Thy large and loving heart for all Thy tried, tempted, sorrowing, suffering brethren here below!

In Hebrews vii. 25 we have another very precious branch of our Lord's priestly work, and that is His intercession—His active intervention on our behalf, in the presence of God. "Wherefore He is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them."

What comfort is here for all the "holy brethren!" What strong consolation! What blessed assurance! Our great High Priest bears us upon His heart continually before the throne. All our affairs are in His blessed hands, and can never fall through.

He lives for us, and we live in Him. He will carry us right through to the end. Men speak about "the final perseverance of the saints." Scripture speaks of the final perseverance of our divine and adorable High Priest. Here we rest. He says to us, "Because I live, ye shall live also." "If, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by *the death of His Son*," (the only possible way in which we could be reconciled) "much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life"—that is, His life up in heaven. He has made Himself responsible for every one of the "holy brethren," to bring them through all the difficulties, trials, snares, and temptations of the wilderness, right home to glory. Universal and everlasting homage to His blessed name!

We cannot, of course, attempt to go elaborately into the great subject of priesthood in a paper like this; we can do little more than touch upon the three salient points indicated above, and quote for the reader the passages of Scripture in which those points are presented.

In Hebrews xiii. 15 we have the third branch of our Lord's service for us in the heavenly sanctuary. "*By Him*, therefore, let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to his name."

What a comfort to know that we have One in the presence of God to present our sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving! How sweetly it encourages us to bring such sacrifices at all times! True,

they may seem very poor, very meagre, very imperfect; but our great High Priest knows how to separate the precious from the vile; He takes our sacrifices, and presents them to God in all the perfect fragrance of His own person and ministry. Every little breathing of the heart, every utterance, every little act of service, goes up to God, not only divested of all our infirmity and imperfection, but adorned with all the excellency of the One who ever liveth in the presence of God, not only to sympathize and intercede, but also to present our sacrifices of thanksgiving and praise.

All this is full of comfort and encouragement. How often have we to mourn over our coldness, barrenness, and deadness, both in private and in public! We seem unable to do more than utter a groan or a sigh. Well, Jesus—it is the fruit of His grace—takes that groan or that sigh, and presents it to God in all His own preciousness. This is part of His present ministry for us in the presence of our God, a ministry which He delights to discharge—blessed be His name! It is His joy to bear us upon His heart before the Throne. He thinks of each one in particular, as if He had but that one to think of.

It is wonderful; but so it is. He enters into all our little trials and sorrows, conflicts and exercises, as though He had nothing else to think of. Each one has the undivided attention and sympathy of that large, loving heart, in all that may rise in our passage through this scene of trial and sorrow. He

has gone through it all. He knows, as we say, every step of the road. We can discern His blessed footprints all across the desert; and look up through the opened heavens and see Him on the throne, a glorified Man, but the same Jesus who was down here upon earth—His circumstances changed, but not His tender, loving, sympathizing heart: "The same yesterday, to-day, and for ever."

Such then, beloved Christian reader, is the great High Priest, whom we are exhorted to "consider." Truly we have all we want in Him. His sympathy, perfect; His intercession, all-prevailing; His presentation of our sacrifices, ever acceptable. Well may we say, "We have all, and abound."

And now, in conclusion, let us glance for a moment at the precious exhortation in Hebrews x. 24: "Let us *consider* one another, to provoke unto love and good works."

How morally lovely is the connection! The more attentively we consider Him, the more we shall be fitted and disposed to consider all who belong to Him, whoever and wherever they may be. Shew us a man full of Christ, and we will shew you a man full of love, and care, and interest for every member of the body of Christ. It must be so. It is simply impossible to be near Christ, and not have the heart filled with the sweetest affections for all that belong to Him. We cannot consider Him without being reminded of them, and led out in service, prayer, and sympathy, according to our little measure. If you hear a person talking loudly

of his love for Christ, his attachment to Him and delight in Him, and, all the while, having no love for His people—no readiness to spend and be spent for them, no self-sacrifice on their behalf—you may be sure it is all hollow, worthless profession. "Hereby perceive we the love, because he laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed, and in truth." And again, "This commandment have we from Him, that he who loveth God, love his brother also" (1 John iii. 16-18; iv. 21).

These are wholesome words for all of us. May we apply our hearts most diligently to them! May we, by the powerful ministry of the Holy Ghost, be enabled to respond with all our hearts, to these two weighty and needed exhortations, to "Consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession," and to "Consider one another!" And let us bear in mind, that the proper consideration of one another will never take the form of prying curiosity, or unwarrantable *espionage*—things which can only be regarded as the curse and bane of all Christian society. No, no; it is the very reverse of all this. It is a loving, tender care, expressing itself in every form of refined, delicate, and seasonable service—the lovely fruit of true communion with the heart of Christ.

JEHOVAH'S DEMAND AND SATAN'S OBJECTIONS

"Let My people go, that they may hold a feast to Me in the wilderness" (Exodus v. 1).

WHAT a volume of truth is contained in the sentence which we have just penned! It is one of those comprehensive and suggestive passages which lie scattered up and down the divine volume, and which seize, with peculiar power, upon the heart, and open up a vast field of most precious truth. It sets forth, in plain and forcible language, the blessed purpose of the Lord God of Israel to have His people completely delivered from Egypt and separated unto Himself, in order that they might feast with Him in the wilderness. Nothing could satisfy His heart, in reference to them, but their entire emancipation from the land of death and darkness. He would free them not only from Egypt's brick-kilns and task-masters, but from its temples and its altars, and from all its habits and all its associations, from its principles, its maxims, and its fashions. In a word, they must be a thoroughly separated people, ere they could hold a feast to Him in the wilderness.

Thus it was with Israel, and thus it is with us. We, too, must be a fully and consciously delivered people ere we can properly serve, worship, or walk with God. We must not only know the forgiveness of our sins, and our entire freedom from guilt, wrath, judgment, and condemnation; but also our complete deliverance from this present evil world and all its belongings, ere we can intelligently serve the Lord. The world is to the Christian what Egypt was to Israel; only, of course, our separation from the world is not local or physical, but moral and spiritual. Israel left Egypt in person; we leave the world in spirit and principle. Israel left Egypt in fact; we leave the world in faith. It was a real, out-and-out, thorough separation for them, and it is the same for us. "Let My people go, that they may hold a feast to Me in the wilderness."

1. To this rigid separation, as we very well know, Satan had and still has many objections. His first objection was set forth in the following words, spoken by the lips of Pharaoh, "Go ye, *and sacrifice to your God in the land.*" These were subtle words—words well calculated to ensnare a heart that was not in communion with the mind of God. For it might with great plausibility and apparent force be argued, Is it not uncommonly liberal on the part of the king of Egypt to offer you toleration for your peculiar mode of worship? Is it not a great stretch of liberality to offer your religion a place on the public platform? Surely you can

carry on your religion as well as other people. There is room for all. Why this demand for separation? Why not take common ground with your neighbors? There is no need surely for such extreme narrowness.

All this might seem very reasonable. But then, mark Jehovah's high and holy standard! Harken to the plain and positive declaration, "Let My people go!" There is no mistaking this. It is impossible, in the face of such a statement, to remain in Egypt. The most plausible reasonings that ever could be advanced vanish into thin air in the presence of the authoritative demand of the Lord God of Israel. If He says, "Let My people go," then go we must, spite of all the opposing power of earth and hell, men and devils. There is no use in reasoning, disputing, or discussing. We must obey. Egyptians may think for themselves; Jehovah must think for Israel; the sequel will prove who is right.

And here let us just offer our readers a word, in passing, as to the subject of "narrowness," about which we hear so much now-a-days. The real question is, "Who is to fix the boundaries of the Christian's faith? Is it man or God—human opinion or divine revelation?" When this question is answered, the whole matter is easily settled. There are some minds terribly scared by the bugbear of "narrow-mindedness." But then we have to inquire what *is* narrowness, and what breadth of mind? Now, what we understand by a narrow

mind is simply a mind which refuses to take in and be governed by the whole truth of God. A mind governed by human opinions, human reasonings, worldly maxims, selfish interests, self-will—this we unhesitatingly pronounce to be a narrow mind.

On the other hand, a mind beautifully subject to the authority of Christ—a mind that bows with reverent submission to the voice of Holy Scripture—a mind that sternly refuses to go beyond the written Word—that absolutely rejects what is not based upon “Thus saith the Lord,”—this is what we call a broad, elevated mind.

Reader, is it not—must it not be so? Is not God's word—His mind, infinitely more comprehensive, wide, and full than the mind and ways of man? Is there not infinitely greater breadth in the Holy Scriptures than in all the human writings under the sun? Does it not argue more largeness of heart, and devotion of soul to be governed by the thoughts of God than by our own thoughts or the thoughts of our fellows? It seems to us there can be but one reply to these questions; and hence the entire subject of narrowness resolves itself into this simple but very telling motto, “We must be as narrow as Christ, and as broad as Christ.”

We must view everything from this blessed standpoint, and then our entire range of vision will be correct, and our conclusions thoroughly sound. But if Christ be not our standpoint, but self, or

man, or the world, then our entire range of vision is false, and our conclusions thoroughly unsound.

All this is as clear as a sunbeam to a single eye and an honest and loyal heart. And, really, if the eye be not single, and the heart true to Christ, and the conscience subject to the Word, it is a complete loss of time to argue or discuss. Of what possible use can it be to argue with a man who, instead of obeying the word of God, is only seeking to turn aside its edge? None whatever. It is a hopeless task to reason with one who has never taken in the mighty moral import of that most precious word—obey.

We must now return to our immediate theme. There is something uncommonly fine in Moses' reply to Satan's first objection, "It is not meet so to do; for we shall sacrifice the abomination of the Egyptians to the Lord our God: lo, shall we sacrifice the abomination of the Egyptians before their eyes, and will they not stone us? We will go three days' journey into the wilderness, and sacrifice to the Lord our God, as He shall command us" (Ex. viii. 26).

There would have been a lack of moral fitness in presenting to Jehovah, in sacrifice, the object of Egyptian worship. But, more than this, Egypt was not the place in which to erect an altar to the true God. Abraham had no altar when he turned aside into Egypt. He abandoned his worship and his strangership when he went down thither; and if Abraham could not worship there, neither could

his seed. An Egyptian might ask, Why? But it is one thing to ask a question, and another thing to understand the answer. How could the Egyptian mind enter into the reasons of a true Israelite's conduct? Impossible. What could such an one know of the meaning of a "three days" journey?" Absolutely nothing. "Beloved, the world knoweth us not, because it knew Him not." The motives which actuate, and the objects which animate, the true believer lie far beyond the world's range of vision; and we may rest assured that in the exact proportion in which the world can enter into and appreciate a Christian's motives the Christian must be unfaithful to his Lord.

We speak, of course, of proper Christian *motives*. No doubt there is much in a Christian's life that the world can admire and value. Integrity, honesty, truthfulness, disinterested kindness, care for the poor, self-denial—all these things may be understood and appreciated; but, admitting all this, we return to the apostolic statement that "The world knoweth us not:" and if we want to walk with God—if we would hold a feast unto Him—if it is our heart's true and earnest desire to run a consistent heavenly course, we must break with the world altogether, and break with *self* also, and take our stand outside the camp, with a world-rejected, heaven-accepted Christ. May we do so, with fixed purpose of heart, to the glory of His own precious and peerless name!

2. Satan's second objection is very near akin to

his first. If he cannot succeed in keeping Israel in Egypt, he will at least try to keep them as near to it as possible. "I will let you go, that ye may sacrifice to the Lord your God in the wilderness; only *ye shall not go very far away*" (chap viii. 28).

There is more damage done to the cause of Christ by an apparent, partial, half-hearted giving up of the world, than by remaining in it altogether. Wavering, undecided, half-and-half professors injure the testimony of the Lord more than out-and-out worldlings. And, further, we may say, there is a very wide difference indeed between giving up certain worldly things, and giving up the world itself. A person may lay aside certain forms of worldliness, and, all the while, retain the world deep down in the heart. We may give up the theatre, the ball-room, the race-course, the billiard-table, etc., yet cling to the world all the same. We may lop off some of the branches, and yet cling with tenacity to the old trunk.

This must be carefully seen to. We feel persuaded that what multitudes of professing Christians need is to make a clean break with the world—that very comprehensive word. It is utterly impossible to make a proper start, much less to make any progress, while the heart is playing fast and loose with the holy claims of Christ. We do not hesitate to express it as our settled conviction that, in thousands of cases, where souls complain of doubts and fears, ups and downs, darkness and heaviness, lack of assurance and comfort, of light,

liberty, joy, peace, and vivid realization, it is owing to the simple fact that they have not really broken with the world. They either seek to hold a feast to the Lord in Egypt, or they remain so near as to be easily drawn back again; so near that they are neither one thing nor the other.

How can such people be happy? How can their peace flow as a river? How can they possibly walk in the light of a Father's countenance, or in the joy of a Saviour's presence? How can the blessed beams of that sun that shines in the new creation reach them through the murky atmosphere that envelopes the land of death and darkness? Impossible! They must break with the world, and make a clear, decided, whole-hearted surrender of themselves to Christ. There must be a full Christ for the heart, and a full heart for Christ.

Here, we may rest assured, lies the grand secret of Christian progress. We must make a proper start before ever we can get on; and in order to make a proper start we must break our links with the world, or, rather, we must believe and practically carry out the fact that God has broken them for us in the death of our Lord Jesus Christ. The cross has separated us for ever from this present evil world. It has not merely delivered us from the eternal consequences of our sins, but from the present power of sin, and from the principles, maxims, and fashions of a world that lieth in the hands of the wicked one.

It is one of Satan's masterpieces to lead professing Christians to rest satisfied with looking to the Cross for salvation while remaining in the world, or occupying a border position—"not going very far away." This is a terrible snare, against which we most solemnly warn the Christian reader. What is the remedy? True heart-devotedness to and fellowship with a rejected and glorified Christ. To walk with Christ, to delight in Him, to feed upon Him, we must be apart from the godless, Christless, wicked world—apart from it in the spirit of our minds and in the affections of our hearts—apart from it, not merely in its gross forms of moral pravity, or the wild extravagance of its folly and gaiety, but apart from its religion, its politics, and its philanthropy—apart from the world in all that goes to make up that comprehensive phrase.

But here we may be asked, "Is Christianity merely a stripping, an emptying, a giving up? Does it only consist of prohibition and negation?" We answer, with hearty and blissful emphasis, *No!* A thousand times, *No!* Christianity is preeminently positive—intensely real—divinely satisfying. What does it give us in lieu of what it takes from us? It gives us "unsearchable riches" in place of "dung and dross." It gives us "an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled and unfading, reserved in heaven," instead of a poor passing bubble on the stream of time. It gives us Christ, the joy of the heart of God, the object of heaven's worship, the theme of angels' song, the eternal sunlight of the new crea-

tion, in lieu of a few moments of sinful gratification and guilty pleasure. And, finally, it gives us an eternity of ineffable bliss and glory in the Father's house above, instead of an eternity in the awful flames of hell.

Reader, what sayest thou to these things? Is not this a good exchange? Can we not find here the most cogent reasons for giving up the world? It sometimes happens that men favor us with their reasons for resigning this, that, and the other branch of worldliness; but it strikes us that all such reasons might be summed up in one, and that one be thus enunciated: "*The reason for resigning the world—I have found Christ.*" This is the real way to put the matter. Men do not find it very hard to give up cinders for diamonds, ashes for pearls, dross for gold. No, reader; and in the same way, when one has tasted the preciousness of Christ, there is no difficulty in giving up the world. If Christ fills the heart, the world is not only driven out, but kept out. We not only turn our back upon Egypt, but we go far enough away from it never to return. And for what? To do nothing? To have nothing? To be gloomy, morose, melancholy, sour, or cynical? No; but to "*hold a feast to the Lord.*" True, it is "*in the wilderness*"; but then the wilderness is heaven begun, when we have Christ there with us. He is our heaven, blessed be His name—the light of our eyes, the joy of our hearts, the food of our souls; for even heaven would be no heaven without Him, and the wilderness itself is turned

into a heaven by His dear, bright, soul-satisfying presence.

Nor is this all. It is not merely that the *heart* is thoroughly satisfied with Christ; but the *mind* also is divinely tranquilized as to the difficulties of the path, and the questions that so constantly crop up to trouble and perplex those who do not know the deep blessedness of making Christ their object, and viewing all in direct reference to Him.

For instance, if I am called to act for Christ in any given case, and, instead of looking at the matter simply in its bearing upon Him and His glory, I look at how it will affect *me*, I shall most assuredly get into darkness and perplexity, and reach a wrong conclusion. But if I simply look at *Him*, and consider *Him*, and see how the matter bears upon *Him*, I shall see the thing as clear as a sunbeam, and move with holy elasticity and firm purpose along that blessed path which is ever illuminated by the bright beams of God's approving countenance. A single eye never looks at consequences, but looks straight to Christ, and then all is simple and plain; the body is full of light, and the path marked by plain decision.

This is what is so needed in this day of easy-going profession, worldly religiousness, self-seeking, and man-pleasing. We want to make Christ our *only* standpoint—to look at self, the world, and the so-called Church, from thence, regardless of consequences. Oh that it may be so with us, through the infinite mercy of our God! Then we shall un-

derstand something of the force, depth, beauty, and fulness of the opening sentence of this paper, "Let My people go, that they may hold a feast to Me in the wilderness."

Note the way in which Satan disputes every inch of the ground in the grand question of Israel's deliverance from the land of Egypt. He would allow them to worship *in* the land, or *near* the land; but their absolute and complete deliverance *from* the land is what he will, by every means in his power, obstinately resist.

But Jehovah, blessed be His eternal name, is above the great adversary, and He will have His people fully delivered, spite of all the powers of hell and earth combined. The divine standard can never be lowered—"Let My people go, that they may hold a feast to Me in the wilderness." This is Jehovah's demand, and it must be made good, though the enemy were to offer ten thousand objections. The divine glory is intimately involved in the entire separation of Israel from Egypt, and from all the people that are upon the face of the earth. "The people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations." To this the enemy demurs; and to hinder it he puts forth all his malignant power, and all his crafty schemes. We have already considered two of his objections, and we shall now proceed to the third.

3. "And Moses and Aaron were brought again unto Pharaoh: and he said unto them, Go, serve the Lord your God: but who are they that shall go?

And Moses said, We will go with our young and with our old, with our sons and with our daughters, with our flocks and with our herds we will go; for we must hold a feast unto the Lord. And he said unto them, Let the Lord be so with you, as I will let you go, and your little ones: look to it; for evil is before you. Not so: go now ye that are men, and serve the Lord; for that ye did desire. And they were driven out from Pharaoh's presence" (Ex. x. 8-11).

These words contain a very solemn lesson for the hearts of all Christian parents. They reveal a deep and crafty purpose of the arch-enemy. If he cannot keep the parents in Egypt, he will at least seek to keep the children, and in this way mar the testimony to the truth of God, tarnish His glory in His people, and hinder their blessing in Him. Parents in the wilderness, and their children in Egypt!—how opposed to the mind of God, and utterly subversive of His glory in the walk of His people.

We should ever remember—strange that we should ever forget!—that our children are part of ourselves. God's creative hand has made them such; and, surely, what the Creator has joined together, the Redeemer would not put asunder. Hence we invariably find that God links a man and his house together. "Thou and thy house" is a phrase of deep practical import. It involves the very highest consequences, and conveys the richest consolation to every Christian parent; and, we may truly

add, the neglect of it has led to the most disastrous consequences in thousands of family circles.

Very many—alas, how many!—Christian parents, through an utterly false application of the doctrines of grace, have allowed their children to grow up around them in wilfulness and worldliness; and while so doing they have comforted themselves with the thought that they could do nothing, and that in God's time their children would, if included in the eternal purpose, be gathered in. They have virtually lost sight of the grand practical truth that the One who has decreed the end has fixed the means of reaching it, and that it is the height of folly to think of gaining the end while neglecting the means.

Do we, then, mean to assert that all the children of Christian parents are, of necessity, included in the number of God's elect; that they will all be infallibly saved?—and if not, that it is the parents' fault? We mean to assert nothing of the kind. "Known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world." We know nothing of God's eternal decrees and purposes. No mortal eye has scanned the page of His secret counsels.

What, then, is involved in the weighty expression, "Thou and thy house?" There are two things involved in it. In the first place, there is a most precious privilege; and, in the second place, a deep responsibility. It is unquestionably the privilege of all Christian parents to count on God for their children; but it is also their bounden

duty—do we dislike the homely word?—to train their children for God.

Here we have the sum and substance of the whole matter—the two sides of this great question. The word of God, in every part of it, connects a man with his house. “This day is salvation come to *this house*.” “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and *thy house*” (Luke xix.; Acts xvi). Here lies the solid basis of the privilege and responsibility of parents. Acting on the weighty principle here laid down, we are at once to take God’s ground for our children, and diligently bring them up for Him, counting on Him for the result. We are to begin at the very beginning, and go steadily on, from day to day, month to month, year to year, training our children for God. Just as a wise and skilful gardener begins, while his fruit trees are young and tender, to train the branches along the wall where they may catch the genial rays of the sun, so should we, while our children are young and plastic, seek to mould them for God. It would be the height of folly, on the part of the gardener, to wait till the branches become old and gnarled, and then seek to train them. He would find it a hopeless task. And, most surely, it is the very greatest folly, on our part, to suffer our children to remain for years and years under the moulding hand of Satan, and the world, and sin, ere we rouse ourselves to the holy business of moulding them for God.

Let us not be misunderstood. Let no one sup-

pose that we mean to teach that grace is hereditary, or that we can, by any act or system of training, make Christians of our children. No! nothing of the kind. Grace is sovereign, and the children of Christian parents must, like all others, be born of water and of the Spirit, ere they can see or enter the kingdom of God. All this is as plain and as clear as Scripture can make it; but, on the other hand, Scripture is equally clear and plain as to the duty of Christian parents to "bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." *

And what does this "bringing up" involve? What does it mean? In what does it consist? These, surely, are weighty questions for the heart and conscience of every Christian parent. It is to be feared, that very few of us indeed really understand what Christian training means, or how it is to be carried on. One thing is certain, namely, that Christian training means a great deal more than drilling religion into our children, making the Bible a task-book, teaching our children to repeat texts and hymns like a parrot, and turning the family circle into a school. No doubt it is very

* In Abraham we see how paternal control and exercise of authority over his household is coupled with the Lord's promise and blessing: "And the Lord said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do? . . . For I know him, *that he will command his children and his household after him*, and they shall keep the way of the Lord . . . that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which He hath spoken of him" (Gen. 18: 17-19). Ed.

well to store the memory of a child with Scripture and sweet hymns. No one would think of calling this in question. But is it not too frequently the case that religion is made a weariness to the child, and the Bible a repulsive school-book?

This will never do. What is really needed is to surround our children with a thoroughly Christian atmosphere, from their earliest moments; to let them breathe the pure air of the new creation; to let them see in their parents the genuine fruits of spiritual life—love, peace, purity, tenderness, holy disinterestedness, genuine kindness, unselfishness, loving thoughtfulness of others. These things have a mighty moral influence upon the plastic mind of the child, and the Spirit of God will assuredly use them in drawing the heart to Christ—the centre and the source of all these beauteous graces and heavenly influences.

But, on the other hand, who can attempt to define the pernicious effect produced upon our children by our inconsistencies, by our bad temper, our selfish ways, our worldliness, and covetousness? Can we be said to bring our children out of Egypt when Egypt's principles and habits are seen in our whole career? It may be we use and teach the phraseology of the wilderness or of Canaan; but our ways, our manners, our habits are those of Egypt, and our children are quicksighted enough to mark the gross inconsistency, and the effect upon them is deplorable beyond expression. We have but little idea of the way in which the unfaith-

fulness of Christian parents has contributed to swell the tide of infidelity which is rising around us with such appalling rapidity.

It may be said, and said with a measure of truth, that children are responsible spite of the inconsistency of their parents. But, most assuredly, whatever amount of truth there may be in this statement, it is not for parents to urge it. It ill becomes us to fall back upon the responsibility of our children in view of our failure in meeting our own. They are responsible, no doubt, but so are we; and if we fail to exhibit before the eyes of our children those living and unanswerable proofs that we ourselves have left Egypt, and left it for ever, need we marvel if they remain? Of what possible use is it to talk about wilderness life, and our being in Canaan, while our manners, our habits, our ways, our deportment, our spirit, the bent of our whole life, bears and exhibits the impress of Egypt? None whatever. The language of the life gives the lie to the language of the lips, and we know full well that the former is far more telling than the latter. Our children will judge from our conduct, not from our talk, where we really are; and is this to be wondered at? Is not conduct the real index of conviction? If we have really left Egypt, it will be seen in our ways; and if it be not seen in our ways, the talk of the lips is worse than worthless; it only tends to create disgust in the minds of our children, and to lead them to the conclusion that Christianity is a mere sham.

All this is deeply solemn, and should lead Christian parents into the most profound exercise of soul in the presence of God. We may depend upon it there is a great deal more involved in this question of training than many of us are aware of. Nothing but the direct power of the Spirit of God can fit parents for the great and holy work of training their children, in these days in which we live, and in the midst of the scene through which we are passing. That word falls upon the heart with heavenly sweetness and power: "My grace is sufficient for thee." We can, with fullest confidence, reckon upon God to bless the very feeblest effort to lead our dear children forth out of Egypt. But the effort must be made, and made, too, with real, fixed, earnest purpose of heart. It will not do to fold our arms and say, "Grace is not hereditary. We cannot convert our children. If they are of the number of God's elect they must be saved; if not, they cannot."

All this is one-sided and utterly false. It will not stand; it cannot bear the light of the judgment-seat of Christ. Parents cannot get rid of the holy responsibility of training their children for God; that responsibility begins with, and is based upon, the relationship; and the right discharge of it demands continual exercise of soul before God, in reference to our children. We have to remember that the foundation of character is laid in the nursery. It is in the early days of infancy that Christian training begins, and it must be steadily pursued, from

day to day, month to month, and year to year, in simple, hearty dependence upon God who will, most assuredly, in due time, hear and answer the earnest cry of a parent's heart, and crown with His rich blessing the faithful labors of a parent's hands.

And, while on this subject of training children, we would, in true brotherly love, offer a suggestion to all Christian parents as to the immense importance of inculcating a spirit of implicit obedience.

If we mistake not, there is very wide-spread failure in this respect, for which we have to judge ourselves before God. Whether through a false tenderness, or indolence, we suffer our children to walk according to their own will and pleasure, and the strides which they make along this road are alarmingly rapid. They pass from stage to stage with great speed, until, at length, they reach the terrible goal of despising their parents altogether, throwing their authority entirely overboard, and trampling beneath their feet the holy order of God, and turning the domestic circle into a scene of godless misrule and confusion.

How dreadful this is we need not say, or how utterly opposed to the mind of God, as revealed in His holy word. But have we not ourselves to blame for it? God has put into the parents' hands the reins of government, and the rod of authority, but if parents, through indolence, suffer the reins to drop from their hands; and if through false tenderness or moral weakness, the rod of authority is

not applied, need we marvel if the children grow up in utter lawlessness? How could it be otherwise? Children are, as a rule, very much what we make them. If they are made to be obedient, they will be so; and if they are allowed to have their own way, the result will be accordingly.

Are we then to be continually chucking the reins and brandishing the rod? By no means. This would be to break the spirit of the child, instead of subduing his will. Where parental authority is thoroughly established, the reins may lie gently on the neck, and the rod be allowed to stand in the corner. The child should be taught, from his earliest hour, that the parent only wills his good, but the parent's will must be supreme. Nothing is simpler. A look is enough for a properly trained child. There is no need whatever to be continually hawking our authority; indeed nothing is more contemptible whether in a husband, a father, or a master. There is a quiet dignity about one who really possesses authority; whereas the spasmodic efforts of weakness only draw out contempt.

We have found, through many years of experience and careful observation, that the real secret of successful training lies in the proper adjustment of firmness and tenderness. If the parent, from the very beginning, establishes his authority, he may exercise as much tenderness as the most loving heart can desire or display. When the child is really made to feel that the reins and rod are under the direct control of sound judgment and true affec-

tion, and not of a sour temper and an arbitrary will, there will be little difficulty in training him.

In a word, firmness and tenderness are the two essential ingredients in all sound education; a firmness which the child will not dare to question; a tenderness which takes account of the child's every real want and right desire. It is sad indeed if the idea which a child forms of parental authority be that of an arbitrary interference with, or a cold indifference to, his little wishes and wants. It is not thus that our heavenly Father deals with us; and He is to be our model in this as in all beside. If it be written, and it is written, "Children, obey your parents in all things;" it is also, in beautiful adjusting power, written, "Fathers, provoke not your children, lest they be discouraged." Again, if it be said, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord; for this is right;" it is also said, "Ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath; but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." In short, the child must be taught to obey; but the obedient child must be allowed to breathe an atmosphere of tenderness, and to walk up and down in the sunshine of parental affection. This is the spirit of Christian education.*

* For further remarks on the deeply important subject of domestic government, the reader is referred to a small pamphlet entitled, "Thou and Thy House; or, The Christian at Home."

Also an excellent little paper, "The Training of Children," by a Mother. Price of the first is 10 cts; the last is 4 cts.

Most gladly would we dwell further on this great practical subject; but we trust sufficient has been said to rouse the hearts and consciences of all Christian parents to a sense of their high and holy responsibilities in reference to their beloved offspring; and also to shew that there is a great deal more involved in bringing our children out of Egypt, and taking God's ground for them, than many of us are aware of. And if the reading of the foregoing lines be used of God to lead any parent into prayerful exercise in this most weighty matter, we shall not have penned them in vain.

4. We shall close this paper with the briefest possible reference to the enemy's fourth and last objection, which is embodied in the following words, "And Pharaoh called unto Moses, and said, Go ye, serve the Lord; only let your flocks and your herds be stayed: let your little ones also go with you." He would let them go, but without resources to serve the Lord. If he could not keep them in Egypt, he would send them away crippled and shorn. Such is the enemy's last demurrer.

But mark the noble reply of a devoted heart. It is morally grand. "And Moses said, Thou must give us also sacrifices and burnt-offerings, that we may sacrifice unto the Lord our God. Our cattle also shall go with us; there shall not a hoof be left behind: for thereof must we take to serve the Lord our God; and"—ponder these suggestive words—"*We know not with what we must serve the Lord until we come thither.*"

We must be fully and clearly on God's ground and at His stand-point, before ever we can form any true idea of the nature and extent of His claims. It is utterly impossible, while surrounded by a worldly atmosphere, and governed by a worldly spirit, worldly principles, and worldly objects, to have any just sense of what is due to God. We must stand on the lofty ground of accomplished redemption—in the full-orbed light of the new creation—apart from this present evil world, ere we can properly serve Christ. It is only when, in the power of an indwelling Spirit, we see where we are brought by the death and resurrection of Christ—"three days' journey"—that we can at all understand what true Christian service is; and then we shall clearly see and fully own, that "all we are, and all we have, belong to Him." "We know not with what we must serve the Lord until we come thither." Precious words! May we better understand their force, meaning, and practical application! Moses, the man of God, meets all Satan's objections by a simple but decided adherence to Jehovah's demand, "Let My people go, that they hold a feast unto Me in the wilderness."

This is the true principle we are called to maintain spite of all objections. If that standard be lowered, ever so little, the enemy gains his point, and Christian service and testimony are undermined—if not made impossible.

“THYSELF AND THE DOCTRINE”

(*A Word for the Workman.*)

“Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine (or teaching); continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.”—1 Tim. iv. 16.

THESE are solemn and weighty words for all those who labor in the word and doctrine. They were addressed by the inspired apostle to his beloved son Timothy, and contain most precious instruction for every one who is called of God to minister in the assembly, or to preach the gospel. It is assuredly a very high and holy privilege to be permitted to take part in such a ministry; but it involves a most serious responsibility; and the passage just quoted sets before the workman two deeply important duties—yea, absolutely essential duties, to which he must give his diligent, constant, prayerful attention, if he would be an efficient workman in the Church of God—“a good minister of Jesus Christ.” He must take heed to himself; and he must take heed to the teaching.

1. And first, then, let us consider the solemn clause, “*Take heed to thyself.*” We cannot adequately set forth the moral importance of this. It is, of course, important for all Christians; but for the workman preeminently so; for to such it is here

particularly addressed. He, above all, will need to take heed to himself. He must guard the state of his heart, the state of his conscience, his whole inward man. He must keep himself pure. His thoughts, his affections, his spirit, his temper, his tongue, must all be kept under the holy control of the Spirit and word of God. He must wear the girdle of truth and the breastplate of righteousness. His moral condition and his practical walk must answer to the truth ministered, else the enemy will most assuredly get an advantage over him.

The teacher ought to be the living exponent of what he teaches. At least this should be his honest, earnest, constant aim. He should ever keep this holy standard before "the eyes of his heart." Alas, the best will fail and come short; but where the heart is true, the conscience tender, and the fear of God and the love of Christ have their due place, the workman will never be satisfied with anything short of the divine standard for his inward state and his outward walk. It will ever be his earnest desire to exhibit the practical effect of his teaching, and to be "an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity" (1 Tim. iv. 12). With this he should ever remember that "we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants, for Jesus' sake."

We must never for a moment lose sight of the weighty moral fact that the teacher ought to *live* the truth which he teaches. It is morally dangerous,

in the extreme, for a man to teach in public what he does not live in private—dangerous for himself, most damaging to the testimony, and injurious to those with whom he has to do. What can be more deplorable or humiliating than for a man to be characterized by contradicting in his personal history and in his domestic life the truth which he utters in the public assembly? It is simply fearful, and must inevitably lead to the most disastrous results.

Hence, then, may it be the deep-seated, earnest purpose and aim of all those who minister in the Word and doctrine to feed upon the precious truth of God; to make it their own; to live and move and have their being in the very atmosphere of it; to have the inward man strengthened and formed by it; to have it dwelling richly in them, that thus it may flow out in living power, savor, unction and fulness to others.

It is a very poor, yea, a very dangerous thing to sit down to the word of God as a mere student, for the purpose of preparing lectures or sermons for other people. Nothing can be more deadening or withering to the soul. Mere intellectual traffic in the truth of God, storing up certain doctrines, views and principles in the memory, and giving them out with a certain fluency of speech, is at once deluding and demoralizing. We may be drawing water for other people, and all the while be like rusty pipes ourselves. How miserable this is! "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and *drink*," said our

blessed Lord. He did not say "*draw*." The true spring and power of all ministry in the Church will ever be found in drinking for our own souls, not in drawing for others. "He that believeth on Me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." We must abide close to the eternal fountain, the heart of Christ; drink deeply, drink continually. Thus our own souls shall be refreshed and enriched; rivers shall flow for the refreshment of others, and streams of praise ascend to the throne and to the heart of God by Jesus Christ. This is Christian ministry—yea, this is Christianity; all else is utterly worthless.

2. We shall now dwell for a few moments on the second point in our subject, namely, the doctrine, or teaching—for such is the true force of the original word. And oh, how much is involved in this! "Take heed to the teaching." Solemn admonition! What care is needed! What holy watchfulness! What earnest, prayerful, constant waiting upon God for the right thing to say, and the right way to say it! God only knows the state and the need of souls. He knows their capacity. We do not. We may be offering "strong meat" to those who can only bear "milk," and thus do positive mischief. "If any man speak, let him speak as oracles of God." He does not say, "*according* to the oracles of God." A man may rise and speak for an hour in the assembly, and every word he says may be in strict accordance with the letter of Scripture, and yet he may not at all speak as an oracle of God—

as God's mouthpiece to the people. He may minister truth, but not the needed truth, at the time.

How solemn is all this! How it makes us feel the seriousness of the apostle's admonition, "Take heed to the teaching"! How it sets before us the urgent need of self-emptying dependence upon the power and guidance of the Holy Ghost! Here lies the precious secret of all effective ministry, whether oral or written. We may talk for hours, and write volumes,—and talk and write nothing unscriptural,—but if it be not in the power of the Spirit, our words will prove but as sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal, and our volumes as so much waste paper. We want to lie much at the Master's feet, to drink deeply into His Spirit, to be in fellowship with His heart of love for the precious lambs and sheep of His flock. Then shall we be in a condition of soul to give the portion of meat in due season.

He alone knows exactly what His beloved people really need at all times. We may perhaps feel deeply interested in some special line of truth, and we may judge it to be the right thing for the assembly; but this might be quite a mistake. It is not the truth which interests us, but the truth which the assembly needs, that should be given out; and for this we should ever wait upon our gracious Lord. We should look simply and earnestly to Him, and say, "Lord, what wouldest Thou have me to say to Thy beloved people? Give me the suited message for them." Then would He use us as His chan-

nels; and the truth would flow down from His loving heart into our hearts, and forth from us, in the power of His Spirit, into the hearts of His people.

Oh that it were thus with all who speak and write for the Church of God! What results we might look for!—what power!—what manifest progress in the divine life! The true interests of the flock of Christ would then be thought of in all that was spoken or written. Nothing equivocal, nothing strange or startling, would then be sent forth. Nothing but what is sound and seasonable would flow from the lips or the pen. Sound speech that cannot be condemned, that which is good for the use of edifying, would alone be sent forth.

May every beloved workman throughout the length and breadth of the Church of God take home to himself the apostolic admonition, "Take heed to thyself, and to the teaching; . . . for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee"!

"Of these things put them in remembrance, testifying earnestly before the Lord, not to have disputes of words, profitable for nothing, to the subversion of the hearers. Strive diligently to present thyself *approved to God*, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim. ii. 14, 15).

THE THREE CROSSES.

Luke xxiii. 39-43.

WE want the reader to turn aside with us for a few moments and meditate upon those three crosses. If we mistake not, he will find a very wide field of truth opened before him in the brief but comprehensive record given at the head of this article.

1. First of all, we must gaze at the centre cross, or rather at Him who was nailed thereon—Jesus of Nazareth—that blessed One who had spent His life in labors of love, healing the sick, cleansing the lepers, opening the eyes of the blind, raising the dead, feeding the hungry, drying the widow's tears, meeting every form of human need, ever ready to drop the tear of true sympathy with every child of sorrow; whose meat and drink it was to do the will of God, and to do good to man; a holy, spotless, perfectly gracious man; the only pure, untainted sheaf of human fruit ever seen in this world; "a man approved of God," who had perfectly glorified God on this earth and perfectly manifested Him in all His ways.

Such, then, was the One who occupied the centre

cross; and when we come to inquire what it was that placed Him there, we learn a threefold lesson; or rather, we should say, three profound truths are unfolded to our hearts.

In the first place, we are taught, as nothing else can teach us, what man's heart is toward God. Nothing has ever displayed this—nothing could display it—as the cross has. If we want a perfect standard by which to measure the world, to measure the human heart, to measure sin, we must look at the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. We cannot stop short of the cross, and we cannot go beyond it, if we want to know what the world is, inasmuch as it was there that the world fully uttered itself—there fallen humanity fully let itself out. When the human voice cried out, "Crucify Him! crucify Him!" that voice was the utterance of the human heart, declaring, as nothing else could declare, its true condition in the sight of God. When man nailed the Son of God to the cross, he reached the full height of his guilt, and the depth of moral turpitude. When man preferred a robber and a murderer to Christ, he proved that he would rather have robbery and murder than light and love. The cross demonstrates this tremendous fact; and the demonstration is so clear as to leave not the shadow of a question.

It is well to seize this point. It is certainly not seen with sufficient clearness. We are very prone to judge of the world according to its treatment of ourselves. We speak of its hollowness, its faithlessness, its baseness, its deceitfulness, and such like;

but we are too apt to make *self* the measure in all this, and hence we fall short of the real mark. In order to reach a just conclusion, we must judge by a perfect standard, and this can only be found in the cross. The cross is the only perfect measure of man, of the world, of sin. If we really want to know what the world is, we must remember that it preferred a robber to Christ, and crucified between two thieves the only perfect man that ever lived.

Such, beloved reader, is the world in which you live. Such is its character—such its moral condition—such its true state as proved by its own deliberately planned and determinedly perpetrated act. And therefore we need not marvel at aught that we hear or see of the world's wickedness, seeing that in crucifying the Lord of glory, it gave the strongest proof that could be given of wickedness and guilt.

It will perhaps be said, in reply, the world is changed. It is not now what it was in the days of Herod and Pontius Pilate. The world of the nineteenth century is very different from the world of the first. It has made progress in every way. Civilization has flung its fair mantle over the scene; and, as respects a large portion of the world, Christianity has shed its purifying and enlightening influence upon the masses; so that it would be *very* unwarrantable to measure the world that *is* by the terrible act of the world that *was*.

Reader, do you really believe that the world is changed? Is it really improved in the deep springs

of its moral being—is it altered at its heart's core? We readily admit all that a free gospel and an open Bible have, by the rich mercy of God, achieved here and there. We think, with grateful hearts and worshipping spirits, of thousands and hundreds of thousands of precious souls converted to God. We bless the Lord, with all our hearts, for multitudes who have lived and died in the faith of Christ; and for multitudes who, at this very moment, are giving most convincing evidence of their genuine attachment to the name, the person, and the cause of Christ.

But, after allowing the broadest margin in which to insert all these glorious results, we return, with firm decision, to our conviction that the world is the world still, and if it had the opportunity, the act that was perpetrated in Jerusalem in the year 33, would be perpetrated in Christendom now.

This may seem severe and sweeping; but is it true? Is the Name of Jesus one whit more agreeable to the world to-day, than it was when its great religious leaders cried out, "Not this man, but Barabbas!" Only try it. Go and breathe that peerless and precious Name amid the brilliant circles that throng the drawing-rooms of the polite, the fashionable, the wealthy, and the noble of this our own day. Name Him in the steamboat saloon, in the railway carriage, or in the public hall, and see if you will not very speedily be told that such a subject is out of place. Any other name, any other subject will be tolerated. You may talk folly

and nonsense in the ear of the world, and you will never be told it is out of place; but talk of Jesus, and you will very soon be silenced. How often have we seen our leading thoroughfares literally blocked up by crowds of people looking at a puppet show, or listening to a ballad singer or a German band, and no policeman tells them to move on. Let a servant of Christ stand to preach in our thoroughfares and he will be summoned before the magistrates. There is room in our public streets for the devil, but there is no room for Jesus Christ. "Not this man, but Barabbas."

Can any one deny these things? Have they not been witnessed again and again? And what do they prove? They prove, beyond all question, the fallacy of the notion that the world is improved. They prove that the world of the nineteenth century is the world of the first. It has, in some places, changed its dress, but not its real *animus*. It has doffed the robes of paganism, and donned the cloak of Christianity; but underneath that cloak may be seen all the hideous features of paganism's spirit. Compare Romans i. 29-31 with 2 Timothy iii., and there you will find the very traits and lineaments of nature in darkest heathenism, reproduced in connection with "the form of godliness"—the grossest forms of moral pravity covered with the robe of christian profession.

No, no, reader; it is a fatal mistake to imagine that the world is improving. It is stained with the murder of the Son of God; and it proves its con-

sent to the deed in every stage of its history, in every phase of its condition. The world is under judgment. Its sentence is passed; the awful day of its execution is rapidly approaching. The world is simply a deep, dark, rapid stream rushing onward to the lake of fire. Nothing but the sword of judgment can ever settle the heavy question pending between the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ and that world which murdered His Son.

Thus it is, if Scripture is to be our guide. Judgment is coming. It is at the very door. Eighteen hundred years ago, the inspired apostle penned the solemn sentence, that "God is *ready* to judge." If He was ready then, surely He is ready now. And why tarries He? In long-suffering mercy, not willing that *any* should perish, but that *all* should come to repentance. Precious words! Words of exquisite tenderness and matchless grace! Words that tell out the large, loving, gracious heart of our God, and His intense desire for man's salvation.

But judgment is coming. The awful day of vengeance is at hand; and, meanwhile, the voice of Jesus, sounding through the lips of His dear ambassadors, may be heard on every side calling men to flee out of the terrible vortex, and make their escape to the stronghold of God's salvation.

2. But this leads us, in the second place, to look at the cross as the expression of God's heart toward man. If on the cross of our adorable Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, we read, in characters

deep, broad, and unmistakable, the true state of man's heart Godward; in the selfsame cross, we may read, with no less clearness surely, the state of God's heart toward man. The cross is the divinely perfect measure of both.

"The very spear that pierced Thy side,
Drew forth the blood to save."

We behold, at the cross, the marvellous meeting of enmity and love—sin and grace. Man displayed at Calvary, the very height of his enmity against God. God, blessed for ever be His name, displayed the height of His love. Hatred and love met; but love proved victorious. God and sin met; God triumphed, sin was put away, and now, at the resurrection side of the cross, the eternal Spirit announces the glad tidings, that grace reigns through righteousness, unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord. At the cross, the battle was fought and the victory won; and now the liberal hand of sovereign grace is scattering far and wide the spoils of victory.

Reader, do you really desire to know what the heart of God is toward man? If so, go and gaze on that centre cross to which Jesus Christ was nailed, by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God. True it is, as we have already seen, man did, with wicked hands, crucify and slay the blessed One. This is the dark side of this question. But there is a bright side also, for God is seen in it. No doubt, man fully let himself out at

the cross; but God was above him. Yes, above all the powers of earth and hell which were there ranged in their terrible array.

As it was, in the case of Joseph and his brethren; they told out the enmity of their hearts in flinging him into the pit, and selling him to the Ishmaelites. Here was the dark side. But then, mark these words of Joseph: "Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither; for God did send me before you to preserve life."

Here was the bright side. But to whom were these wondrous words of grace addressed? To broken hearts and penitent spirits, and convicted consciences. To men who had learnt to say, "We are verily guilty." It is only such that can at all enter into the line of truth which is now before us. Those who have taken their true place, who have accepted the judgment of God against themselves, who truly own that the cross is the measure of their guilt—they can appreciate the cross as the expression of God's heart of love toward them; they can enter into the glorious truth that the selfsame cross which demonstrates man's hatred of God sets forth also God's love to man. The two things ever go together. It is when we see and own our guilt, as proved in the cross, that we learn the purifying and peace-speaking power of that precious blood which cleanseth us from all sin.

Yes, beloved reader; it is only a broken heart and a contrite spirit that can truly enter into the marvellous love of God as set forth in the cross of

Christ. How could Joseph ever have said, "Be not grieved with yourselves," if he had not seen his brethren broken down in his presence? Impossible. And how can an unbroken heart, an unreached conscience, an impenitent soul enter into the value of the atoning blood of Christ, or taste the sweetness of the love of God? Utterly impossible. Joseph "spake roughly" to his brethren at the first, but the very moment those accents emanated from their broken hearts, "We are verily guilty," they were in a condition to understand and value the words, "Be not grieved with yourselves." It is when we are completely broken down in the presence of the cross, seeing it as the perfect measure of our own deep personal guilt, that we are prepared to see it as the glorious display of God's love towards us.

And then and there we escape from a guilty world. Then and there we are rescued completely from that dark and rapid current of which we have spoken, and brought within the hallowed and peaceful circle of God's salvation, where we can walk up and down in the very sunlight of a Father's countenance and breathe the pure air of the new creation. "Thanks be to God for His unspeakable gift!"

3. And now, one word, ere closing this branch of our subject on the cross as displaying the heart of Christ toward God. We can do little more than indicate this point, leaving the reader to prove its suggestive power, under the immediate ministry of the Holy Ghost.

It is an unspeakable comfort to the heart, in the midst of such a world as this, to remember that God has been perfectly glorified by One, at least. There has been One on this earth whose meat and drink was to do the will of God, to glorify Him, and finish His work. In life and death, Jesus perfectly glorified God. From the manger to the cross, His heart was perfectly devoted to *the* one great object, namely, to accomplish the will of God, whatever that will might be. "Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of Me) to do Thy will, O God." In the roll of Scripture it was written of the Son that, in due time, He should come into this world, according to God's eternal counsels, and accomplish the will of the Godhead. To this He dedicated Himself with all the energies of His perfect being. From this He never swerved a hair's breadth from first to last; and when we gaze on that centre cross which is now engaging our attention, we behold the perfect consummation of that which had filled the heart of Jesus from the very beginning, even the accomplishment of the will of God.

All this is blessedly unfolded to us in that charming passage in Philippians ii. "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus; who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; and being found ~~in~~ fashion as a man, He humbled Himself,

and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Vers. 5-8).

How wonderful is all this! What profound depths there are in the mystery of the cross! What lines of truth converge in it! What rays of light emanate from it! What unfoldings of heart there! The heart of man to Godward—the heart of God to manward—the heart of Christ to God! All this we have in the cross. We can gaze on that One who hung there between two thieves, a spectacle to heaven, earth, and hell, and see the perfect measure of every one and everything in the whole universe of God. Would we know the measure of the heart of God—His love to us—His hatred of sin? we must look at the cross. Would we know the measure of the heart of man, his real condition, his hatred of all that is divinely good, his innate love of all that is thoroughly bad? we must look at the cross. Would we know what the world is—what sin is—what Satan is? we must look at the cross.

Assuredly, then, there is nothing like the cross. Well may we ponder it. It shall be our theme throughout the everlasting ages. May it be, more and more, our theme now! May the Holy Ghost so lead our souls into the living depths of the cross, that we may be absorbed with the One who was nailed thereto, and thus weaned from the world that placed Him there. May the real utterance of our hearts, beloved reader, ever be, "God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord

Jesus Christ." God grant it, for Jesus Christ's sake!

Having dwelt, for a little, on that marvellous centre cross to which the Lord of glory was nailed, for our redemption, we shall now turn to the other two, and seek to learn some solemn and weighty lessons from the inspired record concerning the men who hung thereon. We shall find in these two men samples of the two great classes into which the human family is divided, from the beginning to the end of time, namely the receivers and the rejecters of the Christ of God—those who believe in Jesus, and those who believe not.

In the first place, it is of the utmost importance to see that there was no essential difference between those two men. In nature, in their recorded history, in their circumstances, they were one. Some have labored to establish a distinction between them; but for what object it is difficult to say, unless it be to dim the lustre of the grace that shines forth in the narrative of the penitent thief. It is maintained that there must have been some event in his previous history to account for his marvellous end—some redeeming feature—some hopeful circumstance on account of which his prayer was heard at the last.

But Scripture is totally silent as to aught of this kind. And not only is it silent as to any redeeming or qualifying circumstance, but it actually gives us the testimony of two inspired witnesses to prove

that, up to the very moment in which Luke introduces him to our notice, he, like his fellow on the other side, was engaged in the terrible work of railing on the Son of God. In Matthew xxvii. 44, we read that "The *thieves* also, which were crucified with Him, cast the same in His teeth." So also in Mark xv. 32, "*They* that were crucified with Him reviled Him."

Now, this is divinely conclusive. It proves, beyond all question, that there was no difference between the two thieves. They were both condemned malefactors; and not only so, but when actually on the very confines of the eternal world, they were both occupied in the awful sin of reviling the blessed Son of God.

It is utterly vain, therefore, for any one to seek to establish a distinction between these two men, inasmuch as they were alike in their nature, in their guilt, in their criminality, and in their profane wickedness. There was no difference up to the moment in which the arrow of conviction entered the soul of him whom we call the penitent thief. The more clearly this is seen, the more the sovereign grace of God shines out in all its blessed brightness. "There is no difference; for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." And, on the other hand, "There is no difference, for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon Him" (Compare Rom. iii. 22, 23, with chapter x. 12).

The only standard by which men are to be measured is "the glory of God;" and inasmuch

as all have come short of that—the best as well as the worst of men—there is no difference. Were it merely a question of conscience, or of human righteousness, there might be some difference. Were the standard of measurement merely human, then indeed some shades of distinction might easily be established. But it is not so. All must be ruled by the glory of God; and, thus ruled, all are alike deficient. “There is no difference; for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.”

But, blessed be God, there is another side to this great question. “The same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon Him.” The riches of the grace of God are such as to reach down to the very deepest depths of human ruin, guilt and misery. If the light of divine glory reveals—as nothing else could reveal—man’s utter ruin; the riches of divine grace, as displayed in the person and work of Christ, have perfectly met that ruin, and provided a remedy in every way adequate to meet the claims of the divine glory.

But let us see how all this is illustrated in the striking and beautiful narrative of the penitent thief.

It is very evident that the Spirit of God, in the evangelist Luke, takes up this interesting case at that special point in the which a divine work had really begun. Matthew and Mark present him as a blaspheming malefactor. We can hardly conceive a deeper shade of moral turpitude than that which he, according to their inspired record, exhibits to our view! There is not so much as a single

relieving tint. All is dark as midnight—dark almost as hell; yet not too dark to be reached by the light that was shining straight down from heaven through the mysterious medium of that centre cross.

It is well to get a very profound sense of our true condition by nature. We cannot possibly go too deep in this line. The ruin of nature is complete—of nature in all its phases and in all its stages. If all have not gone to the same length as the thief on the cross—if all have not brought forth the same fruit—if all have not clothed themselves in forms equally hideous, it is no thanks to their nature. The human heart is a seed plot in which may be found the seed of every crime that has ever stained the page of human history. If the seed has not germinated and fructified, it is not owing to a difference in the soul, but a difference in surrounding circumstances and influences.

The testimony of Scripture on this great question, is distinct and conclusive, "There is no difference." Men do not like this. It is too leveling for them. Self-righteousness is cut out by the roots by this sweeping statement of inspiration. Man likes to establish distinctions. He cannot bear to be placed in the same category with the Magdalenes and the Samaritans, and such like. But it cannot be otherwise. Grace levels all distinctions now; and judgment will level them all by-and-by. If we are saved, it is in company with Magdalenes and Samaritans; and if we are lost,

it will be in company with such likewise. There will, no doubt, be degrees of glory; as there will be degrees of punishment; but as to the real nature and character of the human heart, "there is no difference." "The *heart* is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." What heart? Man's heart—the heart of the writer and the reader of these lines. "For out of *the heart* proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies." Out of what heart? Man's heart—the heart of the writer and the reader of these lines. These things could not come out of the heart if they were not there; and if they do not come out in action, it is not because they are not there, but that circumstances have operated to prevent.

Such is the clear and unvarying testimony of Holy Scripture; and whenever the Spirit of God begins to operate on the heart and conscience of a man He produces the deep sense and full confession of the truth of this testimony. Every divinely convicted soul is ready to adopt as his own these words, "In me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good." Every truly contrite spirit owns the fact of his total ruin. All wisdom's children justify God and condemn themselves—there is no exception. All who are really brought under the convicting power of the Holy Spirit will, without any reserve, set their seal—the seal of their whole moral being to the inspired statement, "there is no difference."

Any who hesitate to own this have yet to learn

themselves, in the light of the holiness of God. The most refined, polished and cultivated person, if enlightened by the Spirit of God, will readily take his place with the thief on the cross, inasmuch as the divine light shining in upon him, reveals the hidden springs of his being, leads him to see the profound depths of his nature—the roots and sources of things. Thus while relatives, friends and acquaintances—mere onlookers, judging from the surface, may think very highly of his character, he himself, knowing better, because of divine light, can only exclaim, “O wretched man that I am”—“Behold I am vile”—“Woe is me, I am undone”—“I am a sinful man, O Lord.”

These are the proper utterances of a divinely convicted soul; and it is only when we can thus truly and heartily express ourselves that we are really prepared to appreciate the riches of the grace of God as unfolded in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Grace takes up real sinners. “The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which is lost;” and the more fully I realize my lost estate, my hopeless ruin, my utter wretchedness, the more fully I can enter into the fulness and freeness of God’s salvation—a salvation purchased by the blood of the cross.

Hence we see how brightly grace shines in the salvation of the thief on the cross. There can be no possible mistake as to him. Clearly he had no good works to trust in. He had performed no deeds of charity. Of baptism and the Lord’s

Supper he knew nothing. The rites, ceremonies, and ordinances of religion had done—could do nothing for him. In a word, his case was a thoroughly hopeless one, so far as *he* was concerned. For what could *he* do? Whither could he turn? His hands and his feet were nailed fast to a malefactor's cross. It was useless to talk to him about doing or going. His hands, while he had the use of them, had been stretched forth in deeds of violence; and now they were nailed to the tree, and could do nothing. His feet, while he had the use of them, had trodden the terrible path of the transgressor; and now they were nailed to the tree, and could not carry him anywhere.

But, reader, note this. Although the poor thief no longer had the use of his hands and his feet—so indispensable to a religion of works—his heart and his tongue were free; and these are the very things that are called into exercise in a religion of faith, as we read in that lovely tenth of Romans, “With the *heart* man believeth unto righteousness; and with the *mouth* confession is made unto salvation.”

Precious words! How suited to the thief on the cross! How suited and seasonable for *every* poor helpless, hopeless, self-destroyed sinner! And we must all be saved in like manner as the thief on the cross. There are no two ways to heaven. There is not one way for the religionist, the moralist, the Pharisee, and another way for the malefactor. There is but one way, and that way is marked

from the very throne of God down to where the guilty sinner lies, dead in trespasses and sins, with the footprints of redeeming love; and from thence back to the throne by the precious atoning blood of Christ. This is the way to heaven—a way paved with love, sprinkled with blood, and trodden by a happy holy band of redeemed worshipers gathered from all the ends of the earth, to chant the heavenly anthem, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain."

We have said that the heart of the thief was free; yes, free under the mighty action of the Holy Ghost, to turn toward that blessed One who hung beside him—that One whom he had just been reviling, but on whom he could now fix his repentant gaze, and to whom he could now bear the noblest testimony ever uttered by men or angels.

But it is most instructive and interesting to mark the progress of the work of God in the soul of the dying thief. Indeed the work of God in any soul is ever of the deepest possible interest. The operations of the Holy Spirit *in us* must never be separated from the work of Christ *for us*; and, we may add, both the one and the other are founded upon, and inseparably linked with the eternal counsels of God with respect to us. This is what makes it all so real, so solid, so entirely divine. It is not of man. It is all of God, from first to last—from the first dawning of conviction in the soul until it is introduced into the full-orbed

light of the glorious gospel of the grace of God. The Lord be praised that it is so! Were it otherwise—were there a single atom of the creature in it, from beginning to end, that one atom would neutralize and destroy the whole, and render it not worth having.

Now in the case of the penitent thief, we discern the first touch of the Eternal Spirit—the very earliest fruit of His sanctifying work, in the words addressed to his fellow, “Dost thou not fear God?” He does not say, “Dost thou not fear punishment?” The sanctification of the Spirit, in every case, is evidenced by the fear of the Lord, and a holy abhorrence of evil for its own sake. “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” There may be a fear of judgment, a fear of hell, a fear of the consequences of sin, without the smallest particle of hatred of sin itself. But where the Spirit of God is really at work in the heart, He produces the real sense of sin and the judgment thereof in the sight of God.

This is repentance; let the reader ponder it deeply. It is a grand reality; an essential element, in every case. “God commandeth all men, everywhere, to repent” (Acts xvii. 30). There is no getting over this—no setting it aside. Some may seek to do away with man’s responsibility on the plea of his inability to do anything right or good. They may seek to persuade us that it is useless, yea unsound, to call upon men to repent and believe, seeing that men can do nothing of them-

selves. But the question is, what is the meaning of the words which we have just culled from the apostle's address at Athens? Did Paul preach the truth? Was he sound in the faith? Was he sufficiently high in doctrine? Well then Paul declares, in the clearest and most emphatic manner, that "God commandeth *all* men, *everywhere*, to repent." Will any turn round and say they cannot? Will any venture to deny man's responsibility to obey a divine command? If so, where are they? On very dangerous ground. If God commands all men to repent, woe be to those who refuse to do so; and woe be to those who teach that they are not responsible to do so.

But let us devote a few moments to the examination of this great practical question in the light of the New Testament. Let us see whether our Lord and His apostles called upon men—"all men, everywhere, to repent."

In the third chapter of Matthew's Gospel, we read, "In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judæa, and saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

It will, perhaps, be said that John addressed himself specially to Israel—a people in recognized relationship with Jehovah—and hence this passage cannot be adduced in proof of the universal and abiding necessity of repentance. Well, we merely quote it here in order to shew that man, whether Jew or Gentile, is responsible to repent, and that the very first voice which falls upon the ear, in

the time of the New Testament, is heard calling sinners to repentance. Was the Baptist right or wrong? Was he trespassing upon the domain of sound doctrine when he summoned men to repent? Would some of our modern theologians have called him aside, after he was done preaching, and taken him to task for deceiving men by leading them to suppose that they could repent? We should like to have heard the Baptist's reply.

But we have the example of a greater than John the Baptist, as our warrant for preaching repentance, for in Matthew iv. we read, "From that time, Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Dare any one turn round and say to the divine Preacher, "We cannot repent. We have no power. We are not responsible!" Ah, no! men may argue and reason, and talk theology; but there stands the living record before us—Jesus called upon men to repent, and that, too, without entering, in any way, upon the question of man's ability here or there. He addressed man as a responsible being, as one who was imperatively called to judge himself and his ways, to confess his sins, and repent in dust and ashes. The only true place for a sinner is the place of repentance; and if he refuses to take that place in the presence of divine grace, he will be compelled to take it in the presence of divine judgment, when repentance will be too late. "God commandeth all men, everywhere, to repent."

Passing on to the opening of the Acts of the

Apostles, we are privileged to hearken to Peter's address on the day of Pentecost—the most fruitful sermon ever preached in this world—crowned with the glorious result of three thousand souls! And what did Peter preach? He preached Christ, and he called upon men to repent. Yes, the great apostle of the circumcision insisted upon repentance—self-judgment—true contrition of heart before God. “Then said Peter unto them, Repent, and be baptized *every one of you* in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Acts ii. 38). And, again, “Repent ye therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out” (Chap. iii. 19).

Was Peter right in calling upon men to repent and be converted? Would any one be justified in saying to him, at the close of his preaching, “How can men repent? How can they be converted? They can do nothing.” We should vastly like to hear Peter's reply. One thing is certain, the power of the Holy Ghost accompanied the preaching. He set His seal to it, and that is enough. “God commandeth *all men, everywhere*, to repent.” Woe to all who refuse.

We have already referred to the preaching of the blessed apostle of the Gentiles, and the great teacher of the Church of God. He himself, referring to his ministry at Ephesus, declares in the audience of the elders, “I kept back nothing that was profitable, but have shewed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house,

testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts xx. 20, 21). So also, in his pungent address to Agrippa, he says, "I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision; but shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judæa, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance."

Thus we have a body of evidence, drawn from Scripture, such as cannot be gainsaid, proving the universal and abiding necessity of repentance. "God commandeth all men, everywhere, to *repent*." There is no avoiding this. Let men beware how they set it aside. No system of theology can be sound that denies the responsibility of the sinner to repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.

We have digressed; but the digression was needful, and we now return to our theme.

The case of the penitent thief furnishes a **very** fine illustration of Peter's weighty sentence, "Repent and be converted." It teaches us in a clear and forcible manner, the true meaning of repentance and conversion—two subjects so little understood, so sadly clouded by false teaching.

The human heart is ever prone to take divine things by the wrong end; and when false theology combines with this tendency of the heart, by presenting things in a one-sided manner, the moral effect upon the soul is something terrible. Hence it is that, when men are called upon in the

gospel message to repent and turn to God, they think it needful to set about doing something or other, in the shape of reading, praying, and attending upon the ordinances and offices of religion, so called. Thus they become occupied with their doings instead of judging their state.

This is a fatal mistake—the result of the combined influence of self-righteousness and bad theology—these fruitful sources of darkness and misery to precious souls, and of serious damage to the truth of God.

It is perfectly marvellous to note the varied forms in which self-righteousness clothes itself. Indeed so varied are these forms that one would scarcely recognize it to be what it really is. Sometimes it looks like humility, and speaks largely of the evil and danger of being too presumptuous. Then again, it assumes the garb and adopts the language of what is called experimental religion, which, very often, is nothing more than intense self-occupation. At other times, it expresses itself in the threadbare formularies of systematic divinity—that stumbling-block of souls and the sepulchre of divine revelation.

What then is repentance? It is, in one of its grand elements, the thorough judgment of self—of its history and its ways. It is the complete breaking up of the entire system of self-righteousness and the discovery of our complete wreck, ruin and bankruptcy. It is the sense of personal vileness, guilt, and danger—a sense produced by the mighty

action of the Word and Spirit of God upon the heart and conscience. It is a hearty sorrow for sin, and a loathing of it for its own sake.

True, there are other features and elements in genuine repentance. There is a change of mind as to self, and the world, and God. And further, there are various degrees in the depths and intensity of the exercise. But, for the present, we confine ourselves to that deeply important feature of repentance illustrated in the touching narrative of the penitent thief, which we may term, in one word, self-judgment. This must be insisted upon constantly. We greatly fear it is sadly lost sight of in much of our modern preaching and teaching. In our efforts to make the gospel simple and easy, we are in danger of forgetting that "God commandeth all men everywhere to repent." The sinner must be made to feel that he is a sinner, a lost sinner, a guilty sinner, a hell-deserving sinner. He must be made to feel that sin is a terrible thing in the sight of God; so terrible, that nothing short of the death of Christ could atone for it—so terrible, that all who die unpardoned must inevitably be damned—must spend a dreary, never-ending eternity in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone.

Is there, then, anything meritorious in repentance? Is there anything to build upon or to boast in? Has it aught to do with the ground of our salvation, our righteousness, or our acceptance with God? As well might we inquire if the

consciousness of bankruptcy could form the basis of a man's credit or future fortune. No, no, reader; repentance, in its deepest and most intensified form, has nothing to do with the ground of our pardon. How could the sense of guilt have aught to do with the ground of pardon? How could the feelings of a drowning man have aught to do with the life-boat that saves him? Or how could the agonies of a man in a house on fire have aught to do with the fire-escape by which he descends from the burning pile?

Look at the case of the thief on the cross. Hearken to his words: "Dost thou not fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? *And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds.*" Here are the accents of a genuine repentance, "we indeed justly." He felt and owned that he was justly condemned; that he was reaping only "the due reward of his deeds." Was there anything meritorious in this? By no means. It was the judgment of himself, the condemnation of his ways, the sense of his guilt. And this was right. It was the sure precursor of conversion to God. It was the fruit of the Spirit's work in his soul, and enabled him to appreciate God's salvation. It was the hearty acknowledgment of his own just condemnation; and, most surely, this could in no wise contribute to his righteousness before God. It is utterly impossible that the sense of guilt could ever form the basis of righteousness.

Still, there must be repentance; and the deeper

the better. It is well that the plough should do its work in breaking up the fallow ground, and making deep the furrows in which the incorruptible seed of the Word may take root. We do not believe that any one had ever to complain that the ploughshare entered too deeply into the soul. Nay, we feel assured that the more we are led down into the profound depths of our own moral ruin, the more fully we shall appreciate the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ, unto all, and upon all them that believe.

But, be it well understood, repentance is not doing this or that. What did the thief do? What could he do? He could not move hand or foot. And yet he was truly repentant. He is handed down, on the page of history, as "the penitent thief." Yes, he was penitent; and his penitence expressed itself in the unmistakable accents of self-judgment. Thus it must ever be. There must be the judgment of sin, sooner or later; and the sooner, the better; and the deeper, the better.

And what then? What is the divine order? "Repent, and be converted." "Repent, and turn to God." Beauteous order! It is conviction and conversion. It is the discovery of self and its ruin, and the discovery of God and His remedy. It is condemning myself and justifying God. It is finding out the emptiness of self, and finding out the fulness of Christ. It is learning the force and application of those few words, "Thou hast destroyed thyself; but in Me is thy help."

And see how all this comes out in the brief but comprehensive record of the thief. No sooner does he give expression to the sense of his own just condemnation, than he turns to that blessed One who was hanging beside him, and bears the sweet testimony, "This man hath done nothing amiss." Here he gives a flat contradiction to the whole world. He joins issue with the chief priests, elders, and scribes, who had delivered up the holy One as a malefactor. They had declared, "If he were not a malefactor, we would not have delivered him up unto thee." But the dying thief declares, "This man hath done nothing amiss." Thus he stands forth in clear and decided testimony to the spotless humanity of the Lord Jesus Christ—that grand truth which lies at the very base of "the great mystery of godliness." He turns from a guilty self to a spotless Christ; and he tells the world that it had made a terrible mistake in crucifying the Lord of glory.

And was not this a good work? Yes, truly, the very best work that any one could do. To bear a full, clear, bold testimony to Christ, is the most acceptable and fragrant service that any mortal can render to God. Millions bestowed in charity, continents traversed in the interests of philanthropy, a lifetime spent in the dreary exercises of mechanical religiousness—all these things put together are as the small dust of the balance when compared with one word of heartfelt, genuine, Spirit-taught testimony to God's beloved Son. The poor thief

could do nothing and give nothing; but oh, he was permitted to enjoy the richest and rarest privilege that could possibly fall to the lot of any mortal, even the privilege of bearing witness to Christ, when the whole world had cast Him out, when one of His own disciples had denied Him, another had sold Him, and all had forsaken Him. This, indeed, was service; this was work; a service and a work which shall live in the records and the memory of heaven when the proudest monuments of human genius and benevolence shall have crumbled and sunk in eternal oblivion.

But we have some further lessons to learn from the lips of the dying malefactor. Not only does he bear a bright and blessed testimony to the spotless humanity of Christ, but he also owns Him as Lord and King; and this, too, at a moment, and amid a scene when, to nature's view, there was not a single trace of lordship or royalty. "He said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom."

Reader, think of this! Think of one who had, as it were, a moment before, been railing on the dying Saviour, now owning Him as Lord and King! Truly this was divine work. Surely this was real conversion—a true turning to God. "Lord, remember *me*." Oh, how unspeakably precious is this golden chain with its three links! How lovely to see a poor worthless, guilty, hell-deserving "*me*" linked on to the divine Saviour by that one word, "*remember!*"

This was life eternal. A Saviour and a sinner linked together, is everlasting salvation. Nothing can be simpler. People may talk of works, of feelings, of experiences; but here we have the matter presented in its divine simplicity, and in its divine order. We have first the fruit of a genuine repentance, in the words, "We indeed justly;" and then the sweet result of spiritual conversion in the one simple but powerful utterance, "Lord, remember me." "Repent and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out." "Repent and turn to God."

What marvellous depth and power in those words! To repent is to see the utter ruin of self. To turn to God, is life, and peace, and everlasting salvation. We discover self and we loathe and abhor it. We discover God and turn to Him with the whole heart, and find in Him all we want for time and for eternity. It is all divinely simple and unspeakably blessed. Repentance and conversion are inseparably linked together. They are distinct, yet intimately connected. They must neither be separated nor confounded.

And, now, let us note the divine response to the appeal of the penitent thief. He had said, "Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom." What is the answer? "To-day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise." It is as though the blessed Saviour had said to him, "You need not wait for the *glory* of the *kingdom*; this very day thou shalt taste the *grace* of the *house*—the love of

My Father's home above; I shall have you with Me in that bright paradise, to enjoy full communion with Me long before the glories of the kingdom shall be unfolded." Most blessed Saviour, such was Thy matchless grace!

And not one reproving word! Not a single reference to the past! Not even a glance at the recent heartless wickedness! Ah, no; there is never aught of this in the divine dealing with a penitent soul. The thief had said—said from the depths of a broken and contrite heart, "We indeed justly." This was enough. True, it was needful; but it was enough. "A broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise." No; and not only will He not despise it, but He will pour into it the rich and precious consolation of His grace and pardoning love. It is the joy of God to pardon a penitent sinner; and none but a penitent sinner can truly enjoy the pardon of God.

"*To-day* shalt thou be *with Me* in paradise." Here the glories of a present, personal, and perfect salvation pour themselves in divine lustre upon the gaze of the astonished thief.

And, be it noted, that there is not one syllable about doing, or giving, or feeling, or aught else that might turn the eye in upon self. The eye had been turned in, and rightly so; and it had seen nothing but a deep, dark abyss of guilt and ruin. This was enough. The eye must henceforth and for evermore be turned outward and upward; it must be fixed on the precious Saviour

who was bringing him to paradise, and on that bright paradise to which He was bringing him.

No doubt the thief could never forget what a sinner he had been—never forget his guilt and wickedness—he never could, he never shall; yea, throughout the countless ages of eternity, he and all the redeemed shall remember the past. How could it be otherwise? Shall we lose the power of memory in the future? Surely not. But every remembrance of the past shall only tend to swell the note of praise which the heart shall give forth as we think of the grace that shines in those precious words, "Their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more." Such is the style of divine forgiveness! God will never again refer to those sins which His own loving hand has cancelled by the blood of the Cross. Never! No, never! He has cast them behind His back for ever. They have sunk as lead into the deep waters of His eternal forgetfulness. All praise to His glorious Name!

Let us now fix the eye, for a brief moment, upon the third cross. On it we behold—what? A guilty sinner? Not merely that. The penitent thief was that. They were in the same condemnation. No one need go to hell simply because he is a sinner, inasmuch as Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, "even the chief." There is not a sinner this day, outside the precincts of hell, who is not within the reach of God's salvation if he only feel his need of it.

No one need be lost, merely because he is a ruined, guilty, hell-deserving sinner.

But what do we behold on that third cross? We behold an *unbelieving* sinner. This is the solemn point. We may, without any hesitation, declare that had the occupant of that cross, like his penitent companion, cast himself upon the grace of the dying Saviour, he would, most assuredly, have met with the same response. There was grace in the heart of Jesus to meet the one as well as the other. But he did not want it, would not have it. He remained impenitent and unbelieving until the dark shadows of death gathered round him, and the darker horrors of hell burst upon his guilty soul. He perished within arm's length of the Saviour and salvation.

Tremendous thought! what finite mind can take it in? Who can fully estimate the contrast between those two men? True, the contrast was in one point; but that one point involved consequences of eternal moment. What was it? It was this—*the reception or rejection of the Son of God*; believing or not believing on that blessed One who was hanging between them—as near to the one as He was to the other. There was no difference in their nature; no difference in their condition; no difference in their circumstances. The grand and all-important difference lay in this, that one believed in Jesus, and the other did not; one was enabled to say, "Lord, remember me;" the other said, "If thou be the Christ."

What a contrast! What a broad line of demarcation! What an awful chasm between two men so like in other respects—so near to one another—so near to the divine Saviour! But it is just the same in all cases, everywhere, and at all times. The one simple but solemn question for each and for all is this, "What is my relation to Christ?" All hinges upon this—yes, all for time and eternity. Have I received Christ? or have I not? Am I in Him? or am I not?

The two thieves represent the two great classes into which mankind has been divided, from the days of Cain and Abel down to this very moment. God's Christ is the one great and all-deciding test in every case. All the shades of moral character; all the grades of social life; all the castes, classes, sects and parties into which the human family has been, is, or ever shall be divided—all are absorbed in this one momentous point—"*In or out of Christ.*" The difference between the two thieves is just the difference between the saved and the lost; the Church and the world—the children of God and the children of God's great enemy. True it is that, in the case of the two thieves, the matter is brought to a point, so that we can see it at a glance; but it is the same in every case. The person of Christ is the one great boundary line that marks off the new creation from the old—the kingdom of God from the kingdom of Satan—the children of light from the children of darkness; and this boundary line stretches away into eternity.

Reader, what sayest thou to these things? On which side of this line art thou, at this moment, standing? Art thou, like the penitent thief, linked on to Christ by a simple faith? Or dost thou, like his impenitent companion, speak of Christ with an "if"? Say, dear friend, how is it? Do not put this question away from thee. Take it up and look it solemnly in the face. Your eternal weal or woe hangs on your answer to this question. Oh, do we beseech of thee, think of it now! Turn to Jesus now! Come now! God commands thee! Delay not! Reason not! Come just as thou art to Jesus, who hung on that centre cross for us.

P. S.—The two thieves furnish a powerful answer to the ritualist and the rationalist. In one, we see a man going straight to paradise who had never been baptized, and never received what ritualists call "the holy communion." In the other, we see a man who perishes, within arm's length of a Saviour, through a skeptical, rationalistic, infidel "*if*." Let all ritualists and rationalists ponder these *facts*.

OUR STANDARD AND OUR HOPE

THERE are two very important principles presented in Revelation iii. 3, 11, which are profoundly interesting, but clear, simple, easily grasped, and full of power, when understood—two distinct things which characterize the overcomer. The first is the truth that has been communicated; and the second, the hope that is set before us.

We find these two things illustrated in Israel's history, and in the history of the Church of God—what He has given us, and what is held out before us. These two things are to form your character and mine. We are not to be influenced by the character of things around, or the present condition of the people of God; but we are to be influenced by what God *has* given, and what He *will* give. We are apt to be discouraged and disheartened by the state of things around, and to surrender everything because of the ruin, and thus get paralyzed; but if you get hold of these two things, or rather if they get hold of you, they will enable you to stem the tide, and to be an overcomer. You are to remember what you have received and heard, and cherish the hope of glory.

We have Protestantism before us in Sardis. You must always distinguish between a work of

the Spirit of God and the state of things resulting from it through man's interference, human management, earthly machinery, stereotyping the form when the power was gone. The Reformation was a distinct work of the Spirit of God, a wave of spiritual power. Protestantism is the powerless form which, through human weakness and Satan's craft, has followed that glorious season of divine visitation.

Fifty years ago there was a very distinct movement of the Spirit of God, which drew many out of the enclosures of Christendom. But what use has been made of it? When the energy, freshness, and bloom of the Spirit had departed, what followed, in many cases? Why, people slipped into what may be called dead brethernism, and there is nothing worse than that, because the corruption of the best thing is the worst corruption. What is our moral safeguard? Simply to hold fast what we have received, and to live in the blessed hope of Christ's coming, to realize in our own souls the power of what God has given and what He will give.

We find illustrations of this in Old Testament times. All the great reformatory movements in Israel were characterized by this very thing. It was so in Jehoshaphat's time, and in Hezekiah's time. The Lord calls back His people to the original standard, to what they had received at the first. Hezekiah goes back to Moses, as his authority to maintain the divine standard in the

celebration of the passover. Many might have said, Oh, it is all hopeless; your national unity is gone. Even Solomon had left abominations behind him. The devil suggests to lower the standard because of the ruin; but Hezekiah did not listen to that. He was an overcomer. A tide of blessing rolled in, such as had not been known since the days of Solomon (2 Chron. xxx.)

So, again, in the days of Josiah: a child was on the throne; a woman filling the prophetic office; Nebuchadnezzar almost at the gates. What did Josiah do? The book of the law was read. Instead of lowering the standard on account of the state of things, he acted on the word of God; that was his standard of action, and he kept the passover in the first month. The result was, there had not been such a passover since the days of Samuel.

Thus was it with Hezekiah and Josiah; and we have a still more beautiful example of it in Ezra and Nehemiah. In those days a feast was kept which had not been observed since the days of Joshua the son of Nun. It was reserved for that poor, little remnant to keep that feast. They were overcomers; they went back to God, and to what He had given at the beginning.

Again, Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego gained a magnificent victory when they refused to eat the king's meat. They would not yield one hair's breadth. Were not they overcomers? They might have said, God in His governmental de-

ings has sent us into captivity; why should we refuse to eat the king's meat? But no! they were enabled to hold up the standard of God in the midst of the ruin around.

It was the same with Daniel. He stood in unshaken faithfulness, and gained a splendid victory. It was not to make a show that he opened his windows, and prayed towards Jerusalem, but to maintain the truth of God; he prayed towards God's centre, and he was called the servant of the living God. If these had surrendered, they would have lost their victories, and God would have been dishonored.

All this bears upon us in a very distinct way, in the midst of Protestantism. It makes the word of God of unspeakable value to us. It is not a question of setting up our own opinion or authority, but we are called on to maintain the truth of God, and nothing else; and if you do not get hold of that, you do not know where you are. It might have been said to Josiah, when he broke down the high places built by Solomon (2 Kings xxiii. 13), Who are you, to set yourself up against Solomon, and the institutions set up by a great man like him? But it was not a question of Josiah *versus* Solomon, but of God *versus* error.

And now, as to our second great principle, namely, that our character is also to be formed by what is before us—the coming of the Lord. But mark here, the church of Sardis, instead of **being** cheered by the Church's proper hope, the

bright and Morning Star, is warned, "If, therefore, thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee." This is how He will come upon the world—as a thief. We belong to the region of light; our proper hope is the Morning Star, which is only seen by those who are watching during the night. The reason why Sardis is warned, instead of cheered by the hope of His coming, is, that it has sunk down to the world's level: low, lifeless, sapless Christianity; and it will overtake them as a thief. This is what Protestantism is threatened with, and what you are threatened with, if you let yourself go down with the stream, like a dead fish. The Lord is awakening the hearts of His people to a deeper sense of this. He is giving them to see that nothing will do, save downright reality. If we have not this, we have nothing. It is one thing to have doctrines in the mind, and another thing altogether to have Christ in the heart and Christ in the life.

He is coming for ME, and I have to watch for the bright and Morning Star. Now let my heart rise up, and overcome the condition of things around. If I find saints in that condition, I seek to rouse them out of it. If you want to instruct saints, you must bring them back to the truth you have received, what God gave at the beginning. Build on what God has given you, and on the hope that is set before you. I find it a great thing to say to any one, Are you prepared to

abandon everything that will not bear the test of the word of God—to take your stand on that? Hold fast the standard of the truth of God, and do not accept anything less; even though you may be alone. If a regiment were cut to pieces, and only one man left, if he hold the colors, the dignity of the regiment is maintained. It is not a question of results, but of being true to Christ, to be really alive in a scene which is characterized by having “a name to live, while dead.” We want something more than mere profession. Even the breaking of bread may become an empty formality. We want more power and freshness, more living devotedness to the person of Christ. We are called to overcome. The hearing ear is found only with the overcomer. May our hearts be stirred up to desire it increasingly.

LIFE-WORKS

“As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all, especially unto them who are of the household of faith” (Gal. vi. 10).

IF aught could enhance the value of these lovely words, it would be the fact of their being found at the close of the Epistle to the Galatians. In the progress of this very remarkable writing, the inspired apostle cuts up by the roots the entire system of legal righteousness. He proves, in the most unanswerable way, that by works of law, of any sort, moral or ceremonial, no man can be justified in the sight of God. He declares that believers are not under law in any way whatever, either for life, for justification, or for walk—that if we are under law, we must give up Christ; we must give up the Spirit of God; we must give up faith; we must give up the promises. In short, if we take up legal ground, in any shape whatever, we must give up Christianity and lie under the actual curse of the law.

We do not attempt to quote the passages, or to go into this side of the question at all, just now. We merely call the earnest attention of the Christian reader to the golden words which stand at the head of this paper—words which, we cannot but feel, come in with incomparable beauty and

peculiar moral force at the close of an epistle in which all human righteousness is withered up and flung to the winds. It is always needful to take in both sides of a subject. We are all so terribly prone to one-sidedness, that it is morally healthful for us to have our hearts brought under the full action of *all* truth. It is, alas, possible for grace itself to be abused; and we may sometimes forget that, while we are justified in the sight of God by faith alone, a real faith must be evidenced by works. We have, all of us, to bear in mind that while *law-works* are denounced and demolished, in the most unqualified manner, in manifold parts of Holy Scripture, yet that *life-works* are diligently and constantly maintained and insisted upon.

Yes, beloved Christian reader, we have to bend our earnest attention to this. If we profess to have life, this life must express itself in something more tangible and forcible than mere words or empty lip-profession. It is quite true that law cannot give life, and hence it cannot produce life-works. Not a single cluster of living fruit ever was, or ever will be, culled from the tree of legality. Law can only produce "dead works," from which we need to have the conscience purged just as much as from "wicked works."

All this is most true. It is demonstrated in the pages of inspiration beyond all possibility of question or demur. But then there must be life-works, or else there is no life. Of what possible use is it to profess to have eternal life; to talk about

faith; to advocate the doctrines of grace, while, at the same time, the entire life, the whole practical career is marked by selfishness in every shape and form? "Whoso," says the blessed apostle John, "hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?" So also the apostle James puts a very wholesome question to our hearts, "What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man *say* he hath faith, and have not works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister be naked or destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?"

Here we have life-works insisted upon in a way which ought to speak home, in the most solemn and forcible way, to our hearts. There is an appalling amount of empty profession—shallow, powerless, worthless talk in our midst. We have a wonderfully clear gospel—thanks be to God for it! We see very distinctly that salvation is by grace, through faith, not by works of righteousness, nor by works of law. Blessedly true, and our heart praises God for it. But when people are saved, ought they not to live as such? Ought not the new life to come out in fruits? It must come out if it be in; and if it does not come out, it is not there. Mark what the apostle Paul says, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of

yourselves ; it is the gift of God ; not of works, lest any man should boast." Here we have what we may call the upper side of this great practical question. Then the other side, to which every true and earnest Christian will delight to give his attention. The apostle goes on to say, "We are his workmanship *created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before prepared that we should walk in them.*"

Here we have the whole subject fully and clearly before us. God has created us to walk in a path of good works, and He has prepared the path of good works for us to walk in. It is all of God, from first to last ; all through grace, and all by faith. Thanks and praise be to God that it is so ! But, let us remember that it is utterly vain to talk about grace and faith, and eternal life, if the "good works" are not forthcoming. It is useless to boast of our high truth, our deep, varied, and extensive acquaintance with Scripture, our correct position, our having come out from this, that, and the other, if our feet are not found treading that "path of good works which God hath before prepared" for us. God looks for reality. He is not satisfied with mere words of high profession. He says to us, "My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in *deed* and in *truth.*" He, blessed be His name, did not love us in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth ; and He looks for a response from us—a response clear, full, and distinct ; a response coming out in

a life of good works, a life yielding mellow clusters of the "fruits of righteousness which are by Christ Jesus, to the glory and praise of God."

Beloved Christian reader, do you not consider it to be our bounden duty to apply our hearts to this weighty subject? Ought we not diligently to seek to promote love and good works? And how can this be most effectually accomplished? Surely by walking in love ourselves, and faithfully treading the path of good works in our own private life. For ourselves, we confess we are thoroughly sick of hollow profession. High truth on the lips and low practice in daily life, is one of the crying evils of this our day. We talk of grace; but fail in common righteousness—fail in the plainest moral duties in our daily private life. We boast of our "*position*" and our "*standing*;" but we are deplorably lax as to our *condition* and *state*.

May the Lord, in His infinite goodness, stir up all our hearts to more thorough earnestness, in the pursuit of good works, so that we may more fully adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things!

P. S.—It is very interesting and instructive to compare the teaching of Paul and James—two divinely inspired apostles—on the subject of "*works*." Paul utterly repudiates *law-works*. James jealously insists upon *life works*. If this fact be seized, all difficulty vanishes; and the divine harmony is clearly seen. Many have failed

to do this, and hence have been much perplexed by the seeming difference between Roman iv. 5, and James ii. 24. We need not say there is the most perfect and beautiful harmony. When Paul says, "To him that *worketh not*, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness," he refers to law-works. When James says, "Ye see then how that *by works* a man is justified, and not by faith only," he refers to life-works.

This is abundantly confirmed by the two cases adduced by James in proof of his thesis, namely, Abraham offering up his son and Rahab concealing the spies. If you abstract faith from these cases, they were bad works. Look at them as the fruit of faith, and they were life-works.

How marked is the far-seeing wisdom of the Holy Spirit in all this! He foresaw the use that would be made of this passage; and hence, instead of selecting works abstractedly good, He takes up two from the history of four thousand years, which, if they were not the fruit of faith, were bad works.

"THERE IS ONE BODY"*

Psalm xciii. ; 1 Cor. iii. 16, and vi. 19.

THESE scriptures set forth a truth which I believe to be of cardinal importance to every one of us, individually as well as corporately: the Church as a whole is the temple of God; and every believer is made such as really, as literally, as absolutely as the temple of old in which God dwelt, only, of course, in a different way. He dwells in each individual believer in this room to-day. Mark that fact; ponder it. It is not a question of opinion; it is God's truth. If people do not bow to Scripture, it is of no use to argue with them.

The truth presented here is not one about which you may think this or that. *God has a house here on the earth.* Take in that fact, beloved; ponder it. Do not say it is what we *ought* to be, but what we *are*; and then see the conduct that flows from it; see what becomes God's house: "Holiness becometh Thy house, O Lord, for ever."

This is the basis of the truth which underlies all discipline from the time that God had a house on earth. We never hear a word about God dwelling with man until redemption is accomplished. But

* Notes of an Address delivered in London.

the moment that Israel is out of Egypt, on the shore of the Red Sea, the first note that falls on our ear from the lips of a redeemed people is: "I will prepare Him a habitation." And the moment the last pin is put into the earthly tabernacle, the glory of God comes down to take up His abode in the midst of His people.

But His presence demands and secures holiness. Read Joshua vi., vii., and see how we get there two grand consequences of the self-same presence: Jericho in ruins, and the heap of stones in the valley of Achor. One man dared to defile the assembly of God! How solemn it is! It was a fine thing to see those bulwarks crumbling to dust beneath the feet of God's people. But mark: the same presence that laid Jericho in ruins could not allow that one man's sin to escape notice. The Holy Ghost has penned these records for us, and it is our bounden duty to hang over them, and to seek to drink into our souls the instruction in them.

The very instincts of faith ought to have taught Joshua that there was some hindrance. God's people were His habitation. That fact gave them a characteristic which marked them off from every other nation upon earth. No other nation knew aught of that great privilege but Israel. But God is God; He will be true to Himself; He will take care of His great name. Joshua thought the glory of that great name was involved: but there are more ways than one to maintain that glory.

If Jehovah is present to give victory over His

enemies, He is also present to discipline His people. "Israel hath sinned!" God does not say, One man has sinned—find him out. No; it is the six hundred thousand of Israel, because Israel is one nation; one divine presence in their midst stamped and marked and formed their unity. Do not try to reason about it, brethren, but bow down your whole moral being to that truth. Do not judge it, but let it judge you. "Israel hath sinned;" that is the reason why they could not get the victory. And Israel must come up man by man, so that he who has transgressed the covenant of Jehovah may be taken. God cannot go on with unjudged evil. Weakness is no hindrance, wickedness is. Can God lend the sanction of His presence to evil? Never! If we are God's dwelling-place, we *must* be holy. This is one of those eternal principles which can never be given up.

But the question is raised: How could it be said that Israel had sinned? Six hundred thousand innocent people! The answer is, *the nation is one*, and that unity has to be maintained and confessed.

In Leviticus xxiv. we read, that twelve loaves were placed on the golden table before the Lord continually, with the seven lamps of the golden candlestick to throw their light upon them. The end of the same chapter shows us a man brought outside the camp, where all Israel is to stone him with stones. Why this grouping of passages? It is full of meaning. The grouping of Scripture is

among some of its brightest glories; the very way in which the Holy Ghost groups His materials commands our attention. Every fact, every circumstance tends to illustrate its infinite depths and its moral glories.

Why, then, do we find this connection in Leviticus? For the simple purpose of illustrating this great principle: faith's power to grasp the eternal truth of Israel's unity, and to confess it in the face of everything;—a magnificent, practical truth. There is first the divine side: what Israel was in God's mind; and then, what Israel might become under God's discipline. And it ever behoves the faithful company to confess and maintain the original truth of God, even in the midst of the ruin around. I earnestly, urgently press the necessity as from God to-day, to maintain the great truth of the unity of the body of Christ as that which we have to hold, maintain, and confess in the face of everything.

Elijah on mount Carmel, when the kingdom was divided, called for twelve stones with which to build the altar. But Israel is no longer twelve tribes, it might be said; Israel's unity is broken and gone. No; it is an indissoluble unity, a unity which is never to be surrendered. Israel is twelve while God's eye rests on the twelve loaves on the golden table, on the twelve stones in Aaron's breast-plate. Faith holds fast that truth, and Elijah builds his altar of twelve stones. The unity is never to be given up, though it may be like a chain flung across a river, with the tide flowing

over it, so that you cannot see it. The Church was one on the day of Pentecost; it will be one in the glory; and it is as true to-day that there is one body and one Spirit, as it was when the Holy Ghost penned the fourth of Ephesians. How is this unity formed? By the Holy Ghost; it is union with the Man at the right hand of God.

Thus I get three substantial reasons for a life of holiness: I am not to dishonor Him to whom I am united; I am not to grieve the Spirit by whom I am united; and I am not to grieve the members to whom I am united.

I feel my responsibility to urge this truth upon you, beloved hearers. Let not the devil cheat you of the blessing of walking in it. See that you realize its formative, influential power. Think how your state and walk at this moment are affecting the saints elsewhere. "If one member suffer, all the members suffer with it." All Israel was affected by Achan's sin. He thought nobody saw, nobody knew, and quietly hid the forbidden thing in his tent. If this is your state, there is a complete stoppage at once: there is no more power put forth on your behalf by God; there is power truly, but power not to act for you in *victory*, but to act towards you in *discipline*; power to smash you to pieces.

Let us not measure the word of God by our consciences, or by our sensibilities, but in simplicity believe what it says. We read that there is one Spirit uniting every member to the Head in glory,

and uniting every single member on the earth to every other. In this body a saint out of communion is like a waster in a candle; he affects his fellow-saints. Confess this great truth, own it simply, whatever the condition. Never deny it, never give it up. You say, Brethren are smashed up! I answer, I am not to be occupied with brethren, but with the truth of God. Take your eyes off brethren, and fix them on the truth of God. Are you conscientiously gathered on the ground of the one body? I speak freely and pointedly to you, because I believe this truth is assailed. "He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit," and is joined to all who belong to Him. There is no such thing as independence in the word of God. The assembly in one place is the corporate local expression of the Church of God, as we saw of the twelve tribes of Israel in the Old Testament.

Why did Daniel pray towards Jerusalem? The house of God was not there to the eye of man; but it was there to faith. Faith still recognizing it prays towards it, though the lions' den be its reward.

Again, when Paul was before Agrippa, the nation scattered among all peoples from one end of the earth to the other, but Paul will speak of "the promise unto which our twelve tribes hope to come" and the noun is in the singular (*dodecaphylon*). Could Paul have *shown* them?

Nor can you talk "joining" this body. If you

are converted to Christ, all the "joining" is done! you are "added to the Lord;" you are a part of that which man cannot touch for a moment; no one can cut off one single member of the body of Christ, which, according to the eternal purpose of God, and according to the operation of the Holy Ghost, is united to Him.

There is no need to organize this body. No, thank God, it is not man's work at all. The Holy Ghost came down at Pentecost to form it, and here it is still. And when our Lord Jesus comes to take it to the glory, it will be "the *holy* city, the new Jerusalem, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband," in which He will show forth "the exceeding riches of His grace, in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus."

ONE-SIDED THEOLOGY

WE have lately received a long letter, furnishing a very striking proof of the bewildering effect of one-sided theology. Our correspondent is evidently under the influence of what is styled the high school of doctrine. Hence, he cannot see the rightness of calling upon the unconverted to "come," to "hear," to "repent," or to "believe." It seems to him like telling a crab-tree to bear some apples in order that it may become an apple-tree.

Now, we thoroughly believe that faith is the gift of God, and that it is not according to man's will or by human power. And further, we believe that not a single soul would ever come to Christ if not drawn, yea, compelled by divine grace so to do; and therefore all who are saved have to thank the free and sovereign grace of God for it; their song is, and ever shall be, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy name give glory, for Thy mercy, and for Thy truth's sake."

And this we believe not as part of a certain system of doctrine, but as the revealed truth of God. But, on the other hand, we believe, just as fully, in the solemn truth of man's moral responsibility, inasmuch as it is plainly taught in Scripture, though we do not find it amongst what

are called "the five points of the faith of God's elect." We believe these five points, so far as they go; but they are very far indeed from containing the faith of God's elect. There are wide fields of divine revelation which this stunted and one-sided system does not touch upon, or even hint at, in the most remote manner. Where do we find the heavenly calling? Where, the glorious truth of the Church as the body and bride of Christ? Where, the precious sanctifying hope of the coming of Christ to receive His people to Himself? Where have we the grand scope of prophecy opened to the vision of our souls, in that which is so pompously styled "the faith of God's elect?" We look in vain for a single trace of them in the entire system to which our friend is attached.

Now, can we suppose for a moment that the blessed apostle Paul would accept as "the faith of God's elect" a system which leaves out that glorious mystery of the Church of which he was specially made the minister? Suppose any one had shewn Paul "the five points" of Calvinism, as a statement of the truth of God, what would he have said? What! "The whole truth of God;" "the faith of God's elect;" "all that is essential to be believed;" and yet not a syllable about the real position of the Church—its calling, its standing, its hopes, its privileges! And not a word about Israel's future! A complete ignoring, or at best a thorough alienation, of the promises

made to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and David! The whole body of prophetic teaching subjected to a system of spiritualizing, falsely so called, whereby Israel is robbed of its proper portion, and Christians dragged down to an earthly level—and this presented to us with the loft pretension of “The faith of God’s elect!”

Thank God it is not so. He, blessed be His name, has not confined Himself within the narrow limits of any school of doctrine, high, low, or moderate. He has revealed Himself. He has told out the deep and precious secrets of His heart. He has unfolded His eternal counsels, as to the Church, as to Israel, the Gentiles, and the wide creation. Men might as well attempt to confine the ocean in buckets of their own formation as to confine the vast range of divine revelation within the feeble enclosures of human systems of doctrine. It cannot be done, and it ought not to be attempted. Better far to set aside the systems of theology and schools of divinity, and come like a little child to the eternal fountain of Holy Scripture, and there drink in the living teachings of God’s Spirit.

Nothing is more damaging to the truth of God, more withering to the soul, or more subversive of all spiritual growth and progress than mere theology, high or low—Calvinistic or Arminian. It is impossible for the soul to make progress beyond the boundaries of the system to which it is attached. If I am taught to regard “The five

points" as "the faith of God's elect," I shall not think of looking beyond them; and then a most glorious field of heavenly truth is shut out from the vision of my soul. I am stunted, narrowed, one-sided; and not only so, but I am in danger of getting into that hard, dry state of soul which results from being occupied with mere points of doctrine instead of with Christ. A disciple of the high school of doctrine will not hear of a world-wide gospel—of God's love to the world—of glad tidings to every creature under heaven. He has only gotten a gospel for the elect. On the other hand, a disciple of the low or Arminian school will not hear of the eternal security of God's people. Their salvation depends partly upon Christ, and partly upon themselves. According to this system, the song of the redeemed should be changed. Instead of "Worthy is the Lamb," we should have to add, "and worthy are we." We may be saved to-day, and lost to-morrow. All this dishonors God, and robs the Christian of all true peace.

We do not write to offend the reader. Nothing is further from our thoughts. We are dealing not with persons, but with schools of doctrine and systems of divinity which we would, most earnestly, entreat our beloved readers to abandon, at once, and for ever. Not one of them contains the full, entire truth of God. There are certain elements of truth in all of them; but the truth is often neutralized by the error; and even if we

could find a system which contains, so far as it goes, nothing but the truth, yet if it does not contain the whole truth, its effect upon the soul is pernicious, because it leads a person to plume himself on having the truth of God when, in reality, he has only laid hold of a one-sided system of man.

Then again we rarely find a mere disciple of any school of doctrine who can face Scripture as a whole. Favorite texts will be quoted and continually reiterated; but a large body of Scripture is left almost wholly unappropriated. For example, take such passages as the following, "But now God commandeth *all men* everywhere to repent" (Acts xvii. 30.) And again, "Who will have *all men* to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. ii.) So also, in 2 Peter, "The Lord . . . is long-suffering to usward, not willing that *any* should perish, but that *all* should come to repentance" (Chap. iii. 9). And, in the very closing section of the volume, we read, "Who-soever will, let him take the water of life freely."

Are these passages to be taken as they stand, or are we to introduce qualifying or modifying words to make them fit in with our system? The fact is, they set forth the largeness of the heart of God, the gracious activities of His nature, the wide aspect of His love. It is not according to the loving heart of God that any of His creatures should perish. There is no such thing in Scripture as any decree of God consigning a certain number of the human race to eternal damnation. Some

may be judicially given over to blindness because of deliberate rejection of the light, (see Rom. ix. 17; Heb. vi. 4-6; x. 26, 27; 2 Thess. ii. 11, 12; 1 Pet. ii. 8.) but all who perish will have only themselves to blame. All who reach heaven will have to thank God.

If we are to be taught by Scripture we must believe that every man is responsible according to his light. The Gentile is responsible to listen to the voice of creation. The Jew is responsible on the ground of the law. Christendom is responsible on the ground of the full-orbed revelation contained in the whole word of God. If God commands all men, everywhere to repent, does He mean what He says, or merely all the elect? What right have we to add to, or alter, to pare down, or to accommodate the word of God? None whatever. Let us face Scripture as it stands, and reject everything which will not stand the test. We may well call in question the soundness of a system which cannot meet the full force of the word of God as a whole. If passages of Scripture seem to clash, it is only because of our ignorance. Let us humbly own this, and wait on God for further light. This, we may depend upon it, is safe moral ground to occupy. Instead of endeavoring to reconcile apparent discrepancies, let us bow at the Master's feet and justify Him in all His sayings. Thus shall we reap a harvest of blessing, and grow in the knowledge of God and His word as a whole.

A few days since, a friend put into our hands a

sermon recently preached by an eminent clergyman belonging to the high school of doctrine. We have found in this sermon, quite as much as in the letter of our correspondent, the effects of one-sided theology. For instance, in referring to that magnificent statement of the Baptist in John i. 29, the preacher quotes it thus, "The Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of *the whole world of God's chosen people.*"

But there is not a word about "God's chosen people" in the passage. It refers to the great propitiatory work of Christ, in virtue of which every trace of sin shall yet be obliterated from the wide creation of God. We shall only see the full application of that blessed scripture in the new heavens and the new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness. To confine it to the sin of God's elect can only be viewed as the fruit of theological bias.

NOTE.—It is deeply interesting to mark the way in which Scripture guards against the repulsive doctrine of reprobation. Look, for example, at Matthew xxv. 34. Here, the King, in addressing those on His right hand, says, "*Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.*" Contrast with this the address to those on His left hand: "Depart from me ye cursed (He does not say 'of my Father') into everlasting fire, prepared (not for you, but) for the devil and his angels." So also, in Romans ix.

In speaking of the "vessels of wrath," it says "fitted to destruction"—fitted not by God surely, but by themselves. On the other hand, when speaking of the "vessels of mercy," it says, "which *He had afore prepared* unto glory." The grand truth of *election* is fully established; the repulsive error of *reprobation*, sedulously avoided.

A LETTER TO A FRIEND ON ETERNAL PUNISHMENT

BELOVED FRIEND,

I HAVE been thinking a good deal of late, on the last verse of the third chapter of John. It seems to me to furnish a most powerful answer to two of the leading heresies of this our day, namely, *Universalism* on the one hand, and *Annihilationism*, on the other: "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son, *shall not see life*; but *the wrath of God abideth on him*."

The deniers of eternal punishment, as you know, are divided into two classes, differing from each other very materially. The one professes to believe that all will ultimately be restored and brought into everlasting felicity; these are the *Universalists*. The other is of the opinion that all who die out of Christ are annihilated, soul and body—made an end of thoroughly—will perish like the beast.

I think you will agree with me that John iii. 36 completely demolishes both these fatal errors. It meets the Universalist by the sweeping and conclusive statement that the unbeliever "shall not

see life." It entirely sets aside the notion of all being restored and eternally saved. Those who refuse to believe the Son, shall die in their sins, and never see life.

But, were this all, the Annihilationist might say, "Exactly so; that is just what I believe. None but those who believe in the Son shall live eternally. Eternal life is only in the Son, and hence, all who die out of Christ shall perish—soul and body shall be made an end of."

Not so, says the Holy Spirit. It is quite true they shall not see life; but—tremendous fact! "The wrath of God *abideth* on him." This, beyond all question, gives a flat contradiction to annihilationism. If the wrath of God is to abide upon the unbeliever, it is utterly impossible he can be made an end of. Annihilation and abiding wrath are wholly incompatible. We must either erase the word "abiding" from the inspired page, or abandon completely the notion of annihilation. To hold the two is out of the question.

Of course, I am merely now referring to this one passage of Holy Scripture; and truly it is enough of itself to settle any mind that simply bows to the voice of God, as to the solemn question of eternal punishment. But, beloved friend, here is just the point. Men *will* not submit to the teaching and authority of Holy Scripture. They presume to sit in judgment upon what is and what is not worthy of God to do. They imagine that people may live in sin, in folly, in rebellion against God,

and in the neglect of His Christ, and after all go unpunished. They take upon them to decide that it is inconsistent with their idea of God to allow such a thing as eternal punishment. They attribute to the government of God what we should consider a weakness in any human government, namely, an inability to punish evil-doers.

But ah! the word of God is against them. It speaks of "*unquenchable* fire"—of an "*undying* worm"—of a "*fixed* gulf"—of "*abiding* wrath." What, I would ask, is the meaning of such words, in the judgment of any honest, unprejudiced mind? It may be said that these are figures. Granted that the "fire," the "worm," and the "gulf" are figures, but figures of what? Of something ephemeral—something which must, sooner or later, have an end? Nay; but something which is eternal, if anything is eternal.

If we deny eternal punishment, we must deny an eternal anything, inasmuch as it is the same word which is used in every instance to express the idea of endless continuance. There are about seventy passages in the Greek New Testament where the word "everlasting" occurs. It is applied, amongst many other things, to the life which believers possess, and to the punishment of the wicked, as in Matthew xxv. 46. Now, upon what principle can any one attempt to take out the six or seven passages in which it applies to the punishment of the wicked, and say that in all these instances it does not mean for ever; but

that in all the rest it does? I confess this seems to be perfectly unanswerable. If the Holy Ghost, if the Lord Jesus Christ Himself had thought proper to make use of a different word, when speaking of the punishment of the wicked, from what He uses when speaking of the life of believers, I grant there might be some basis for an objection.

But no; we find the same word invariably used to express what everybody knows to be endless; and therefore if the punishment of the wicked be not endless, nothing is endless. They cannot, consistently, stop short with the question of punishment, but must go on to the denial of the very existence of God Himself.

Indeed, I cannot but believe that here lies the real root of the matter. The enemy desires to get rid of the word of God, of the Spirit of God, the Christ of God, and God Himself; and he craftily begins by introducing the thin end of his fatal wedge, in the denial of eternal punishment; and when this is admitted, the soul has taken the first step on the inclined plane which leads down to the dark abyss of atheism.

This may seem strong, harsh, and ultra; but it is my deep and thorough conviction; and I feel most solemnly impressed with the necessity of warning all our young friends against the danger of admitting into their minds the very shadow of a question or doubt as to the divinely established truth of the endless punishment of the wicked in

hell. The unbeliever cannot be restored, for Scripture declares "he shall not see life." Moreover, he cannot be annihilated, for Scripture declares that "the wrath of God abideth upon him."

O my beloved friend, how much better and wiser and safer it would be for our fellow men to flee from the wrath to come than to deny that it is coming; or that, when it does come, it will be eternal.

Believe me,

Most affectionately yours,

C. H. M.

"PUBLICLY AND FROM HOUSE TO HOUSE."

THE sentence which we have just penned is taken from Paul's farewell address to the elders of Ephesus, as recorded in Acts xx. It is a very suggestive sentence, and sets forth in a most forcible manner the intimate connection between the work of the teacher and that of the pastor. "I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you," says the blessed apostle, "but have showed you and have taught you publicly, and from house to house."

Paul was not only an apostle; he combined, in a striking way the evangelist, the pastor. and the teacher. The two last named are closely connected, as we see from Eph. iv. 11. It is important that this connection be understood and maintained. The teacher unfolds truth; the pastor applies it. The teacher enlightens the understanding; the pastor looks to the state of the heart. The teacher supplies the spiritual nutriment; the pastor sees to the use that is made of it. The teacher occupies himself more with the Word; the pastor looks after the soul. The teacher's work is for the most part public; the pastor's work, chiefly in private. When combined in one person, the teaching faculty imparts immense moral power to the pastor, and the pastoral element imparts affectionate tenderness to the teacher.

The reader must not confound a pastor with an elder or bishop. The two are quite distinct. Elder and bishop are frequently interchangeable, but pastor is never confounded with either. Elder is a local charge; pastor is a gift. We have nothing about elders or bishops in 1 Corinthians xii. and xiv, or Ephesians iv., though in these scriptures we have the fullest unfolding of the subject of gifts. We must carefully distinguish between gift and local charge. Elders or bishops are for rule and oversight. Teachers and pastors are to feed and edify. An elder may be a teacher or pastor, but he must keep the two things distinct. They rest upon a different footing altogether, and are never to be confounded.

However, our object in this brief article is not to write a treatise on ministry, or to dwell elaborately upon the difference between spiritual gift and local charge, but simply to offer to our readers a few words on the immense importance of the pastoral gift in the Church of God, in order that they may be stirred up to earnest prayer to the great Head of the Church, that He may graciously be pleased to shed forth this precious gift more abundantly in our midst. We are not straitened in Him. The treasury of spiritual life is not exhausted; and our Lord Christ loves His Church, and delights to nourish and cherish His body, and to supply its every need out of His own infinite fulness.

That there is urgent need of pastoral care

throughout the Church of God, few can deny who know what pastorship is, and who are at all acquainted with the true condition of the Church. How rare is the true spiritual pastor! It is easy to take the name, and assume the office; but, in point of fact, pastorship is neither a name nor an office, but a living reality—a divinely-imparted gift—something communicated by the Head of the Church for the growth and blessing of His members. A true pastor is a man who is not only possessed of a real spiritual gift, but also animated by the very affections of the heart of Christ toward every lamb and sheep of His blood-bought flock.

Yes, we repeat it, "*every* lamb and sheep." A true pastor is a pastor all over the world. He is one who has a heart, a message, a ministry, for every member of the body of Christ. Not so the elder or bishop. His is a local charge, confined to the locality in which such charge is entrusted. But the pastor's range is the whole Church of God, as the evangelist's range is the wide, wide world. In New York, in London, in Paris, or Canton, a pastor is a pastor, and he has his blessed work everywhere. To imagine a pastor, confined to a certain congregation to which he is expected to discharge the functions of evangelist, teacher, elder, or bishop, is something altogether foreign to the teaching of the New Testament.

But, ah, how few real pastors are to be found in our midst! How rare is the pastor's gift, the

pastor's heart! Where shall we find those who duly combine the two grand and important elements contained in the heading of this paper—"Publicly and from house to house?" A man may, perhaps, give us a brief address on the Lord's day, or a lecture on some week-day; but where is the "house to house" side of the question? Where is the close, earnest, diligent looking after individual souls day by day? Very often it happens that the public teaching shoots completely over the head; it is the house to house teaching that is sure to come home to the heart. How frequently it happens that something uttered in public is entirely misunderstood and misapplied, until the loving pastoral visit during the week supplies the true meaning and just application.

Nor is this all. How much there is in a pastor's range that the public teacher never can compass! No doubt public teaching is most important; would that we had many times more of it than we have. The teacher's work is invaluable, and when mellowed by the deep and tender affection of a pastor's heart, can go a great way indeed in meeting the soul's manifold necessities. But the loving pastor who earnestly, prayerfully, and faithfully goes from house to house, can get at the deep exercises of the soul, the sorrows of the heart, the puzzling questions of the mind, the grave difficulties of the conscience. He can enter, in the profound sympathy of an affectionate heart, into the thousand little circumstances and sorrows

of the path. He can kneel down with the tried, the tempted, the crushed, and the sorrowing one before the mercy-seat, and they can pour out their hearts together, and draw down sweet consolation from the God of all grace and the Father of mercies.

The public teacher cannot do this. No doubt, if, as we have said, he has something of the pastoral element in him, he can anticipate in his public address a great deal of the soul's private exercises, sorrows, and difficulties. But he cannot fully meet the soul's individual need. This is the pastor's holy work. It seems to us that a pastor is to the soul what a doctor is to the body. He must understand disease and medicine. He must be able to tell what is the matter. He must be able to discern the spiritual condition to apply the true remedy. Ah, how few are these pastors! It is one thing to take the title, and another thing to do the work.

Christian reader, we earnestly entreat you to join us in fervent believing prayer to God to raise up true pastors amongst us. We are in sad need of them. The sheep of Christ are not fed and cared for. We are occupied so much with our own affairs, that we have not time to look after the beloved flock of Christ. And even on these occasions, when the Lord's people assemble in public, how little there is for their precious souls! What long barren pauses and silence of poverty! What aimless hymns and prayers we hear! How

little leading of the flock through the green pastures of Holy Scripture, and by the still waters of divine love! And then, all through the week, few loving pastoral calls, few tender solicitous inquiries after soul or body. There seems to be no time. Every moment is swallowed up in the business of providing for ourselves and our families. It is, alas! the old sad story; "All seek their own, not the things that are Jesus Christ's." How different it was with the blessed apostle. He found time to make tents, and also to "teach publicly and from house to house." He was not only the earnest evangelist, ranging over continents and planting churches, but he was also the loving pastor, the tender nurse, the skilful spiritual physician. He had a heart for Christ and for His body, the Church, and for every member of that body. Here lies the real secret of the matter. It is wonderful what a loving heart can accomplish. If I really love the Church, I shall desire its blessing and progress, and seek to promote these according to my ability.

May the Lord raise up in the midst of His people pastors and teachers after His own heart—men filled with His Spirit, and animated by a genuine love for His Church—men competent and ready to teach—"publicly and from house to house."

ISRAEL AND THE NATIONS

Read Psalm lxvii

IT would greatly tend to give clearness and definiteness to missionary effort to keep fully before our minds God's original purpose in sending the gospel to the Gentiles, or nations. This we have stated in the most distinct manner in Acts xv. "Simeon hath declared," says James, "how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, *to take out of them* a people for His name."

It gives no warrant for the idea, so persistently held by the professing Church, that the whole world is to be converted by the preaching of the gospel. To convert the world is one thing; to take out of the nations a people is quite another.

The latter, and not the former, is God's present work. It is what He has been doing since the day that Simon Peter opened the kingdom of heaven to the Gentile in Acts x; and it is what He will continue to do until the moment so rapidly approaching, in which the last elect one is gathered out, and our Lord shall come to receive His people unto Himself.

Let all missionaries remember this. They may rest assured it will not clip their wings, or cripple their energies; it will only guide their movements,

by giving them a divine aim and object. Of what possible use can it be for a man to propose as the end of his labors something wholly different from that which is before the mind of God? Ought not a servant to seek to do his master's will? Can he expect to please his master by pursuing other than his clearly expressed object?

It is blessedly true, that all the earth shall yet be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. There is no question as to this. All Scripture bears witness to it. To quote the passages would literally fill a volume. All Christians are agreed on this point, and hence there is no need to adduce evidence.

But the question is, how is this grand and glorious result to be brought about? Is it the purpose of God to use the professing Church as His agent, or a preached gospel as His instrument, in the conversion of the world? Scripture says **No**; with a clearness which ought to sweep away every doubt.

And here let it be distinctly understood that we delight in all true missionary effort. We heartily wish God's speed to every true missionary—to every one who has left home, and kindred, and friends, and all the comforts and privileges of civilized life, in order to carry the glad tidings of salvation into the dark places of the earth. We desire to render hearty thanks to God for all that has been accomplished in the fields of foreign missions; though we cannot approve some modes

by which the work is carried on. We consider there is a lack of simple faith in God, and of subjection to the authority of Christ, and the guidance of the Holy Ghost. There is too much of human machinery, and looking to the world for aid.

But all this is not our present object. The point with which we are occupied in this brief paper is this—*will* God make use of the professing Church to convert the nations? We ask not, *has* He done so? for, were we to put the question thus, we could only receive an unqualified negative; for the professing Church has been at work for eighteen long centuries; and what is the result? Let the reader take a glance at a missionary map, and he will see in a moment. Look at those large patches of black, designed to set forth the dismal regions over which heathenism bears sway. Look at the red, the green, the yellow, setting forth popery, the Greek church, and Mohammedanism. And where is—we say not true Christianity, but even nominal Protestantism? That is indicated by those spots of blue which, if all put together, make but a small fraction indeed. And as to what even this Protestantism is we need not now stop to inquire.

What, then, say the Scriptures on the great question of the conversion of the nations? Take, for example, the lovely psalm that stands at the head of this paper. It is but one proof among a thousand, but, we need hardly say, perfectly harmonizes with the testimony of all Scripture. We give it in full to the reader.

“God be merciful unto us, and bless us; and cause His face to shine upon us; that Thy way may be known upon earth, Thy saving health among all nations. Let the people praise Thee, O God; let all the people praise Thee. O let the nations be glad, and sing for joy: for Thou shalt judge the people righteously, and govern the nations upon earth. Let the people praise Thee, O God, let all the people praise Thee. Then shall the earth yield her increase; and God, even our own God, shall bless us. God shall bless us; and all the ends of the earth shall fear Him.”

Here, then, the simple truth shines before us. It is when God shall have mercy upon Israel—when He shall cause His light to shine upon Zion—then will His way be known upon earth, His saving health among all nations. It is through *Israel*, not through the professing Church, that God will yet bless the nations.

That the “us” of the foregoing psalm refers to Israel, no intelligent reader of Scripture needs to be told. Indeed, as we all know, the great burden of the Psalms, the Prophets, and the entire Old Testament, is Israel. There is not a syllable about the Church in the Old Testament. Types and shadows there are in which—now that we have the light of the New Testament—we can see the truth of the Church prefigured. But without that light no one could, by any possibility, find the truth of the Church in Old Testament Scripture. That great mystery was, as the inspired apostle

tells us, "*hid*"—not in the Scriptures (for whatever is contained in the Scriptures is no longer hid, but revealed) but it was "hid in God;" and was not, and could not, be revealed until Christ, being rejected by Israel, was crucified and raised from the dead. So long as the testimony to Israel was pending, the doctrine of the Church could not be unfolded. Hence, although at the day of Pentecost we have the *beginning of the Church*, yet it was not until Israel had rejected the testimony of the Holy Ghost in Stephen that a special witness was called out in the person of Paul, to whom *the doctrine of the Church* was committed. We must distinguish between the fact and the doctrine; indeed it is not until we reach the last chapter of the Acts that the curtain finally drops upon Israel; and Paul, the prisoner at Rome, fully unfolds the grand mystery of the Church which from ages and generations had been hid in God, but was now made manifest. Let the reader ponder Romans xvi. 25, 26; Ephesians iii. 1-11; Colossians i. 24-27.

We cannot attempt to go fully into this glorious subject here; indeed, to refer to it at all is a digression from our present line. But we deem it needful just to say thus much, in order that the reader may fully see that psalm lxvii. refers to Israel; and, seeing this, the whole truth will flow into his soul, that the conversion of the nations stands connected with Israel, and not with the Church. It is through Israel, and not through the Church, that God will yet bless the nations. It is

His eternal purpose that the seed of Abraham, His friend, shall yet be pre-eminent in the earth, and that all nations shall be blessed in and through them. "Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold, *out of all languages of the nations*, even shall take hold of *the skirt of him that is a Jew*, saying, *We will go with you*; for we have heard that God is with you" (Zech. viii. 23).

It would be an easy and a delightful task to prove from the New Testament, that, previous to the restoration and blessing of Israel, and therefore previous to the conversion of the nations, the true Church of God, the body of Christ, shall have been taken up to be for ever with the Lord, in the full and ineffable communion of the Father's house; so that the Church will not be God's agency in the conversion of the Jews as a nation, any more than in that of the Gentiles. But we do not desire at this time to do more than establish the two points above stated, which we deem of importance.

LANDMARKS AND STUMBLINGBLOCKS

“Thou shalt not remove thy neighbor's landmark, which they of old have set in thine inheritance” (Deut. xix. 14).

“Take up the stumblingblock out of the way of My people” (Isa. lvii. 14).

WHAT tender care, what gracious consideration, breathe in the above passages! The ancient landmarks were not to be removed; but the stumblingblocks were to be taken up. The inheritance of God's people was to stand entire and unchanged, while the stumblingblocks were to be sedulously removed out of their pathway. Such was the grace and care of God for His people! The portion which God had given to each was to be enjoyed, while, at the same time, the path in which each was called to walk should be kept free from every occasion of stumbling.

Now, judging from recent communications, we believe we are called upon to give attention to the spirit of those ancient enactments. Some of our friends have, in their letters to us, opened their minds very freely as to their spiritual condition. They have told us of their doubts and fears. their

difficulties and dangers, their conflicts and exercises. We are truly grateful for such confidence; and it is our earnest desire to be used of God to help our readers by pointing out the landmarks which He, by His Spirit, has set up, and thus remove the stumblingblocks which the enemy diligently flings in their path.

In pondering the cases which have lately been submitted to us, we have found some in which the enemy was manifestly using as a stumblingblock the doctrine of election *misplaced*. The doctrine of election, in its right place, instead of being a stumblingblock in the pathway of anxious inquirers, will be found to be a landmark set by them of old time, even by the inspired apostles of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, in the inheritance of God's spiritual Israel. But we all know that *misplaced* truth is more dangerous than positive error. If a man were to stand up, and boldly declare that the doctrine of election is false, we should without hesitation reject his words; but we might not be quite so well prepared to meet one who, while admitting the doctrine to be true and important, puts it out of its divinely appointed place. This latter is the very thing which is so constantly done, to the damaging of the truth of God, and the darkening of the souls of men.

What, then, is the true place of the doctrine of election? Its true, its divinely appointed place, is for those within the house—for the establishment of true *believers*. Instead of this, the enemy

puts it *outside* the house, for the stumbling of anxious *inquirers*. Hearken to the following language of a deeply exercised soul: "If I only knew that I was one of the elect I should be quite happy, inasmuch as I could then confidently apply to myself the benefits of the death of Christ."

Doubtless, this would be the language of many, were they only to tell out the feelings of their hearts. They are making a wrong use of the doctrine of election—a doctrine blessedly true in itself—a most valuable "landmark," but made a "stumblingblock" by the enemy. It is very needful for the anxious inquirer to bear in mind that it is *as a lost sinner*, and not as "one of the elect," that he can apply to himself the benefits of the death of Christ.

The proper stand-point from which to get a saving view of the death of Christ is not election, but *the consciousness of our ruin*. This is an unspeakable mercy, inasmuch as I *know* I am a lost sinner; but I do *not* know that I am one of the elect, until I have received, through the Spirit's testimony and teaching, the glad tidings of salvation through the blood of the Lamb. Salvation—free as the sunbeams, full as the ocean, permanent as the throne of the eternal God—is *preached* to me, *not* as one of the elect, but as one *utterly lost*, guilty, and undone; and when I have received this salvation there is conclusive evidence of my election. "Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God; for our gospel came not unto you in

word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance" (1 Thess. i. 4, 5). Election is not my warrant for accepting salvation; but the reception of salvation is the proof of election. For how is any sinner to know that he is one of the elect? Where is he to find it? It must be a matter of divine revelation, else it cannot be a matter of faith. But where is it revealed? Where is the knowledge of election made an indispensable prerequisite, an essential preliminary, to the acceptance of salvation? Nowhere, in the word of God. My only title to salvation is, that I am a poor guilty, hell-deserving sinner. If I wait for any other title, I am only removing a most valuable landmark from its proper place, and putting it as a stumblingblock in my way. This, to say the least of it, is very unwise.

But it is more than unwise. It is positive opposition to the word of God; not only to the quotations which stand at the head of this paper, but to the spirit and teaching of the entire volume. Harken to the risen Saviour's commission to His first heralds: "Go ye into *all* the world, and preach the gospel to *every* creature" (Mark xvi. 15). Is there so much as a single point, in these words, on which to base a question about election? Is any one, to whom this glorious gospel is preached, called to settle a prior question about his election? Assuredly not. "All the world" and "every creature" are expressions which set aside every difficulty, and render salvation as free

as the air, and as wide as the human family. It is not said, "Go ye into a given section of the world, and preach the gospel to a certain number." No; this would not be in keeping with that grace which was to be proclaimed to the wide, wide world. When the law was in question, it was addressed to a certain number, in a given section; but when the gospel was to be proclaimed, its mighty range was to be, "All the world," and its object, "Every creature."

Again, hear what the Holy Ghost saith, by the apostle Paul: "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of *all* acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save *sinners*" (1 Tim. i. 15). Is there any room here for raising a question as to one's title to salvation? None whatever. If Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, and if I am a sinner, then I am entitled to apply to my own soul the benefits of His precious sacrifice. Ere I can possibly exclude myself therefrom I must be something else than a sinner. If it were anywhere declared in Scripture that Christ Jesus came to save only the elect, then clearly I should, in some way or another, prove myself one of that number, ere I could make my own the benefits of His death. But, thanks be to God, there is nothing the least like this in the whole gospel scheme. "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was *lost*" (Luke xix. 10). And is not that just what I am? Truly so. Well then, is it not from the standpoint of a lost one that I am to look

at the death of Christ? Doubtless. And can I not, while contemplating that precious mystery from thence, adopt the language of faith, and say, "He loved *me*, and gave Himself for *me*?" Yes, as unreservedly and unconditionally as though I were the only sinner on the surface of the globe.

Nothing can be more soothing and tranquillizing to the spirit of an anxious inquirer than to mark the way in which salvation is brought to him in the very condition in which he is, and on the very ground which he occupies. There is not so much as a single stumblingblock along the entire path leading to the glorious inheritance of the saints—an inheritance settled by landmarks which neither men nor devils can ever remove. The God of all grace has left nothing undone, nothing unsaid, which could possibly give rest, assurance, and perfect satisfaction to the soul. He has set forth the very condition and character of those for whom Christ died, in such terms as to leave no room for any demur or hesitation. Listen to the following glowing words: "For when we were yet *without strength*, in due time Christ died *for the ungodly*." "But God commendeth His love toward us, in that *while we were yet sinners*, Christ died for us." "For if, *when we were enemies*, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son," &c. (Rom. v. 6, 8, 10).

Can aught be plainer or more pointed than these passages? Is there a single term made use of which could possibly raise a question in the heart of any sinner as to his full and undisputed title to

the benefits of the death of Christ? Not one. Am I "ungodly?" It was for such Christ died. Am I "a sinner?" It is to such that God commendeth His love. Am I "an enemy?" It is such God reconciles by the death of His Son. Thus all is made as plain as a sunbeam; and as for the theological stumblingblock caused by misplacing the doctrine of election, it is entirely removed. It is as a sinner I get the benefit of Christ's death. It is as a lost one I get a salvation which is as free as it is permanent, and as permanent as it is free. All I want, in order to apply to myself the value of the blood of Jesus, is to know myself a guilty *sinner*. It would not help me the least in this matter to be told that I am one of the elect, inasmuch as it is not in that character God addresses me in the gospel, but in another character altogether, even as a *lost* sinner.

But then, some may feel disposed to ask, "Do you want to set aside the doctrine of election?" God forbid. We only want to see it in its right place. We want it as a landmark, not as a stumblingblock. We believe the evangelist has no business to *preach* election. Paul never preached election. He *taught* election, but He preached Christ. This makes all the difference. We believe that no one can be a proper evangelist who is, in any wise, hampered by the doctrine of election misplaced. We have seen serious damage done to two classes of people by preaching election instead of preaching Christ. Careless sinners are

made more careless still, while anxious souls have had their anxiety intensified.

These, surely, are sad results, and they ought to be sufficient to awaken very serious thoughts in the minds of all who desire to be successful preachers of that free and full salvation which shines in the gospel of Christ, and leaves all who hear it without a shadow of an excuse. The grand business of the evangelist is to set forth, in his preaching, the perfect love of God, the efficacy of the blood of Christ, and the faithful record of the Holy Ghost. His spirit should be entirely untrammelled, and his gospel unclouded. He should preach a present salvation, free to all, and stable as the pillars which support the throne of God. The gospel is the unfolding of the heart of God as expressed in the death of His Son, recorded by the Holy Spirit.

Were this more carefully attended to, there would be more power in replying to the oft-repeated objection of the careless, as well as in hushing the deep anxieties of exercised and burdened souls. The former would have no just ground of objection; the latter, no reason to fear. When persons reject the gospel on the ground of God's eternal decrees, they are rejecting what is *revealed* on the ground of what is *hidden*. What can they possibly know about God's decrees? Just nothing. How then can that which is secret be urged as a reason for rejecting what is revealed? Why refuse what *can* be known, on the ground of what *cannot*? It

is obvious that men do not act thus in cases where they wish to believe a matter. Only let a man be willing to believe a thing, and you will not find him anxiously looking for a ground of objection. But alas! men do not want to believe God. They reject His precious testimony which is as clear as the sun in meridian brightness, and urge, as their plea for so doing, His decrees which are wrapped in impenetrable darkness. What folly! What blindness! What guilt!

And then as to anxious souls who harass themselves with questions about election, we long to show them that it is not in accordance with the divine mind that they should raise any such difficulty. God addresses them in the exact state in which He sees them and in which they can see themselves. He addresses them as *sinners*, and this is exactly what they are. *There is nothing but salvation for ANY sinner, the moment he takes his true place as a sinner.* This is simple enough for any simple soul. To raise questions about election is sheer unbelief. It is, in another way, to reject what is revealed on the ground of what is hidden; it is to refuse what I *can* know, on the ground of what I *cannot*. God has revealed Himself in the face of Jesus Christ, so that we may know Him and trust Him. Moreover, He has made full provision in the atonement of the cross for all our need and all our guilt. Hence, therefore instead of perplexing myself with the question, "Am I one of the elect?" it is my happy privilege to rest in

the perfect love of God, the all-sufficiency of Christ, and the faithful record of the Holy Ghost.

We must here close, though there are other stumblingblocks which we long to see removed out of the way of God's people, as well as landmarks which are sadly lost sight of.

GRACE AND GOVERNMENT

THE title of this paper may possibly present a theme to which some of our readers have not given much of their attention; and yet few themes are more important. Indeed, we believe that the difficulty felt in expounding many passages of Holy Scripture, and in interpreting many acts of divine providence, is justly traceable to a want of clearness as to the vast difference between God in grace and in government. Now, as it is our constant aim to meet the actual need of our readers, we purpose, in dependence upon the Spirit's teaching, to unfold a few of the leading passages of Scripture in which the distinction between grace and government is fully and clearly presented.

In the third chapter of the book of Genesis we shall find our first illustration—the first exhibition of divine grace and divine government. Here, we find man a sinner—a ruined, guilty, naked sinner. But here, too, we find God in grace, to remedy the ruin, to cleanse the guilt, to clothe the nakedness. All this He does in His own way. He silences the serpent, and consigns him to eternal ignominy. He establishes His own eternal glory, and provides both life and righteousness for the sinner—all through the bruised Seed of the woman.

Now, this was grace—unqualified grace—free, unconditional, perfect grace—the grace of God. The Lord God gives His Son to be, as “the Seed of the woman,” bruised for man’s redemption—to be slain to furnish a robe of divine righteousness for a naked sinner. This, I repeat, was grace of the most unmistakable nature. But then, be it carefully noted, that in immediate connection with this first grand display of grace, we have the first solemn act of divine government. It was grace that clothed the man. It was government that drove him out of Eden. “Unto Adam also, and to his wife, did the Lord God make coats of skins, and clothed them.” Here we have an act of purest grace. But then we read: “So He drove out the man: and He placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life.” Here we have a solemn, soul-subduing act of government. The coat of skin was the sweet pledge of grace. The flaming sword was the solemn ensign of government. Adam was the subject of both. When he looked at the coat, he could think of divine grace—how God provided a robe to cover his nakedness; when he looked at the sword, he was reminded of divine, unflinching government.

Hence, therefore, the “coat” and the “sword”* may be regarded as the earliest expression of

* The “sword” is the ensign of divine government; the cherubim are the invariable companions thereof. Both symbols are frequently used throughout the word of God.

“grace” and “government.” True, these things appear before us in new forms as we pass down along the current of inspiration. Grace shines in brighter beams, and government clothes itself in robes of deeper solemnity. Moreover, both grace and government assume an aspect less enigmatical, as they develop themselves in connection with the personal history of the people of God from age to age; but still it is deeply interesting to find these grand realities so distinctly presented under the early figures of the coat and the sword.

The reader may perhaps feel disposed to ask, “How was it that the Lord God drove out the man, if He had previously forgiven him?” The same question may be asked in connection with every scene, throughout the entire book of God and throughout the entire history of the people of God, in which the combined action of grace and government is exemplified. Grace forgives; but the wheels of government roll on in all their terrible majesty. Adam was perfectly forgiven, but his sin produced its own results. The guilt of his conscience was removed, but not the “sweat of his brow.” He went out pardoned and clothed; but it was into the midst of “thorns and thistles” he went. He could feed in secret on the precious fruits of grace, while he recognized in public the solemn and unavoidable enactments of government.

Thus it was with Adam; thus it has been ever since; and thus it is at this moment. My reader should seek to get a clear understanding of this

subject in the light of Scripture. It is well worthy of his prayerful attention. It too frequently happens that grace and government are confounded, and, as a necessary consequence, grace is robbed of its charms, and government is shorn of its solemn dignities: the full and unqualified forgiveness of sins, which the sinner might enjoy on the ground of free grace, is rarely apprehended, because the heart is occupied with the stern enactments of government. The two things are as distinct as any two things can be; and this distinctness is as clearly maintained in the third chapter of Genesis as in any other section of the inspired volume. Did the "thorns and thistles" with which Adam found himself surrounded on his expulsion from Eden interfere with that full forgiveness of which grace had previously assured him? Clearly not. His heart had been gladdened by the bright beams of the lamp of promise, and his person clothed in the robe which grace had fashioned for him ere he was sent forth into a cursed and groaning earth, there to toil and struggle by the just decree of the throne of government. God's government "drove out the man"; but not until God's grace had pardoned and clothed him. That sent him forth into a world of gloom; but not until this had placed in his hand the lamp of promise to cheer him through the gloom. He could bear the solemn decree of government in proportion as he experienced the rich provision of grace.

Thus much as to Adam's history in so far as it

illustrates our thesis. We shall now pass on to the ark and deluge, in the days of Noah, which, like the coat of skin and the flaming sword, exemplify in a striking way divine grace and divine government.

The inspired narrative of Cain and his posterity presents, in lines of unflinching faithfulness, the progress of *man* in his fallen condition; while the history of Abel and his immediate line unfolds to us, in glowing contrast, the progress of those who were called to live a life of faith in the midst of that scene into which the enactments of the throne of government had driven our first parents. The former pursued with headlong speed the downward course until their consummated guilt brought down the heavy judgment of the throne of government. The latter, on the contrary, pursued, through grace, an upward course, and were safely borne, through the judgment, into a restored earth.

Now, it is interesting to see that, before ever the governmental act of judgment proceeded, the elect family, and all with them, were safely shut in the ark, the vessel of grace. Noah, safe in the ark, like Adam clad in the coat, was the witness of Jehovah's unqualified grace; and, as such, he could contemplate the throne of government, as it poured its appalling judgment upon a defiled world. God in grace saved Noah, ere God in government swept the earth with the besom of judgment. It is grace and government over again. That, acts in salvation; this, in judgment. God is seen in both.

Every atom of the ark bore the sweet impress of grace; every wave of the deluge reflected the solemn decree of government.

We shall just select one case more from the book of Genesis—a deeply practical one—one in which the combined action of grace and government is seen in a very solemn and impressive way. I allude to the case of the patriarch Jacob. The entire history of this instructive man presents a series of events illustrative of our theme. I shall merely refer to the one case of his deceiving his father for the purpose of supplanting his brother. The sovereign grace of God had, long before Jacob was born, secured to him a preeminence of which no man could ever deprive him; but, not satisfied to wait for God's time and way, he set about managing matters for himself. What was the result? His entire after-life furnishes the admonitory reply. Exile from his father's house; twenty years of hard servitude; his wages changed ten times; never permitted to see his mother again; fear of being murdered by his injured brother; dishonor cast upon his family; terror of his life from the Shechemites; deceived by his ten sons; plunged into deep sorrow by the supposed death of his favorite Joseph; apprehension of death by famine; and, finally, death in a strange land.

Reader, what a lesson is here! Jacob was a subject of grace—sovereign, changeless, eternal grace. This is a settled point. But then, he was a subject of government likewise; and be it well

remembered that no exercise of grace can ever interfere with the onward movement of the wheels of government. That movement is resistless. Easier would it be to stem the ocean's rising tide with a feather, or to check the whirlwind with a spider's web, than to stay by any power, angelic, human, or diabolical, the mighty movement of Jehovah's governmental chariot.

All this is deeply solemn. Grace pardons; yes, freely, fully and eternally pardons; but what is sown must be reaped. A man may be sent by his master to sow a field with wheat, and through ignorance, dulness, or gross inattention, he sows some noxious weed. His master hears of the mistake, and, in the exercise of his grace, he pardons it—pardons it freely and fully. What then? Will the gracious pardon change the nature of the crop? Assuredly not; and hence, in due time, when golden ears should cover the field, the servant sees it covered with noxious weeds. Does the sight of the weeds make him doubt his master's grace? By no means. As the master's grace did not alter the nature of the crop, neither does the nature of the crop alter the master's grace and pardon flowing therefrom. The two things are perfectly distinct; nor would the principle be infringed even though the master were, by the application of extraordinary skill, to extract from the weed a drug more valuable than the wheat itself. It would still hold good that "whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

This will illustrate, in a feeble way, the difference between grace and government. The passage just quoted from the sixth of Galatians is a brief but most comprehensive statement of the great governmental principle—a principle of the gravest and most practical nature—a principle of the widest application. “Whatsoever a man soweth.” It matters not who he is: as is your sowing, so will be your reaping. Grace pardons; nay, more, it may make you higher and happier than ever; but if you sow weeds in spring, you will not reap wheat in harvest. This is as plain as it is practical. It is illustrated and enforced both by Scripture and experience.

Look at the case of Moses. He spoke unadvisedly with his lips at the waters of Meribah (Num. xx.). What was the result? Jehovah’s governmental decree prohibited his entrance into the promised land. But be it noted, while the decree of the throne kept him out of Canaan, the boundless grace of God brought him up to Pisgah (Deut. xxxiv.), where he saw the land, not as it was taken by the hand of Israel, but as it had been given by the covenant of Jehovah. And what then? Jehovah buried His dear servant! What grace shines in this! Truly, if the spirit is overawed by the solemn decree of the throne at Meribah, the heart is enraptured by the matchless grace on the top of Pisgah. Jehovah’s government kept Moses out of Canaan. Jehovah’s grace dug a grave for Moses in the plains of Moab. Was there ever such a bur-

ial? May we not say that the grace that dug the grave of Moses is only outshone by the grace that occupied the grave of Christ? Yes; Jehovah can dig a grave or make a coat; and, moreover, the grace that shines in these marvelous acts is only enhanced by being looked at in connection with the solemn enactments of the throne of government.

But again: look at David "in the matter of Uriah the Hittite." Here we have a most striking exhibition of grace and government. In an evil hour David fell from his holy elevation. Under the blinding power of lust, he rushed into a deep and horrible pit of moral pollution. There, in that deep pit, the arrow of conviction reached his conscience, and drew forth from his broken heart those penitential accents, "I have sinned against the Lord." How were those accents met? By the clear and ready response of that free grace in which our God ever delights: "The Lord hath put away thy sin." This was absolute grace. David's sin was perfectly forgiven. There can be no question as to this. But whilst the soothing accents of grace fell on David's ears upon the confession of his guilt, the solemn movement of the wheels of government was heard in the distance. No sooner had mercy's tender hand removed the guilt, than "the sword" was drawn from the scabbard to execute the necessary judgment. This is deeply solemnizing. David was fully pardoned, but Absalom rose in rebellion. "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also

reap." The sin of sowing weeds may be forgiven, but the reaping must be according to the sowing. The former is grace, the latter is government. Each acts in its own sphere, and neither interferes with the other. The lustre of the grace and the dignity of the government are both divine. David was permitted to tread the courts of the sanctuary as a subject of grace (2 Sam. xii. 20) ere he was called to climb the rugged sides of Mount Olivet as a subject of government (2 Sam. xv. 30); and we may safely assert that David's heart never had a deeper sense of divine grace than at the very time in which he was experiencing the righteous action of divine government.

Sufficient has now been said to open to the reader a subject which he can easily pursue for himself. The Scriptures are full of it; and human life illustrates it every day. How often do we see men in the fullest enjoyment of grace, knowing the pardon of all their sins, walking in unclouded communion with God, and all the while suffering in body or estate the consequences of past follies and excesses. Here, again, you have grace and government. This is a deeply important and practical subject; it will be found to aid the soul very effectively in its study, not only of the page of inspiration, but also of the page of human biography.

I shall close this article by quoting for my reader a passage which is often erroneously adduced as an exhibition of grace, whereas it is entirely an exhibition of government. "And the Lord passed by

before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty ; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation" (Ex. xxxiv. 6, 7). Were we to regard this passage as a presentation of God in the gospel, we should have a very limited view indeed of what the gospel is. The gospel speaketh on this wise: "God was in Christ, *reconciling* the world unto Himself, *not imputing* their trespasses unto them" (2 Cor. v. 19). "Visiting iniquity" and "not imputing" it are two totally different things. The former is God in government; the latter is God in grace. It is the same God, but a different manifestation.

SAUL OF TARSUS.

IN contemplating the character of this most remarkable man, we may gather valuable principles of gospel truth. He seems to have been peculiarly fitted to show forth, in the first place, what the grace of God *can* do; and, in the second place, what the greatest amount of legal effort *cannot* do. If ever there was a man upon this earth whose history illustrates the truth that "salvation is by grace, without works of law," Saul of Tarsus was that man. Indeed, it is as though God had specially designed to present in this man a living example, first, of the depth from which His grace can rescue a *sinner*; and, secondly, the height from which a *legalist* is brought down to receive Christ. He was at once the very *worst* and the very *best* of men—the chief of sinners and the chief of legalists: as he hated and persecuted Christ in His saints, he was a sinner of sinners; and a Pharisee of the Pharisees in his moral conduct and pride.

Let us, then, in the first place, contemplate him as

THE CHIEF OF SINNERS.

"This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to

save sinners; of whom *I am chief*" (1 Tim. i. 15). Now, let the reader note particularly what the Spirit of God declares concerning Saul of Tarsus: that he was the chief of sinners. It is not the expression of Paul's humility, though, no doubt, he was humble under the sense of what he had been. We are not to be occupied with the feelings of an inspired writer, but with the statements of the Holy Ghost who inspired him. It is well to see this. Very many persons speak of the feelings of the various inspired writers in a way calculated to weaken the sense of that precious truth, the plenary inspiration of Holy Scripture. They may not mean to do so; but then, at a time like the present, when there is so much of reason, so much of human speculation, we cannot be too guarded against aught that might, even in appearance, militate against the integrity of the word of God. We are anxious that our readers should treasure the Scriptures in their hearts' affections, not as the expression of human feelings, however pious and praiseworthy, but as the depository of the thoughts of God. "For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (2 Peter i. 21).

Hence, therefore, in reading 1 Tim. i. 15, we are not to think of the feelings of man, but of the record of God, which declares that Paul was "chief of sinners." It is never stated of any one else. No doubt, in a secondary sense, each convicted heart will feel and own itself the guiltiest within its own

range of knowledge ; but this is quite another matter. The Holy Ghost has declared this of Paul ; nor does the fact that He has told us this by the pen of Paul himself interfere with or weaken the truth and value of the statement. No matter how bad any one may be, Paul could say, "*I am chief.*" No matter how far from God any one may feel himself to be—no matter how deeply sunk in the pit of ruin—a voice rises to his ear from a deeper point still, "*I am chief.*"

But let us mark the *object* of all this dealing with the chief of sinners. "Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in *me first*, Jesus Christ might show forth *all* long-suffering, for a *pattern* to them who should hereafter believe on Him to life everlasting." The chief of sinners is in heaven. How did he get there? Simply by the blood of Jesus ; and moreover, he is Christ's "pattern" man. All may look at him and see how they too are to be saved ; for in such wise as the "chief" was saved, must all the subordinate be saved. The *grace* that reached the chief can reach all. The blood that cleansed the chief can cleanse all. The title by which the chief entered heaven is the title for all. Behold in Paul a "pattern of Christ's long-suffering !" There is not a sinner at this side the portal of hell, backslider or aught else, beyond the reach of the love of God, the blood of Christ, or the testimony of the Holy Ghost.

We shall now turn to the other side of Saul's character, and contemplate him as

THE CHIEF OF LEGALISTS.

“Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, *I more*” (Phil. 3: 4). Here we have a most valuable point. Saul of Tarsus stood, as it were, on the loftiest height of the hill of legal righteousness. He reached the topmost step of the ladder of human religion. He would suffer no man to get above him. His religious attainments were of the very highest order. (See Gal. 1: 14.) “If *any* other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, *I more.*” Is any man trusting in his temperance? Paul could say, “*I more.*” Is any man trusting in his morality? Paul could say, “*I more.*” Is any man trusting in ordinances, sacraments, religious services, or pious observances? Paul could say, “*I more.*”

All this imparts a peculiar interest to the history of Saul of Tarsus. In him we see, at one view, the power of the blood of Christ, and the utter worthlessness of the fairest robe of self-righteousness that ever decked the person of a legalist. Looking at him, no sinner need despair; looking at him, no legalist can boast. If the chief of sinners is in heaven, I can get there too. If the greatest religionist, legalist, and doer, that ever lived had to come *down* from the ladder of self-righteousness, it is of no use for me to go *up*.

The guilt of Saul of Tarsus was completely

covered by the blood of Christ; and his lofty religious pride and boasting was swept away by a sight of Jesus, and Saul found his place at the pierced feet of Jesus of Nazareth. His guilt was no hindrance, and his righteousness no use. The former was washed away by the blood, and the latter turned into dung and dross by the moral glory of Christ. It mattered not whether it was "*I chief*," or "*I more*." The cross was the only remedy. "God forbid," says this chief of sinners and prince of legalists, "that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world" (Gal. 6: 14). Paul had just as little idea of trusting in his righteousness as in his crimes. He was permitted to win the laurel of victory in the grand legal struggle with his "equals in his own nation," only that he might fling it, as a withered, worthless thing, at the foot of the Cross. He was permitted to outstrip all in the dark career of guilt, only that he might exemplify the power of the love of God and the efficacy of the blood of Christ. Saul was no nearer to Christ as the chief of legalists than he was as the chief of sinners. There was no more justifying merit in his noblest efforts in the school of legalism than in his wildest acts of opposition to the name of Christ. He was saved by grace, saved by blood, saved by faith. There is no other way for sinner or legalist.

There is another point in Paul's history at which we must briefly glance, in order to shew

the practical results of the grace of Christ wherever that grace is known. This will present him to our notice as

THE MOST LABORIOUS OF APOSTLES.

If Paul learned to cease working for righteousness, he also learned to begin working for Christ. When we behold on Damascus' road the shattered fragments of this worst and best men—when we hear those pathetic accents emanating from the depths of a broken heart, "Lord, what wilt *Thou* have me to do?"—when we see that man who had left Jerusalem in the mad fury of a persecuting zealot, now stretching forth the hand of blind helplessness to be led like a little child into Damascus, we are led to form the very highest expectations as to his future career; nor are we disappointed. Mark the progress of that most remarkable man, behold his gigantic labors in the vineyard of Christ; see his tears, his toils, his travels, his perils, his struggles; see him as he bears his golden sheaves into the heavenly garner, and lays them down at the Master's feet; see him wearing the noble bonds of the gospel, and finally laying his head on a martyr's block, and say if the gospel of God's free grace—the gospel of Christ's free salvation, does away with good works? Nay, my reader, that precious gospel is the only true basis on which the superstructure of good works can ever be erected. Morality, without Christ, is an icy morality. Benevolence, without Christ, is

a worthless benevolence. Ordinances, without Christ are powerless and valueless. Orthodoxy, without Christ, is heartless and fruitless. We must get to the end of *self*, whether it be a guilty self or a religious self, and find Christ as the satisfying portion of our hearts, now and for ever. Then we shall be able to say, with truth,

“Thou, O Christ, art all I want,
More than all in Thee I find.”

And again:

“Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.”

Thus it was with Saul of Tarsus. He got rid of himself and found his all in Christ; and hence, as we hang over the impressive page of his history, we hear, from the depths of ruin, the words, “I am *chief*”—from the most elevated point in the legal system, the words, “I *more*”—and from amid the golden fields of apostolic labor, the words, “I labored *more abundantly* than they all.”

THE TRUE WORKMAN.

HIS REBUFFS, HIS RESOURCES, HIS RETURNS

Read Matthew xi

THERE is a never-failing freshness in every part of the word of God, but especially in those portions of it which present to us the blessed person of the Lord Jesus; which tell us what He was, what He did, what He said, how He did it, and how He said it; which present Him to our hearts in His comings and goings, and matchless ways; in His spirit, tone, and manner, yea, in His very look. There is something in all this that commands and charms the heart. It is far more powerful than the mere statement of doctrines, however important, or the establishment of principles, however profound. These have their value and their place, most assuredly; they enlighten the understanding, instruct the mind, form the judgment, govern the conscience, and, in so doing, render us invaluable service. But the presentation of the person of Christ draws the heart, rivets the affections, satisfies the soul, commands the whole being. In short, nothing can exceed the occupation of heart with Christ Himself as the Holy Ghost has unfolded Him to us

in the Word, and especially in the inimitable narratives of the Gospels. May it be given us, beloved reader, to prove this, as we hang together over the eleventh chapter of the Gospel of Matthew, in which we shall get a view of Christ, the true Workman, in His rebuffs, His resources and His returns—the rebuffs which He met with in His ministry; the resources which He found in God; and the returns which He makes to us.

And first, let us look at

THE REBUFFS.

There never yet was one who stood as a workman for God in this world, that had not to encounter rebuffs in some shape or form, and the only perfect Workman is no exception to the general rule. Jesus had His rebuffs and disappointments; for had it been otherwise with Him, He could not sympathize with those who have to meet them at every stage of their career. He, as man, perfectly entered into everything that man is capable of feeling—sin excepted. “He was in all points tempted like as we are, except sin.” “He is touched with the feeling of our infirmities.” He perfectly understands, and fully enters into, all that His servants have to pass through in their work.

Now, in this eleventh chapter, the Spirit has grouped together a series of those rebuffs or disappointments which the perfect Workman, the true Servant, the divine Minister had to encounter

in the discharge of His ministry. The first of these came from a quarter from which we should not have expected it, namely, from John the Baptist himself. "Now, when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, and said unto Him, Art Thou He that should come, or do we look for another?"

It is very evident that at the moment in which the Baptist sent this message to his Master, his spirit was under a cloud. It was a dark season in his experience. This was nothing uncommon. The very best and truest of Christ's servants have had their spirits overcast at times by the dark shadows of unbelief, despondency, and impatience. Moses, that highly honored, faithful servant of God, gave forth on one occasion such accents as these, "Wherefore hast Thou afflicted Thy servant, and wherefore have I not found favor in Thy sight, that Thou layest the burden of all this people upon me . . . I am not able to bear all this people alone, because it is too heavy for me. And if Thou deal thus with me, kill me, I pray Thee, out of hand, *if* I have found favor in Thy sight, and let me not see my wretchedness" (Num. 11: 11-15). Such was the language of the meekest man upon the face of the earth—language drawn forth, no doubt, by very aggravating circumstances, even by the murmuring voices of six hundred thousand footmen—but still it was the language of Moses; and surely it would ill become us to marvel, for where is the mere mortal wh

could have endured the intense pressure of such a moment? What merely human embankment could have resisted the violence of such a mighty tide?

Again, we find Elijah the Tishbite, in a moment of heavy pressure, when a dark cloud was passing over his soul, flinging himself down under a juniper tree, and requesting for himself that he might die. "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers" (1 Kings 19: 4). This was the language of Elijah, one of the most highly honored of the servants of Christ—language evoked, no doubt, by a combination of the most discouraging influences—but still it was the language of Elijah the Tishbite; and let no one blame him until he himself has passed, without a wavering feeling or a faltering word, through like conditions.

In like manner also we find Jeremiah, another of Christ's high-favored workmen, when under the smitings of Pashur, and the derisive insults of the ungodly around him, giving vent to his feelings in such language as this, "O Lord, Thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived: Thou art stronger than I, and hast prevailed; I am in derision daily, every one mocketh me. For since I spake, I cried out, I cried violence and spoil; because the word of the Lord was made a reproach unto me, and a derision, daily. Then I said, I will not make mention of Him, nor speak any more in His name." And, again, "Cursed be the day wherein I was

born: let not the day wherein my mother bare me be blessed. Cursed be the man who brought tidings to my father, saying, A man child is born unto thee; making him very glad. And let that man be as the cities which the Lord overthrew, and repented not: and let him hear the cry in the morning, and the shouting at noontide, because he slew me not from the womb; or that my mother might have been my grave, and her womb to be always great with me. Wherefore came I forth out of the womb to see labor and sorrow, that my days should be consumed with shame?" (Jer. 20: 7-9, 14-18). Such was the language of the weeping prophet—language drawn forth, no doubt, by sharp rebuffs and sore disappointments in his prophetic ministry, but still the language of Jeremiah; and, ere we condemn him, let us see if we could acquit ourselves better under similar pressure.

Need we wonder, then, after reading such records as the above, when we find the Baptist, amid the gloom of Herod's dungeon, faltering for a moment? Should we be greatly astonished to discover that he was made of no better material than the workmen of former generations? If Israel's lawgiver, Israel's reformer, and Israel's weeping prophet had, each in his day and generation, tottered beneath the ponderous weight of his burden, are we to be surprised to find "John, the son of Zacharias" giving way to a momentary feeling of impatience and unbelief beneath the

dark shadow of his prison walls? Assuredly, not until we ourselves have sat unmoved amid similar influences.

And yet we have ventured to assert, that John's message was a rebuff and a disappointment to the spirit of his Master. Yes, that is just what we assert; and we find the authority for our assertion in the style of Christ's answer. "Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see. The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in Me."

It is very possible, nay probable, that the Baptist, under a passing shadow of unbelief, had been tempted to wonder if indeed Jesus was the One to whom he had, in the discharge of his ministry, borne such full and unqualified testimony. He was, doubtless, stumbled for the moment, when he saw himself in the iron grasp of Herod, and heard of the works of Christ. His poor heart might indulge itself in such reasoning as this, "If indeed this be the glorious Messiah for whom we looked, whose kingdom was to be set up in power, then why is it thus with me His servant and witness? Why am I here in the gloom of this prison? Why is not the strong hand of power stretched forth to free me from these bonds and fling open these prison doors?"

If such were the reasonings of the captive Baptist, and we can easily believe it, what a powerful, pointed, pungent answer lay folded up in his Master's reply! He points him to those grand moral evidences of His divine mission, which were amply sufficient to carry conviction to every one that was taught of God. Was it not to be expected that if the God of Israel appeared in the midst of His people, He should address Himself to their actual condition? Was that the moment for the display of mere power? Could the Son of David set up His throne amid disease and misery? Was there not a demand for the exercise of patient, lowly grace and mercy in the midst of the varied and multiplied fruits of sin? True, mere power could have burst open Herod's prison, and set the captive free; but then what about the lame, the blind, the deaf, the leper, the dead, the poor, the wretched? Could the display of royalty alleviate their condition? Was it not plain that something else was needed? And was it not equally plain that that something was being supplied by the gracious, tender, soothing ministrations of the lowly Jesus of Nazareth? Yes, and the Baptist ought to have known this. But ah! beloved reader, you and I may well tread softly in the prison-chamber of this honored servant of Christ, not only because grace would have us so to do, but also because of the conviction which assuredly must possess our souls that, had *we* been in his position, the foundations

of our personal faith, if not sustained by grace, would have given way far more deplorably.

Still, it is important that we should fully comprehend the failure of John the Baptist, and sedulously gather up the seasonable instruction furnished by his temporary depression. We shall do well to see, with distinctness, what was lacking in his faith, in order that we ourselves may profit by this touchingly interesting narrative. It would have greatly helped the Baptist had he only understood and remembered that this is the day of Christ's *sympathy*, and not the day of His *power*. Were it the day of His power, there would be no dungeon, no block, no stake, no trial or sorrow of any sort for the saints of God. There would then be no tumultuous waves of the ocean, no cloud in the sky, no storm to brave, no roughness to endure. But this is the day of Christ's sympathy; and the question for the tried and tempted, the harassed and oppressed, is this, "Which would you rather have, the *power* of Christ's *hand* in deliverance *from* the trial, or the *sympathy* of Christ's *heart* in the trial?" The carnal mind, the unsubdued heart, the restless spirit, will, no doubt, at once exclaim, "Oh! let Him only put forth His power and deliver me from this insupportable trial, this intolerable burden, this crushing difficulty. I sigh for deliverance. I only want deliverance."

Some of us can well understand this. We are so often like a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke.

restlessly struggling, instead of patiently submitting; rendering the yoke all the more galling and grievous by our senseless and useless efforts to shake it off. But the spiritual mind, the subdued heart, the lowly spirit, will say, and that without a single particle of reserve, Let me only enjoy the sweet sympathy of the heart of Jesus in my trial, and I ask no more. I do not want even the power of His hand to deprive me of one drop of consolation supplied by the tender love and profound sympathy of His heart. I know, assuredly, that He could deliver me. I know that He could, in the twinkling of an eye, snap these chains, level these prison walls, rebuke that sickness, raise up that beloved object that lies before me in the cold grasp of death, remove this heavy burden, meet this difficulty, supply this need. But if He does not see fit to do so, if it does not fall in with His unsearchable counsels, and harmonize with His wise and faithful purpose concerning me so to do, I know it is only to lead me into a deeper and richer experience of His most precious sympathy. If He does not see it right to take me off the rough path of trial and difficulty—that path which He Himself, in perfection, and all His saints from age to age, in their measure, have trodden—it is His gracious purpose to come and walk with me along that path which, though rough and thorny, leads to those everlasting mansions of light and blessedness above.

We cannot, for a moment, doubt but that the

knowledge and recollection of these things would greatly have relieved the heart of John the Baptist in the midst of his prison experiences; and surely they would serve to soothe and sustain our hearts amid the varied exercises through which we are called to pass in this wilderness scene. The moment has not yet arrived for Jesus to take to Himself His great power, and reign. It is the day of His patience with the world, of His sympathy with His people. We must ever remember this. He did not put forth the strong hand of power to avert aught of His own suffering. Nay, when Peter, in mistaken zeal, drew the sword in His defence, He said, "Put up thy sword into its place; for all they that take the sword shall perish by the sword. Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He shall presently give Me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the Scriptures be fulfilled that thus it must be?" (Matt. xxvi. 52-54).

But while we fully recognize the momentary failure of John the Baptist, and while we clearly discern the points in which his faith proved itself defective, let us remember the pressure of his circumstances, and the great practical difficulty of the lesson which he was called to learn within his prison walls. It is very hard for a workman to find himself laid aside. Indeed, there are few things more difficult for an active mind than to learn that we can be dispensed with. We are so apt to think that the work cannot get on without

us. And yet the Lord can soon teach us our mistake. Paul's bonds advanced the cause of Christ. The imprisonment of one great preacher drew out a multitude of minor preachers. Luther's confinement in the Wartburg furthered the cause of the Reformation.

Thus it is always; and we have all to learn the wholesome lesson, that God can do without us; that the work can go on without us. This holds good in every case. It matters not, in the least, what our sphere of action may be. We may not be apostles or reformers, teachers or preachers; but whatever we are, it is well for us to learn that we can very easily be spared from the scene around us. The remembrance of this gives great rest to the heart. It tends amazingly to cure us of all that bustling self-importance which is so truly hateful, and it enables us to say, "The Lord be praised! The work is being done. I am satisfied."

The reader will discern a very marked difference between Christ's message *to* John and his testimony *of* John. In speaking to His servant, He lets him know, in a way not to be mistaken, that He *felt* his question. We can have no difficulty in seeing this. We feel persuaded that the Lord's answer to His servant contained a sharp arrow. True, that arrow was enclosed in a very delicate case; but it was an arrow, and a sharp one too. "Blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in Me." John would, doubtless, understand this. It was designed to go right home to his very

inmost soul. That dear servant had said, in reference to Jesus, "He must increase, but I must decrease," and he was called to enter practically into this, not merely in his ministry, but in his person. He had to be content to end his career by the sword of the executioner, after having spent his closing days in the gloom of a dungeon. How mysterious! What a profound lesson to be set down to! How difficult to flesh and blood! What need—what urgent need there was, at such a moment, for John to have whispered into his ear these words, afterwards uttered to Peter, "What I do, thou knowest not *now*; but thou shalt know *hereafter*."

What pregnant words! "*Now*" and "*Hereafter!*" How much we all need to remember them! Often it happens with us that "*Now*" is involved in deep and impenetrable obscurity. Heavy clouds hang upon our path. The dealings of our Father's hand are perfectly inexplicable to us. Our minds are bewildered. There are circumstances in our path for which we cannot account—ingredients in our cup the object of which we cannot understand or appreciate. We are confounded and feel disposed to cry out, "Why am I thus?" We are wholly engrossed with "*Now*," and our minds are filled with dark and unbelieving reasonings until those precious words fall, in a still small voice upon the ear, "What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter." Then the reasonings are answered, the storm hushed,

the dark and depressing "Now" is lighted up with the beams of a brilliant and glorious "Hereafter," and the subdued heart breathes forth, in accents of holy and intelligent acquiescence, "As Thou wilt, Lord." Would that we knew more of this! Assuredly, we need it, whatsoever may be our lot in this world. We may not be called, like the Baptist, to the prison and the block; but each has his "Now" which must be interpreted in the light of "Hereafter." We must look at the "seen and temporal" in the clear and blessed light of the "unseen and eternal."

But let us now turn, for a moment, and hearken to Christ's testimony of John. "And, as they departed, Jesus began to say unto the multitudes concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind? But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? behold they that wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? Yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet. For this is he of whom it is written, Behold, I send My messenger before Thy face, which shall prepare Thy way before Thee. Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding, he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he." *

* In order fully to understand this last clause, we must distinguish between John's personal character and walk,

Such was the glowing testimony borne by Christ of His servant, John the Baptist. "Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than he." There is a great principle in this—a principle which we may see illustrated, again and again, in the record of God's dealings with His people. If the Lord had a message to send to His servant, He would send it. He would

and his dispensational and official position. If we look at him, in his person and walk, few, even in the kingdom, could bear comparison with him, in separation and devotedness. But when we look at him, in his dispensational position, *i. e.*, in the place assigned him in the divine economy, the very weakest and least in the kingdom occupies a better and higher place. The same remark holds good with respect to the saints of Old Testament times. If we take Abraham, for example, and compare him with the best of the children of God of this dispensation, the "father of the faithful" might stand higher, as regards personal faith and devotedness; the feeblest member of the Church of God occupies, dispensationally, in the divine economy, a place which Abraham never thought of, because it was not revealed. Very many pious and godly people are prevented from seeing the dignities and privileges of the saints of this dispensation, by comparing themselves *personally* with Old Testament believers. But we must remember it is not a question of what we are in ourselves, but of the *place* which God, in the arrangement of His kingdom and household, has thought proper to assign us; and if He has been pleased to give us a higher place than that occupied by His people in Old Testament times, it is *not* true humility on our part to refuse it; yea, rather let us seek grace to occupy it aright, and to walk worthy of it.

speak to him, plainly and pointedly. But, the moment He proceeds to speak *of* him, the case is totally different.

Thus it is always, and blessed be God that it is so. We have our ways and God has His thoughts; and while He will deal with us faithfully as to the former, He can only speak of us according to the latter. What relief for the heart is here! What comfort! What moral power! What solid ground for self-judgment! God has given us a standing, and He thinks of us, and speaks of us, according to that. We have our practical ways, and He deals with us and speaks to us in reference to them. He will expose us to ourselves, and make us feel our ways and judge our doings; but the moment He begins to speak of us to others, He brings out the perfection of His own thoughts respecting us, and speaks of us according to the perfect standing which He has given us in His presence, the fruit of His own eternal counsels respecting us, and of His perfect work on our behalf.

Thus it was with Israel, in the plains of Moab. They had their ways, and God had His thoughts; and while He had, often and often, to reprove them for their ways, to speak plainly to them about their perverseness and stiff-neckedness, yet no sooner did the covetous prophet appear upon the scene, to curse Israel, than the Lord placed Himself right between His people and the enemy to turn the curse into a blessing, and pour forth the most sublime and marvelous strains of testi-

mony on their behalf: "God is not a man, that He should lie; neither the son of man that He should repent: hath He said, and shall He not do it? or hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good? Behold, I have received commandment to bless, and He hath blessed; and I cannot reverse it. He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath He seen perverseness in Israel: the Lord his God is with him, and the shout of a king is among them. God brought them out of Egypt: he hath, as it were, the strength of a unicorn. Surely there is no enchantment against Jacob, neither is there any divination against Israel; according to this time it shall be said of Jacob and of Israel, What hath God wrought!" (Num. xxiii. 19-23).

What grace is here! "I have not beheld iniquity, nor seen perverseness." What could the enemy say to this? "What hath God wrought!" It is not, "What hath Israel wrought!" They had wrought folly, many a time; but God had wrought salvation. He had wrought for His own glory, and that glory had shone out in the perfect deliverance of a crooked, perverse, and stiff-necked people. It was no use the enemy's talking of iniquity and perverseness, if Jehovah would not see either the one or the other. It is of very little consequence to us that Satan accuses, when God has acquitted; that Satan counts up our sins, when God has blotted them all out for ever; that Satan condemns, when God has justified.

“ I hear the accuser roar,
Of ills that I have done ;
I know them well, and thousands more,
Jehovah findeth none.”

But some may feel disposed to ask, “Is there not danger in the statement of such a principle as this? Might it not lead us into the dark and perilous region of antinomianism?” Reader, be thou well assured of this, thou art never further removed from that justly dreaded region than when thy soul is basking in the bright and blessed beams of God’s eternal favor, and exulting in the stability of His unconditional and everlasting salvation. There never was a greater mistake than to imagine that God’s free grace and full salvation could ever lead to unholy results. Man’s notions of these things may have that effect, but wherever grace is fully known and salvation enjoyed, there you will most assuredly find “The fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God.” But we know it is an old habit of ignorant and self-exalting legality to attribute an antinomian tendency to the free grace of God. “Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?” is no modern objection to the precious doctrines of grace; and yet those doctrines remain untouched in all their purity and power, and find their divine centre in the person of Christ Himself, who, having died on the cross to put away our sins, has become our life and righteousness, our sanctification and redemption, our all in all. He has not

only delivered us from the future consequences of sin, but from the present power thereof.

This is what God hath wrought, and this is the groundwork of the great principle on which we have been dwelling, and which we have seen variously illustrated in God's dealings with Israel in the plains of Moab, and in Christ's dealings with the Baptist in the dungeon of Herod. Jehovah was compelling Balaam to exclaim in the ears of Balak, "How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel," at the very moment when those tents and tabernacles were furnishing ample material for judgment. So also, Jesus was telling out in the ears of the multitude the greatness of John the Baptist, at the very moment when the messengers were on their way back to their master, carrying with them an arrow for his heart.

Now, we want the reader to get a clear view of this principle, and to bear it in constant remembrance. If we mistake not, it will greatly help him, not only in the understanding of God's word, but also in the interpreting of His ways. God judges His people. He will not and cannot pass over a jot or a tittle in their ways. The splendid testimony of Balaam on Moab's heights, was followed by the sharp javelin of Phineas in Moab's plains. "*Our* God is a consuming fire." This is what *our* God is now. He cannot tolerate evil. He speaks of us, He thinks of us, He acts toward us according to the perfection of

His own work; but He will judge our ways. Let an enemy come forth to curse, and what is it? Not a spot, not a stain, all perfect and comely and goodly. How could it be otherwise? How could the eye of God behold those sins which have been for ever obliterated by the blood of the Lamb? Utterly impossible.

What then? Does this make light of sin? Far be the thought. Does it open the door for a loose walk? Nay, it lays the only true foundation of personal holiness. "The Lord will judge His people." He will look after the ways of His children. He will take care of His holiness; and not only so, but He will make His people partakers of that holiness, and chasten them with the rod of faithful discipline for that very purpose. It was just because Israel's tents were goodly in the eyes of Jehovah, that He sent Phineas into those very tents with the javelin of righteous judgment in his hand. And so, now, it is because His people are precious to Him, and comely in His eyes, that He will not suffer aught in them, or in their ways, contrary to His holiness. "The time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God" (1 Peter 4: 17). God is not judging the world now. He is judging His people now. He will judge the world by-and-by. But, be it remembered, that it is as a "holy Father" He judges His people; it is as a righteous God He will judge the world. The object of the former is practical holiness; the issue

of the latter will be eternal perdition. Solemn thought!

But there is another point in connection with this, which we desire to press upon the attention of the Christian reader—a point of very great practical moment, namely this, we must not measure our standing by our state, but ever judge our state by our standing. Many err in reference to this, and their error leads to most disastrous results. The standing of the believer is settled, perfect, eternal, divine. His state is imperfect and fluctuating. He is partaker of the divine nature which cannot sin; but he bears about with him also his old nature which can do nothing else but sin. Now his standing is in the new and not in the old. God sees him only in the new. He is not in the flesh, but in the Spirit. He is not under law, but under grace. He is in Christ. God sees him as such. This is his perfect and unalterable standing; his sins gone; his person accepted; all complete. His practical state can never touch his standing. It can very seriously affect his communion, his worship, his testimony, his usefulness, his spiritual enjoyment, his mental repose, the glory of Christ as involved in his practical career. These are grave consequences in the estimation of every sensitive conscience and well-regulated mind; but the standing of the true believer remains—ever remains *intact* and unalterable. The feeblest member of the family of God has this place of security, and is perfect

in Christ. To deny this is to remove the true basis of self-judgment and practical holiness.

Hence, if the Christian sets about measuring his standing by his state, he must be miserable, and his mental misery must be commensurate with his honesty and intelligence. There may be cases in which ignorance, self-complacency, or want of sincerity, will lead to a sort of false peace; but where there is any measure of light, intelligence, and uprightness, there must be mental anguish if the standing is measured by the state.

On the other hand, let it never be forgotten—indeed the earnest Christian never could desire to forget—that the state must be judged by the standing. If this wholesome truth be lost sight of, we shall very speedily make shipwreck of faith and a good conscience. We have to keep the eye of faith steadily fixed on a risen Christ, and never be satisfied with anything short of perfect conformity to Him, in spirit, soul, and body.

A very few words will suffice to present to the reader the remainder of those rebuffs with which our blessed Lord had to deal, as recorded in our chapter. Having disposed of the question of the Baptist and his ministry, He turns to the men of that generation, and says, "But whereunto shall I liken this generation? It is like unto children sitting in the markets, and calling unto their fellows, and saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented. For John came

neither eating nor drinking, and they say, He hath a devil. The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners. But wisdom is justified of her children."

The piping and the mourning were alike neglected by an unbelieving age. "John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not." The Lord Jesus came in perfect grace, and they would not have Him. The stern and distant minister of righteousness, with the ax of judgment in his hand, and the lowly, gentle Minister of divine grace, with words of tenderness and acts of goodness, were alike rejected by the men of that generation. But wisdom's children will ever justify her, in all her doings and in all her sayings. The Lord be praised for this rich mercy! What a privilege to be of the favored number of wisdom's children! To have an eye to see, an ear to hear, and a heart to understand and appreciate the ways and works and words of divine Wisdom! "Oh, to grace how great a debtor!"

"Then began He to upbraid the cities wherein most of His mighty works were done, because they repented not. Woe unto thee, Chorazin! Woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day

of judgment than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell; for if the mighty works which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Sodom in the day of judgment than for thee."

With what deep and awful solemnity does the word "Woe!" fall upon the ear, as coming from the lips of the Son of God. It is the woe consequent upon rejected grace. It is no longer merely a question of law broken, ordinances dishonored and abused, divine institutions shamefully corrupted, prophets and wise men rejected and stoned. All this there was, alas! But there was more. The Son Himself had come, in richest grace. He had spoken in their ears such words as none other had ever spoken. He had wrought His mighty miracles in their midst. He had healed their sick, cleansed their lepers, raised their dead, fed their hungry, opened the eyes of their blind. What had He not done? What had He not said? He longed to gather them beneath His sheltering wing; but they would not nestle there. They preferred the wings of the arch-enemy to the wings of Jehovah. He had opened His bosom to receive them; but they would not trust Him. All day long had He stretched forth His hands to them; but they would not have Him; and now, at length, after long forbearing, He pours forth His solemn woes upon them,

and tells them of the appalling destiny awaiting them.

But, beloved reader, does it not occur to you that the "woe" of the eleventh of Matthew may have a wider range than even Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum? Should it not fall with still deeper emphasis, and more soul-subduing power, upon the ear of Christendom? For our part, we cannot doubt it for a moment. We cannot attempt to enter upon the circumstances which conspire to aggravate the guilt of the professing church—the wide diffusion of scriptural knowledge and evangelical light—the numberless and nameless forms in which spiritual privileges lie scattered upon the pathway of this generation. And what is the return? What the true practical condition of even those who occupy the very highest platform of christian profession? Alas! who shall venture a reply? We look in one direction, and see the dark shadows of superstition enwrapping the minds of men. We turn the eye to another point, and there we see infidelity raising its bold and audacious front, and daring to lay its impious hand upon the sacred canon of inspiration. Combined with these, we see the poor heart eagerly grasping at everything that can possibly minister to ease and self-indulgence. In a word, it may be safely affirmed that during the entire history of the world, there has not been exhibited a darker spectacle than that which professing Christianity presents at this very hour. Take Chorazin and

its companion cities; take Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities of the plain; take Tyre and Sidon; put all these together into one scale, with all their guilt, and Christendom will outweigh them all. For if, in those cities, you find wickedness and infidelity, you do not find them, as in Christendom, tacked on to the name of Christ, or covered with the specious robes of christian profession. No; this latter is the aggravated sin of Christendom, and hence the terrible "woe unto thee" is to be measured by the greatness of the privileges and consequent responsibility.

And if these lines should be scanned by one who up to this moment has rejected the testimony of the gospel, we would affectionately remind him that he should feel the solemnity of the words, "Woe unto thee." We fear that very few, comparatively, realize the awful responsibility of continually hearing and rejecting the gospel message. If it was a solemn thing for Capernaum to reject the light which shone upon it, how much more solemn it is for any one now to reject the still brighter light that shines upon him in the gospel of the grace of God! Redemption is now accomplished, Christ is exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour, the Holy Ghost has come down, the canon of inspiration is complete, everything has been done that love could do. If, therefore, in the face of all this accumulated light and privilege, a man is found still in unbelief, still living in his sins, surely he has much reason to fear lest this

word be pronounced upon him at the last, "Woe unto thee, gospel rejector." "Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out My hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all My counsel, and would none of My reproof; I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then shall they call upon Me, but I will not answer; they shall seek Me early, but they shall not find Me" (Prov. i. 24-28). May these words be used by the Holy Ghost to awaken some careless reader, and lead him to the feet of Jesus!

Let us now turn, for a moment, to

THE RESOURCES

which the true, the perfect, the divine Workman found in God. That blessed One had, most surely, His rebuffs in this wretched world; but He had His never-failing resources in God; and, hence, when everything seemed against Him, when He might say, "I have labored in vain, and spent My strength for nought and in vain;" when unbelief, hardness of heart, and rejection met His view on every side, "At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Thy

sight. All things are delivered unto Me of My Father; and no man knoweth the Son but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him."

Here, then, were the resources—the rich and varied resources of the true Workman, who could thank God in everything, and at all times. He was unmoved in the midst of all. If the testimony was rejected, if the message fell upon deaf ears and uncircumcised hearts, if the precious seed which was scattered by His loving hand fell upon the beaten highway and was borne off by the fowls of the air, He could bow His head and say, "I thank Thee, O Father. Even so, Father; for so it seemed good in Thy sight." There was no failure on His part. He ever walked and worked in the perfect line of the divine counsels. Not so with us. If our testimony is rejected, if our work is unproductive, we may have to inquire as to the cause. We may have to judge ourselves in the matter. Perhaps we have not been faithful. The lack of result may be wholly attributable to ourselves. It might have been different had we been more single-eyed and devoted. We might have gathered golden sheaves in yonder corner of the field, had it not been for our own carnality and worldliness. We were self-indulgent when we ought to have been self-denying; we were governed by mixed motives. In short, there may be a thousand reasons, in ourselves and in our ways, why our labor has proved unproductive.

But with the only perfect Workman, this was not the case, and hence He could calmly retire from the rebuffs without into the resources within. It was all bright with Him there. "I thank *Thee*." He stayed His heart upon the eternal counsels of God. All things were delivered unto Him; and, as He says, elsewhere, "All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me." It was all settled, and all right. The divine counsel shall stand, and the divine good pleasure shall be accomplished. What a sweet relief for the heart amid rebuffs and disappointments! God will perfect that which concerneth His servants; and even where there are mistakes and failures, as alas! there are in abundance with all of us, the Lord's rich grace abounds over all, and actually takes occasion from our very mistakes to shine out all the more brightly—though, assuredly, the mistakes must produce their own painful and humiliating results. It is the remembrance of this which alone can give calm repose in the midst of the most discouraging circumstances. If we take the eye off God, our souls must soon be overwhelmed. It is our privilege to be able, in our little measure, to thank God in view of everything, and take refuge in His eternal counsels, which must be made good despite all the unbelief of man, and all the malice of Satan.

But we must draw this paper to a close, and shall do little more than quote the precious words which set forth

THE RETURNS

which our blessed Lord and Saviour makes to us. "Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

These words are familiar to our readers, and we but introduce them here as completing the lovely picture presented in our chapter. We feel assured the spiritual reader will greatly enjoy the presentation of the divine Workman in His rebuffs, His resources, and His returns. It is a marvelous lesson indeed. The Lord Jesus retires from a scene of disappointments, and finds all His springs in God; He then comes forth into the midst of the very scene that had repulsed Him, and makes His gracious returns. It is all in perfect grace—grace unfailing—mercy inexhaustible—patience unwearied. True, He had sent an answer to the Baptist; He had faithfully portrayed the men of that generation; He had denounced a solemn woe upon the impenitent cities; but He can come forth in all the divine freshness and fulness of the grace that was in Him, and say, to every heavy laden soul, "*Come unto Me.*"

Beloved reader, all this is divine. It draws out our hearts in worship and thanksgiving. If *faithfulness* is constrained, in the view of aggravated

impenitence, to say, "*Woe* unto thee," *grace* can address every burdened heart in the touching accents, "*Come* unto *Me*." Both are perfect. The Lord Jesus felt the rebuffs. He would not have been very man if He had not felt them. Yes, He felt the rebuffs. He could say, "I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none." Mark, "*I looked*." His loving human heart fondly "looked" for pity, but found it not. He looked for comforters, but looked in vain. There was no pity for Jesus—no comforters for Him. He was left alone. Loneliness and desolation, thirst, ignominy and death—such was the portion of the Son of God and Son of man. "Reproach," says He, "hath broken my heart." It is a fatal mistake to suppose that the Lord Jesus did not feel in every respect, as man should feel, the varied exercises through which He passed. He felt everything that man is capable of feeling except sin, and this latter He bore and expiated on the cross, blessed be His name!

This is not only a great cardinal doctrine of the christian faith, but a truth of infinite sweetness to the heart of every true believer. Jesus, as man, felt what it was to be neglected, to be disappointed, to be wounded and insulted. Blessed Jesus! thus it was with Thee, down here, because Thou wast very man, perfect in all that became a man, in the midst of this heartless world. Thy loving heart sought sympathy, but found it not. Loneliness was

Thy portion while craving sweet companionship. This world had no pity, no comfort for Thee.

And yet, mark the grace which breathes in those words, "Come unto Me." How unlike us! If we, who so often deserve them, because of our ways, meet with rebuffs and disappointments, what returns do we make? Alas! for the answer. Chagrin and sourness, fault-finding and bitter complaints. And why is this? It may be said we are not perfect:—certainly not in ourselves; but we may rest assured, that if we were more in the constant habit of retiring from the rebuffs of the world or of the professing church, into our resources in God, we should be much better able to come forth and make gracious returns in the midst of the scene which had repulsed us. But it too often happens that instead of being driven in upon God, we are driven in upon *self*; and the consequence is that, instead of returning grace, we return bitterness. It is impossible that we can make a right return if we fail to realize our right resource.

Oh, that we may really learn of Jesus, and take His yoke upon us! May we drink into His meek and lowly spirit! What words—"Meek and lowly!" How unlike nature! How unlike the world! How unlike us! How much pride, haughtiness, and self-sufficiency in us! What self-confidence, self-seeking, and self-exaltation! May the Lord give us to see ourselves as He sees us, so that we may be in the dust in His presence, and ever walk humbly before Him.

May it be given us to prove, in this day of headiness and high-mindedness, the moral security of a lowly mind and a humble spirit—gladly bearing His yoke—the yoke of entire subjection to our Lord's will in all things. This is the secret of true peace and power. We can only taste of true rest of heart when the will is kept in subjection. It is when we can meet every dispensation of our Father's hand with an "Even so," that rest is our portion. If our will is active, rest must be out of the question. It is one thing to *receive* rest of conscience on coming to Jesus, at the first, and quite another thing to *find* rest of heart through taking His yoke and learning of Him. May it be given us to know very much more of the latter, in this day of restless activity.

DIVERSITY AND UNITY

IT is at once interesting and instructive to mark the varied lines of truth presented in the New Testament, all finding their common centre in that blessed One who is the truth. We see this, both in the Gospels and in the Epistles. Each of the four Evangelists, under the direct guidance and power of the Holy Ghost, gives us a distinct view of Christ. Matthew presents Him in His Jewish relations—as the Messiah, the Son of David, Son of Abraham—heir of the promises made to the fathers. Mark presents Him as the earnest workman, the diligent servant, the laborious minister, the incessant preacher and teacher. Luke gives us “The Man Christ Jesus,” in His human relations, Son of man, Son of Adam. John is occupied with the Son of God, Son of the Father, the heavenly Man, in His heavenly relationships.

Thus each one has his own specific line. No two are alike, but all agree. There is lovely variety, but the most perfect harmony; there is diversity and unity. Matthew does not interfere with Mark; nor Mark with Luke; nor Luke with John. There is no collision, because each moves in his own proper orbit, and all revolve round the one grand centre.

Nor could we do without any one of the four. There would be a serious blank if one were missing; and it is the Holy Spirit's purpose and joy to set forth every ray of the moral glory of the Son of God. Each Gospel fulfils his own service, under the guiding hand of the Holy Ghost.

So also is it in the Epistles. Paul's line of things is as distinct from Peter's, as Peter's is from John's, or John's from James'.* No two are alike, but all agree. There is no collision, because, like the four Evangelists, each moves in his own appointed orbit, and all revolve round the one common centre. The orbit is distinct, but the centre is one. Paul gives us the great truth of man's relation with God, on the ground of accomplished redemption, together with the counsels of God as to Israel and the Church. Peter gives us the Christian pilgrimage and God's government of the world. James insists upon practical righteousness. John opens up the grand theme of eternal life; first with the Father, then manifested in the Son, communicated unto us, and finally displayed in the glorious future.

Now, it would be the very height of folly on our part to institute any invidious comparison between those varied lines of truth, or the beloved and honored instruments by whom those lines are presented to us. How silly it would be to set up

* A pamphlet "The Ministries of Peter, of Paul and of John" sets forth beautifully the special lines of these various ministries. (Price, 15cts.)

Matthew against Mark, Mark against Luke, Luke against John, or John against all the rest! How puerile it would be for any one to say, "I go in for Paul's line of things, only. James seems below the mark. Peter and John I do not appreciate. Paul is the man for me. His ministry suits me."

All this we should, at once, denounce as sinful folly, not to be tolerated for a moment. The varied lines of truth all converge upon one glorious and blessed centre. The varied instruments are all employed by one and the self-same inspiring Spirit, for the one grand object of presenting the varied moral glories of Christ. We want them all. We could no more afford to do without Matthew or Mark than we could do without Luke or John; and it is no part of our business to undervalue Peter or James, because they do not give such a lofty or comprehensive range of truth as Paul or John. Each is needful in his place. Each has his work to do, his appointed line of things to attend to, and we should be doing serious damage to our own souls, as well as marring the integrity of divine revelation, if we were to confine ourselves to any one particular line of truth, or attach ourselves exclusively to any one particular instrument or vessel.

The early Corinthians fell into this grave error, and thus called forth a sharp rebuke from the blessed apostle Paul. Some were of Paul; some of Apollos; some of Cephas; some of Christ. All

were wrong; and those who said they were of Christ were quite as wrong as any of the others. They were carnal, and walked as men. It was a grievous folly to be puffed up for one against another, inasmuch as they were all Christ's servants, and all belonged to the whole Church.

Nor is it otherwise now in the Church of God. There are varied kinds of workmen, and varied lines of truth; and it is our happy privilege, not to say our holy duty, to recognize and rejoice in them all. To be puffed up for one against another, is to be "carnal and walk as men." To depreciate any of Christ's servants is to depreciate the truth which he carries, and to forsake our own mercies. "All things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's."

This is the true and the divine way to look at the matter; and this, too, is the way to avoid sects, parties, cliques and coteries in the Church of God. There is one body, one Head, one Spirit, one divine and perfect revelation—the Holy Scriptures. There are many members, many gifts, many lines of truth, many distinct characters of ministry. We need them all, and therefore God has given them all.

But, most surely, God has not given the various gifts and ministries for us to set one against another, but that we may humbly and thankfully avail ourselves of all, and profit by them according

to His gracious purpose in giving them. If all were Pauls, where were the Peters? If all were Peters, where were the Johns?

Nor this only; but what must be the effect of going in for any one particular line of truth, or character of ministry? What but to produce an imperfect christian character? We are all sadly prone to onesidedness, and nothing more ministers to this evil than an inordinate attachment to some one particular branch of truth, to the exclusion of other branches equally important. It is by "*the truth*" we are sanctified—by all, not by *some* truth. We should delight in every department of truth, and give a cordial welcome to each vessel or instrument which our God may be pleased to use in ministering His truth to our souls. To be puffed up for one against another is to be more occupied with the vessel than with the truth which the vessel contains, more occupied with man than with God—a grievous mistake! "Who then is Paul, or who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as *the Lord gave to every man.*"

Here lies the grand principle. God has various instruments for His work, and we should value them all as *His* instruments, and nothing more. It has ever been Satan's object to lead the Lord's people to set up heads of schools, leaders of parties, centres of cliques, thus splitting up the Church of God into sects, and destroying its visible unity. Let us not be ignorant of his devices; but in every possible way "*endeavor* to

keep the unity of the Spirit in the uniting bond of peace."

How is this great object to be attained? By keeping near the Centre—by abiding in Christ—by habitual occupation with Himself—by drinking deeply into His spirit, and walking in His footsteps—by lying at His feet, in true brokenness of spirit and humility of mind—by thorough consecration to His service, the furtherance of His cause, the promotion of His glory, the prosperity and blessing of every beloved member of His body.

Thus shall we be delivered from strife and contention, from the discussion of profitless questions and baseless theories, from partiality, prejudice, and predilection. We shall be able to see and appreciate all the varied lines of truth converging upon the one divine Centre, the varied rays of light emanating from the one eternal Source. We shall rejoice in the great fact that, in all the ways and works of God, in every department of nature and grace, in things on earth and things in heaven, in time and eternity, it is not a dull uniformity but a delightful variety. In a word, God's universal and eternal principle is "DIVERSITY AND UNITY."

LIVING BY FAITH

“**T**HE *just shall live by his faith.*” This weighty statement occurs in the second chapter of the prophet Habakkuk; and it is quoted by an inspired apostle in three of his epistles, namely, Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews, with a distinct application in each. In Rom. i. 17 it is applied to the great question of righteousness. The blessed apostle declares himself not ashamed of the gospel; “for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed, on the principle of faith, to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.”*

Then, in the third of Galatians, where the apostle is seeking to recall those erring assemblies to the foundations of Christianity, he says, “But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith.”

Finally, in the tenth of Hebrews, where the ob-

* The phrase “from faith to faith” is quite unintelligible. We have given in the text the literal rendering of the Greek words *ἐκ πίστεως εἰς πίστιν*. They set forth the ground, or principle, on which righteousness is to be obtained. It is not on the ground of works, but of faith; and it is revealed to faith. Our apostle repeatedly contrasts *ἐκ πίστεως* with *ἐξ ἔργων*—the principle of faith, with the principle of works. Blessed contrast!

ject is to exhort believers to hold fast their confidence, we read, "Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward. For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. For yet a little while, and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith." Here we have faith presented not only as the ground of righteousness, but as the vital principle by which we are to live, day by day, from the starting-post to the goal of the Christian course. There is no other way of righteousness, no other way of living, but by faith. It is by faith we are justified, and by faith we live. By faith we stand, and by faith we walk.

Now this is true of all Christians, and all should seek to enter into it fully. Every child of God is called to live by faith. It is a very grave mistake indeed to single out certain individuals who happen to have no visible source of temporal supplies, and speak of them as though they alone lived by faith. According to this view of the question, ninety-nine out of every hundred Christians would be deprived of the precious privilege of living by faith. If a man has a settled income; if he has a certain salary; if he has what is termed a secular calling, by which he earns bread for himself and his family, is he not privileged to live by faith? Do none live by faith save those who have no visible means of support? Is the life of faith to be confined to the matter of trusting God for food and raiment?

What a lowering of the life of faith it is to confine it to the question of temporal supplies! No doubt it is a very blessed and a very real thing to trust God for everything; but the life of faith has a far higher and wider range than mere bodily wants. It embraces all that in any wise concerns us, in body, soul, and spirit. To live by faith is to walk with God; to cling to Him; to lean on Him; to draw from His exhaustless springs; to find *all* our resources in Him; and to have Him as a perfect covering for our eyes and a satisfying object for our hearts—to know Him as our *only* resource in all difficulties, and in all our trials. It is to be absolutely, completely and continually shut up to Him; to be undividedly dependent upon Him, apart from and above every creature confidence, every human hope, and every earthly expectation.

Such is the life of faith. Let us see that we understand it. It must be a reality, or nothing at all. It will not do to talk about the life of faith; we must *live* it; and in order to live it, we must know God practically—know Him intimately, in the deep secret of our own souls. It is utterly vain and delusive to profess to be living by faith and looking to the Lord, while in reality our hearts are looking to some creature resource. How often do people speak and write about their dependence upon God to meet certain wants, and by the very fact of their making it known to a fellow-mortal they are, in principle, departing from the life of faith! If I write to a friend, or publish to the church, the fact

that I am looking to the Lord to meet a certain need, I am virtually off the ground of faith in that matter. The language of faith is this: "My soul, wait thou *only* upon God; for my expectation is from Him." To make known my wants, directly or indirectly, to a human being, is departure from the life of faith, and a positive dishonor to God. It is actually betraying Him. It is tantamount to saying that God has failed me, and I must look to my fellow for help. It is forsaking the living fountain and turning to a broken cistern. It is placing the creature between my soul and God, thus robbing my soul of rich blessing, and God of the glory due to Him.

This is serious work, and it demands our most solemn attention. God deals in realities. He can never fail a trusting heart. But then, He must be trusted. It is of no possible use to talk about trusting Him when our hearts are really looking to creature-streams. "What doth it profit, my brethren though a man *say* he hath faith?" Empty profession is but a delusion to the soul and a dishonor to God. The true life of faith is a grand reality. God delights in it, and He is glorified by it. There is nothing in all this world that so gratifies and glorifies God as the life of faith. "Oh how great is Thy goodness, which Thou hast laid up for them that fear Thee; which Thou hast wrought for them that trust in Thee before the sons of men!" (Psa. xxxi. 19).

Beloved reader, how is it with you in reference to

this great question? Are you living by faith? Can you say, "The life that I live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me?" Do you know what it is to have the living God filling the whole range of your soul's vision? Is He enough for you? Can you trust Him for everything—for body, soul, and spirit—for time and eternity? Or are you in the habit of making known your wants to man in any one way? Is it the habit of your heart to turn to the creature for sympathy, succor, or counsel?

These are searching questions; but we entreat you not to turn away from them. Be assured it is morally healthful for our souls to be tested faithfully, as in the very presence of God. Our hearts are so terribly treacherous, that when we imagine we are leaning upon God, we are really leaning upon some human prop. Thus God is shut out, and we are left in barrenness and desolation.

And yet it is not that God does not use the creature to help and bless us. He does so constantly; and the man of faith will be deeply conscious of this fact, and truly grateful to every human agent that God uses to help him. God comforted Paul by the coming of Titus; but had Paul been looking to Titus, he would have had but little comfort. God used the poor widow to feed Elijah; but Elijah's dependence was not upon the widow, but upon God. Thus it is in every case.

WHAT raised the wondrous thought?
Or who did it suggest?
"That we, the Church, to glory brought,
Should WITH the Son be blest."

O God, the thought was Thine!
(Thine only it could be,)
Fruit of the wisdom, love divine.
Peculiar unto Thee.

For, sure, no other mind,
For thoughts so bold, so free,
Greatness or strength, could ever find;
Thine only it could be.

The motives, too, Thine own,
The plan, the counsel, Thine!—
Made for Thy Son, bone of His bone,
In glory bright to shine.

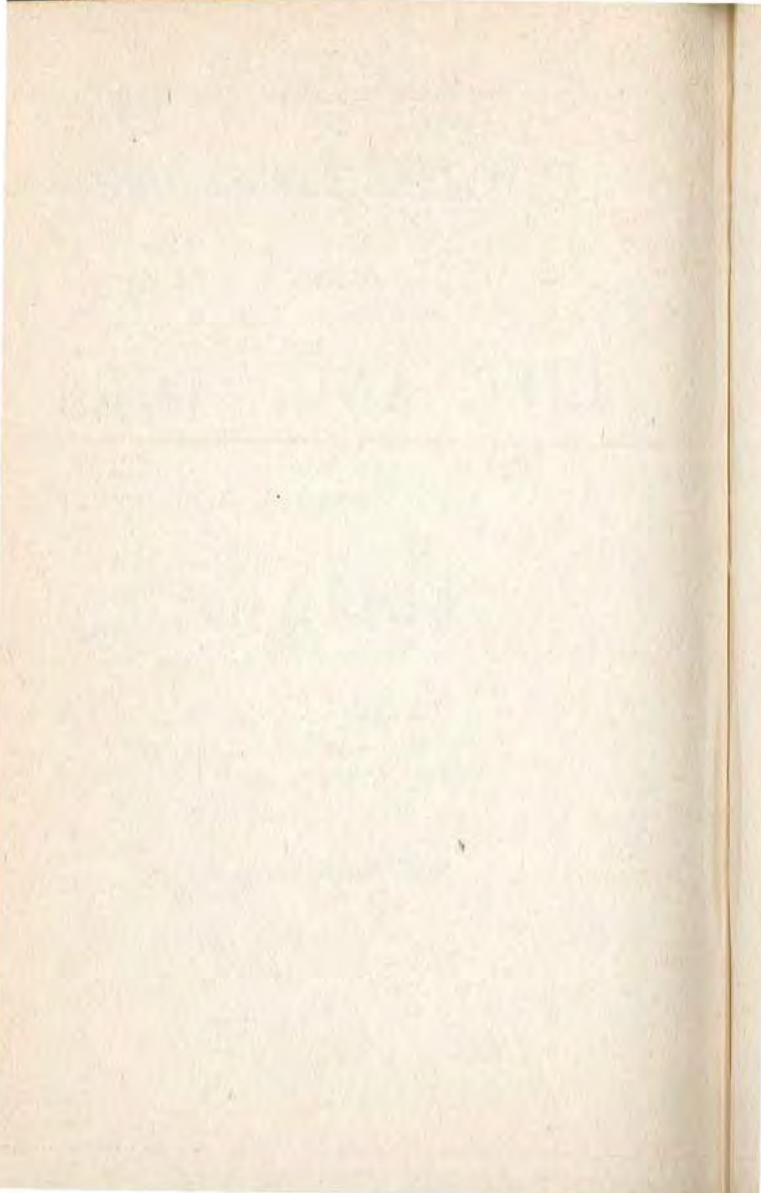
O God, with great delight
Thy wondrous thought we see,
Upon *His* throne, in glory bright,
The bride of Christ shall be.

Sealed with the Holy Ghost,
We triumph in that love,
Thy wondrous thought has made our boast,
"Glory WITH Christ above."

PRACTICAL REFLECTIONS
ON THE
LIFE AND TIMES
OF
ELIJAH.

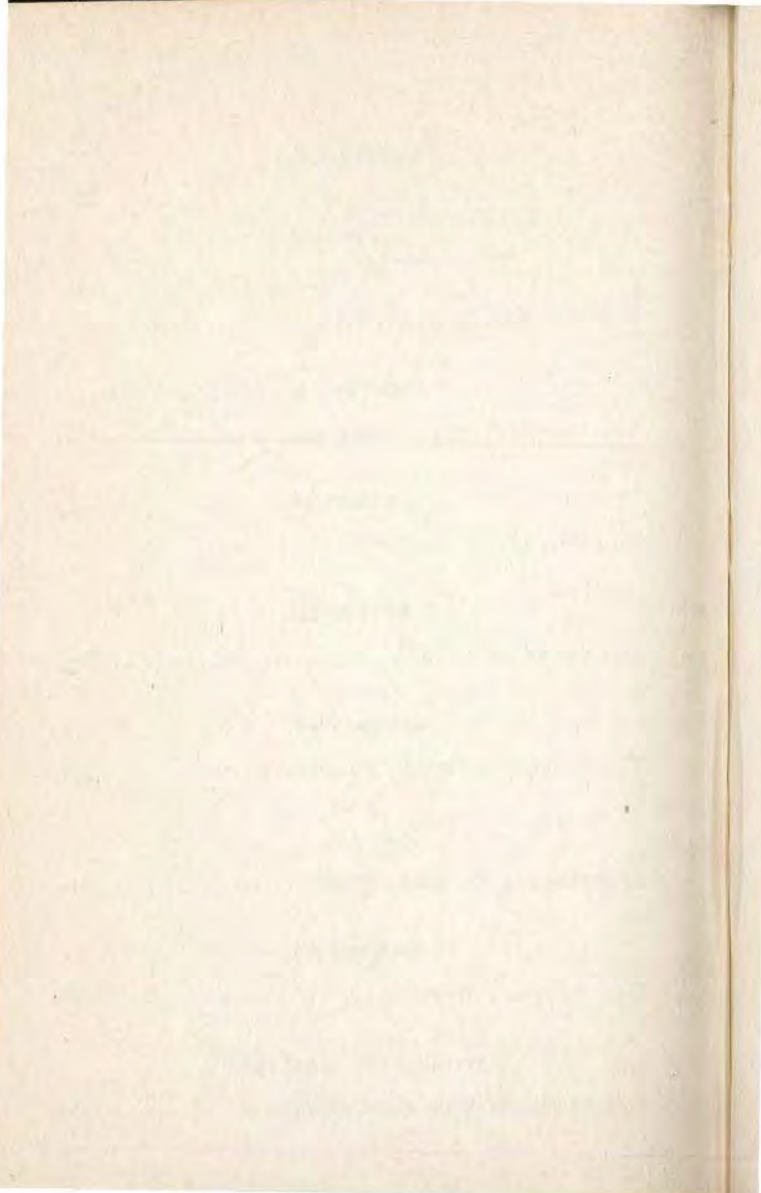
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NEW, REVISED EDITION.



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PRACTICAL REFLECTIONS

ON THE

LIFE AND TIMES OF ELIJAH THE TISHBITE.

INTRODUCTION.

THE exercise of prophetic ministry in Israel, of old, was always a proof of the nation's decline. So long as the great national institutions were maintained in their vigor, and the machinery of the Mosaic economy carried out according to its original design, there was no need of anything extraneous, and therefore the voice of a prophet was not heard; but when failure had set in—when those laws and institutions which had been enacted, and set on foot by God Himself, ceased to be carried out in their pristine spirit and power, then there was a demand for something additional, and that something was supplied by the energy of the Spirit in the prophets.

There were no materials in the whole range of Levitical rites and ceremonies for the formation or maintenance of such a ministry as that of Elijah the Tishbite; there was too much of the carnal element in them for that. The message of a prophet could only be delivered in the power of the Holy

Ghost, and therefore, so long as the Levitical institutions fulfilled their end, the Spirit had no need to put forth any fresh energy. There was no need of such a minister as Elijah in the days of Solomon's glory and greatness; all was in order then—the whole machinery was in a sound condition—every wheel and every screw worked effectually in its own place—the king on the throne wielded the sceptre for the maintenance of Israel's civil interest—the priest in the temple discharged in due order his religious functions—the Levites and the singers were all at their respective posts: in a word, all moved on in such a measure of order as to render the voice of a prophet unnecessary.

However, the scene soon changed; the mighty tide of evil soon set in, and swept away the very foundations of Israel's civil and religious system: ungodly men, in process of time, ascended the throne of David, and sacrificed the interests of the people of God at the shrine of their own vile lusts; and to such a height did wickedness rise, that at last the wicked Ahab, with his consort Jezebel, occupied that throne from which Solomon had administered the judgment of God. Jehovah could no longer forbear; He could not allow the tide of evil to rise any higher, and He therefore sent forth from His quiver a polished shaft to pierce the conscience of Israel, if haply He might bring them back to their place of happy allegiance to Himself. This shaft was none other than Elijah the Tishbite—the bold and uncompromising witness for God who

stood in the breach at a moment when every one seemed to have fled from the field of conflict, unable to stem the overwhelming torrent.

But, before we proceed to the consideration of the life and ministry of this remarkable man, it may be well just to make one observation upon the twofold character of prophetic ministry. We shall find, in considering the ministry of the prophets, that, not only had each prophet a distinct ministry committed to him, but that, also, in one and the same prophet, there was a double purpose carried out: the Lord dealt with the conscience about present evil, while He pointed the eye of the faithful one to the future glory. The prophet, by the Holy Ghost, brought the light and truth of God to bear upon the heart and conscience—he laid open fully and faithfully the hidden chambers of evil within—he spoke plainly of the people's sad declension and departure from God, and removed the foundations of that false religious system which they were erecting around them.

But the prophet did not stop here; it would have been sad indeed had he been confined to the humiliating story of Israel's failure, and the departure of their ancient glory; he was able, through grace, to add to the solemn announcement, "O Israel, *thou* hast destroyed thyself," the consolatory assurance, "but **IN ME** is thy help;" and herein we have developed to us the two elements which composed the ministry of the prophets, namely, Israel's total failure, and God's triumphant grace—the departure of

the glory as connected with, and based upon, the obedience of Israel, and its final return and establishment as connected with, and based upon, the obedience and death of the Son of God.

Truly, we may say, this was ministry of a very elevated and holy character ; it was a glorious commission to be told to stand amid the fragments of a crushed and ruined system, and there to point to the time—the happy time—when God would display Himself in the immortal results of His own redeeming grace, to the joy of His ransomed ones in heaven and on earth.

SECTION I.

THE PROPHET'S FIRST MESSAGE.

THE reign of Ahab, the son of Omri, was a dark and dreary time for the house of Israel; iniquity had risen to a fearful height; the sins of Jeroboam were little when compared with the black catalogue of Ahab's transgressions; the wicked Jezebel, the daughter of the uncircumcised king of the Zidonians, was chosen to be the partner of his heart and his throne, and this circumstance alone was enough to secure the oppression of Israel, and the entire subversion of their ancient worship. In a word, the Spirit sums up the whole matter with these words, "Ahab did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him" (1 Kings xvi. 33). This was saying enough for him. The whole line of kings from Jeroboam down, had done evil in the sight of the Lord; but to do more than all of them, marked a character of no ordinary degree of guilt. Yet such was Ahab—such was the man that occupied the throne of God's ancient people, when Elijah the Tishbite entered upon his course of prophetic testimony.

There is something particularly sorrowful to the spirit in contemplating a scene like that which the

reign of Ahab presents. Every light had been extinguished, every voice of testimony hushed; the firmament in which many a brilliant luminary had shone from time to time, had become overcast with dark clouds; death seemed to spread itself over the whole scene, and the devil to carry every thing with a high hand, when, at length, God in His mercy to His poor oppressed and misguided people, raised up a bright and powerful witness for Himself in the person of our prophet. But then it is just at such a time that a real witness for God is likely to produce the most powerful effect, and exert the most extensive influence. It is after a long drought that a shower is likely to be felt in all its refreshing virtue. The state of things at this time in Israel called for some mighty man of valor to come forth and act in divine energy against the tide of evil.

However, it is instructive to observe that Elijah is presented to us, in common with all his fellow-servants, in circumstances of secret training and exercise ere he appears in public. This is a feature in the history of all the servants of God, not excepting Him who was emphatically *the Servant*; all have been trained in secret with God previous to their acting in public with man; and, moreover, those who have entered most deeply into the meaning and value of the secret training will be found the most effective and permanent in their public service and testimony. That man has much cause to tremble for his destiny who has arrived at a po-

sition in public which exceeds the measure of his secret exercise of soul before God ; he will assuredly come short. If the superstructure exceed the measure of the foundation below, the building will totter or fall. If a tree shoot forth its branches into the air to a degree exceeding the depth of its roots, it will be unequal to the violence of the storm, and will come to the ground : so is it with the man who enters a place of public service ; he must be *alone with God* ; his spirit must be exercised in private ; he must pass through the deep waters in his own experience, otherwise he will be but a theorist, and not a witness ; his ear must be opened to hear, ere his tongue can be fitted to speak as the learned. What has become of all those apparently brilliant lights which have suddenly flashed across the path of the Church of God from time to time, and as suddenly disappeared behind the cloud ? Whence came they, and whither have they gone, and why have they been so evanescent ? They were but sparks of human kindling ; there was no depth, no power of endurance, no reality in them ; hence they shone for a time, and speedily vanished away, producing no result save to increase the darkness around, or at least the sad consciousness thereof. Every true minister of God should be able, in measure, to say with the apostle, "Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort, who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by

the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God" (2 Cor. i. 3, 4).

1 Kings xvii. gives us Elijah's first appearance in public; but the Spirit, in James, has graciously furnished us with the account of a yet earlier stage in his history, and one full of instruction to us, be our sphere of service what it may. The sacred historian introduces our prophet in a way which might seem abrupt. He presents him to us as at once boldly entering upon his sphere of labor, with this grand and solemn announcement, "Thus saith the Lord." But he does not tell us, in this place, anything of the prophet's previous exercise; he speaks not of how it was he came to learn how the Lord would have him to speak: of all this, though most important for us to know, the Spirit in the historian says nothing; He simply introduces him to our notice in the holy exercise of a power which he had obtained in secret with God: He shows us Elijah acting in public, and nothing more. But the apostle lets us into the secret of Elijah's prayer *to God*, before ever he came out in active service before *man*. "Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain; and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months" (James v. 17).

Now, if the Holy Ghost had not informed us about this important fact, by the pen of James, we should have lacked a very powerful incentive to prayer; but Scripture is perfect—divinely perfect, lacking nothing that it ought to have, and having

nothing that it ought to lack; hence it is that James tells us of Elijah's secret moments of prayer and wrestling, and shows him to us in the retirement of the mountains of Gilead, where he had, no doubt, mourned over the lamentable state of things in Israel, and also fortified his spirit for the part he was about to act.

This circumstance in the life of our prophet teaches us a truly profitable lesson. We live in a time of more than usual barrenness and spiritual dearth. The state of the Church may well remind us of Ezekiel's valley of dry bones. We have not merely to cope with evils which have characterized by-gone ages, but also with the matured corruption of a time wherein the varied evils of the Gentile world have become connected with, and covered by, the cloak of the Christian profession. And when we turn to the state of those whose knowledge of truth and high profession might naturally encourage the expectation of more healthy and vigorous Christian action, we find alas! in many that the knowledge is but cold and uninfluential theory, and the profession but superficial, having no power over the feelings and affections of the inward man. Amongst persons of this class it will also be found that the truth of God possesses little or no interest, or attractive power; they know so much in the intellect that nothing can be presented to them with which they are not already acquainted: hence the lifelessness with which they harken to every statement of truth.

In such a condition of things, what is the resource of the faithful one? To what should he betake himself? Prayer; patient, persevering prayer; secret communion with God; deep and real exercise of soul in His presence, where alone we can arrive at a true estimate of ourselves, and things around us: and not only so, but also obtain spiritual power to act for God amongst our brethren, or toward the world without. "Elias was a man of like passions with us;" and he found himself in the midst of dark apostasy, and wide-spread alienation of heart from God. He beheld the faithful failing from amongst the children of men; he saw the tide of evil rising around him, and the light of truth fast fading away: the altar of Baal had displaced the altar of Jehovah, and the cries of the priests of Baal had drowned the sacred songs of the Levites; in a word, the whole thing was one vast mass of ruin before his view. He felt it; he wept over it; he did more—"he *prayed earnestly.*"

Here was the resource—the sure unfailing resource of the grieved prophet; he retreated into the presence of God; he poured out his spirit there, and wept over the ruin and sorrow of his beloved people; he was really engaged about the sad condition of things around him, and therefore prayed about it—prayed as he ought, not coldly, formally, or occasionally, but "earnestly," and perseveringly.

This is a blessed example for us. Never was there a time when fervent prayer was so much needed in the Church of God as at this moment.

The devil seems to be exerting all his malignant power to crush the spirits and hinder the activities of the people of God; with some, he makes use of their public engagements; with others, their domestic trials; and with others, personal sorrow and conflict; in a word, "There are many adversaries," and nothing but the mighty power of God can enable us to cope with them and come off victorious.

But Elijah was not merely called to pass unscathed, as an individual, through the evil; he was called to exert an influence upon others: he was called to act for God in a degenerate age; he had to make an effort to bring his nation back to the God of their fathers; how much more, therefore, did he need to seek the Lord in private; to gather up spiritual strength in the presence of God, whereby alone he could not only escape himself, but be made an instrument of blessing to others also. Elijah felt all this, and therefore "he prayed earnestly that it might not rain."

Thus it was he brought God into the scene, nor did he fail of his object. "It rained not." God will never refuse to act when faith addresses Him on the ground of His own glory, and we know it was simply upon this ground that the prophet addressed Him. It could afford him no pleasure to see the land turned into a parched and sterile wilderness, or his brethren wasted by famine and all its attendant horrors. No; it was simply to turn the hearts of the children to the fathers—to bring the nation back to its early faith—to eradicate those

principles of error which had taken fast hold of the minds of the people: for such ends as these did our prophet pray earnestly that it might not rain, and God harkened and heard, because the prayer was the offspring of His Spirit in the soul of His dear servant.

Truly we may say, *it is good to wait upon God*: it not only leads to happy results as seen in God's answer to it, but there is also much sweetness and comfort in the exercise itself. How truly happy it is for the tried and tempted believer to find himself alone with God! how blessed to allow his spirit to flow out, and his affections to ascend to Him who alone is able to lift him above the depressing power of present things into the calmness and light of His own most blessed presence! May we all be found, then, waiting more upon God—making the very difficulties of our day an occasion for drawing near to the mercy-seat, and then we shall not only exert a salutary influence in our respective spheres, but our own heart will be comforted and encouraged by private waiting upon our Father, for the promise has never yet failed, "They that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength!" Precious promise! May we make full proof of it!

Thus, Elijah the Tishbite entered upon his path of service; he came forth armed from the sanctuary of God with divine power to deal with, and act upon, his fellow-men. There is much power in the words, "as the Lord God of Israel liveth *before whom I stand*;" they bring before us in a very special way

the basis on which the soul of this eminent servant of God was resting, as also the principle which sustained him in his course of service. He stood before "THE LORD GOD OF ISRAEL," and so standing, he could speak with a measure of power and authority.

But how very little did Ahab know of the secret exercises of Elijah's soul, ere he had thus come forth to speak to his conscience! He knew not that Elijah had been on his knees in secret before he presented himself in public. He knew nothing of all this, but Elijah did, and hence he could boldly confront the very head of the evil; he could speak to king Ahab himself, and announce to him the judgments of an offended God. In this, our prophet may be viewed as a fine model for all who are called upon to speak in the name of the Lord. All who are so called should feel themselves, in virtue of their divine commission, entirely lifted above the influence of human opinion. How often does it happen that men who can speak with a measure of power and liberty in the presence of some, are before others cramped, and, it may be, altogether hindered! This we know would not be the case did they but realize with distinctness, not only that they had received their commission from on high, but also that they executed it in the presence of *the living God*. The messenger of the Lord should never be affected by those to whom he delivers his message; he should be above them, while at the same time he takes the humble place of a servant.

His language should be, "But with me it is a very small matter that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment." (*ἀνθρωπίνης ἡμέρας*.)

This was pre-eminently the case with our blessed Master. How little was He affected by the thoughts or judgments of those to whom He spoke! They might thwart, oppose, and reject, but that never led Him for a moment to lose sight of the fact that He was sent of God. He carried with Him, throughout His entire course, the holy, soul-sustaining assurance expressed in the synagogue of Nazareth, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He hath anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor," etc. (Luke iv. 18). Here was the basis of His ministry as Son of man. It was "in the power of the Spirit," and hence He ever felt Himself to be the minister of God, and as such raised quite above the influence of those with whom He had to do. "My doctrine is not Mine," said He, "but His that sent Me." He could truly say, "The Lord God of Israel, *before whom I stand*:" He was ever "the Lord's messenger," speaking "in the Lord's message unto the people" (Hag. i. 13).

And should not all who fill the place of servants or messengers of the Lord, seek to know more of this holy elevation of mind above men and circumstances? Should they not aim at being less under the power of human thoughts and feelings? What have we to do with the thoughts of men about us? Nothing. Whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear; whether they will accept, or whether

they will reject; whether we shall be highly esteemed for our work's sake, or made of no reputation—still let it be our aim, our constant aim, to “approve ourselves as the ministers of God.”

But observe further, the power and authority with which our prophet speaks, “There shall not be dew nor rain these years but according to my word.” He felt such perfect assurance in the fact that he was standing in the Lord's presence, and speaking the Lord's words, yea, that he was thoroughly identified with Him, that he could say, “according to my word.”

Such was the privilege of the Lord's messenger, when delivering the Lord's message. Such are the wondrous results of secret prayer. “Elias was a man of like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain; and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months.” May it prove a powerful incentive to all those who desire to act for God in this day of weakness! We want to be more in the presence of God, in the real sense of our need; if we felt our need more, we should have more of *the spirit of prayer*. And it is the spirit of prayer we want—that spirit which puts God in His own proper place of *giver*, and us into our proper place of *receivers*. But how often are we deceived by the mere form of prayer—with the formal utterance of words which have no reality in them! There are many who make a kind of god of prayer—many who let their

very prayers get between their souls and the God of prayer. This is a great snare. We should always take care that our prayers are the natural outflow of the Spirit within us, and not of the mere superstitious performance of what we think ought to be done.*

* I would offer a few words here on the subject of united prayer among Christians, an exercise which seems so sadly neglected by us at a time when it is so specially needed. It will be generally found that collective life and energy, service and testimony, will be in proportion to the measure of collective waiting upon God. Where there are not public prayer-meetings, there is sure to be a lack of service and testimony; the interests of the Church of God are not realized, and, as a consequence, the things of earth occupy a place of undue prominence in the minds of Christians. If we *felt* our collective weakness, there would be a collective utterance of that weakness, and, moreover, a renewal of our collective strength. Now I think it will be found that all important movements among the people of God have been the result of united heartfelt prayer. And surely we may say it is natural that it should be so. We are not to expect that God will pour forth His reviving grace on those who rest satisfied with their deadness and coldness. The word is, "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it." If we will not open our mouths, how can they be filled? If we are satisfied with what we have, how can we expect to get more? Let it be, therefore, the aim of the Christian reader to stir up his fellow-Christians around him to seek the Lord in united prayer, and, he may be assured of it, the happy results will speedily be seen.

SECTION II.

THE PROPHET IN RETIREMENT.

HARDLY had our prophet delivered his testimony when he was again called away from public observation into retirement and solitude. "And the word of the Lord came unto him, saying, Get thee hence, and turn thee eastward, and *hide thyself* by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan."

These words are full of deep instruction. Elijah had taken a very prominent place in the presence of Israel, and though his having done so was the result of previous retirement and exercise of soul in the presence of God, yet did the faithful One for whom he was acting see it needful to have him away again into privacy, that so he might not only occupy a high place in the presence of his brethren, but also a low place in the presence of God. All this is full of teaching for us. We must be kept low. Flesh must be crushed. Our time of *training in secret*, must far exceed our time of *acting in public*. Elijah stood, as it were, for a brief moment, in public testimony, and that too, after having been alone with God, and he must at once be led away into seclusion for three years and a half.

Oh! how little can man be trusted; how badly can we bear to be set in a place of honor! How soon we forget ourselves and God! We shall see

presently, how much our honored prophet needed to be thus kept in retirement. The Lord knew his temperament and tendencies, and dealt with him accordingly. It is truly humiliating to think how little we can be trusted in the way of public testimony for Christ; we are so full of self; we vainly imagine that *we* are something, and that God will do much by *us*: hence it is that we need, like our prophet, to be told to "hide ourselves," to get away from public view, that we may learn, in the holy calmness of our Father's presence, our own proper nothingness. And the spiritual mind can at once see the importance of all this. It would never do to be always before the eye of man; no creature could stand it: the Son of God Himself constantly sought the solitary place, apart from the din and bustle of the city, where He might enjoy a quiet retreat for prayer, and of secret communion with God. "Jesus went unto the Mount of Olives." "Rising up a great while before day, He departed into a solitary place and there prayed."

But it was not because He needed to hide Himself, for His entire path on earth was, blessed be His name, a hiding of self. The spirit of His ministry is brought out in these words, "My doctrine is not Mine, but His that sent Me." Would that all the Lord's servants knew more of this! We all want to hide self more,—much more than we do. The devil acts so on our poor silly hearts; our thoughts so revolve round ourselves; yea, we so often make our very service, and the truth of God,

a pedestal on which to show forth our own glory. No marvel, therefore, that we are not much used: how could the Lord make use of agents who will not give Him the glory? How can the Lord use Israel, when Israel is ever prone to vaunt himself? Let us then pray to be made more truly humble, more self-abased, more willing to be looked upon as "a dead dog, or a flea," or "the off-scouring of all things," or nothing at all, for the name of our gracious Master.

In His lonely retreat by the brook Cherith, Elijah was called to sojourn many days; not, however, without a precious promise from the Lord God of Israel in reference to his needed provision, for he went accompanied by the gracious assurance, "*I have commanded* the ravens to feed thee there." The Lord would take care of His dear servant while hidden from public view, and minister to his necessities, even though it should be by the instrumentality of ravens. What a strange provision! What a continual exercise of faith was there involved in being called to look out for the daily visits of birds that would naturally desire to devour the prophet's meal! But was it upon the ravens that Elijah lived? Surely not. His soul reposed in the precious words, "*I have commanded.*" It was God, and not the ravens, for him. He had the God of Israel with him in his hiding place—he lived by faith. And how truly blessed for the spirit thus to cling, in unaffected simplicity, to the promise of God! How happy to be lifted above the power of circumstances,

in the apprehension of God's presence and care! Elijah was hiding himself from man, while God was showing Himself to Elijah. This will ever be so. Let us only set self aside, and we may be assured that God will reveal Himself in power to our souls. If Elijah had persisted in occupying a prominent and a public place, he would have been left unprovided for. *He must be hidden*; for the streams of divine provision and refreshment only flowed for him in the place of retirement and self-abasement. "I have commanded the ravens to feed thee *there*." If the prophet were anywhere else but "*there*" he would have gotten nothing at all from God.

What teaching for us in all this! Why are our souls so lean and barren? Why do we so little drink of the streams of divinely provided refreshment? Because we are not hiding self sufficiently. We cannot expect that God will strengthen and refresh us for the purpose of earthly display. He will strengthen us for Himself. If we could but realize more that we are "not our own," we should enjoy more spiritual power.

But there is also much meaning in the little word "*there*." Elijah should be "*there*" and nowhere else, in order to enjoy God's supplies; and just so is it with the believer now; he must know where God would have him to be, and there abide. We have no right to choose our place, for the Lord "orders the bounds of our habitation," and happy for us is it to know this, and submit to His wise and gracious ordering. It was at the brook Cherith,

and there alone, that the ravens were commanded to convey bread and flesh to the prophet; he might wish to sojourn elsewhere, but, if he had done so he should have provided for himself: how much happier to allow God to provide for him! So Elijah felt, and therefore he went to Cherith, for the Lord had "commanded the ravens to feed him *there*." The divinely appointed provision is alone to be had in the divinely appointed place.

Thus was Elijah conveyed from solitude to solitude. He had come from the mountains of Gilead, with a message from the Lord God of Israel to Israel's king, and having delivered that message, he was again conducted, by the hand of God, into unbroken solitude, there to have his spirit exercised, and his strength renewed in the presence of God. And who would be without those sweet and holy lessons learnt in secret? Who would lack the training of a Father's hand? Who would not long to be led away from beneath the eye of man, and above the influence of things earthly and natural, into the pure light of the divine presence, where self and all around are viewed and estimated according to the judgment of the sanctuary? In a word, who would not desire to be alone with God?—alone, not as a merely sentimental expression, but really, practically, and experimentally alone; alone, like Moses at the mount of God; alone, like Aaron in the holiest of all; alone, like our prophet at the brook Cherith; alone, like John in the island of Patmos; and above all, alone, like Jesus on the mount

And here, let us inquire what it is to be alone with God. It is to have self and the world set aside; to have the spirit impressed with thoughts of God and His perfections and excellencies; to allow all His goodness to pass before us; to see Him as the great Actor *for* us, and *in* us; to get above flesh and its reasonings, earth and its ways, Satan and his accusations; and, above all, to feel that we have been introduced into this holy solitude, simply and exclusively through the precious blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.

These are some of the results of our being alone with God. But, in truth, it is a term which one can hardly explain to another, for each spiritually-minded saint will have his own feelings on the subject, and will best understand what it means in his own case. This, at least, we may well crave, to be truly found in the secret of our Father's presence; to be done with the weariness and wretchedness of endeavoring to maintain *our character*, and to know the joy, the liberty, the peace, and unaffected simplicity of the sanctuary, where God in all His varied attributes and perfections rises before our souls and fills us with bliss ineffable.

"To find my place within the veil,
To know that God is mine,
Are springs of joy that will not fail,
Unspeakable, divine."

But, though Elijah was thus happily alone by the brook Cherith, he was not exempt from the deep exercise of soul consequent upon a life of faith.

The ravens, it is true, in obedience to the divine command, paid him their daily visits, and Cherith flowed on in its tranquil and uninterrupted course, so that the prophet's bread was given him, and his water was sure, and thus, as far as he was personally concerned, he might forget that the rod of judgment was stretched out over the land. But faith must be put to the test. The man of faith cannot be allowed to settle on his lees; he must be emptied from vessel to vessel; the child of God must pass from form to form in the school of Christ, and having mastered, through grace, the difficulties of one, he must be called to grapple with those of another. It was, therefore, needful that the soul of the prophet should be tried in order that it might be seen whether he was depending upon Cherith, or upon the Lord God of Israel; hence, "it came to pass, after awhile, that *the brook dried up.*"

We are ever in danger, through the infirmity of our flesh, of having our faith propped up by circumstances, and when these are favorable, we think our faith is strong, and *vice versa*. But faith never looks at circumstances; it looks straight to God; it has to do exclusively with Him and His promises. Thus it was with Elijah; it mattered little to him whether Cherith continued to flow or not; he could say,

"In vain the creature streams are dry,
I have a fountain still."

God was his fountain, his unfailing, exhaustless fountain. The brook might yield to the influence

of the prevailing drought, but no drought could affect God, and the prophet knew this; he knew that the word of the Lord was as certain a portion, and as sure a basis in the drying up of Cherith, as it had been during the time of his sojourn upon its banks; and so it was, for "the word of the Lord came to him, saying, Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which belongeth to Zidon, and dwell there; behold *I have commanded* a widow woman there to sustain thee."

Elijah's faith must still rest upon the same immutable basis. "I have commanded." How truly blessed is this! Circumstances change; human things fail; creature streams are dried up, but God and His word are the same yesterday, to-day, and forever. Nor does the prophet seem to have been the least disturbed by this fresh order from on high. No; for, like Israel of old, he had learned to pitch and strike his tent according to the movement of Jehovah's cloud. The camp, of old, was called to watch attentively the wheels of that heavenly chariot which rolled onward toward the land of rest, and here and there halted in the wilderness to find them out a resting-place; and just so was it with Elijah; he would take up his solitary post by the banks of Cherith, or tread his weary way to Zarephath of Zidon in undeviating obedience to "the word of the Lord." Israel of old were not allowed to have any plans of their own; Jehovah planned and arranged everything for them. He told them when and where they were to move and halt; at various in-

tervals He signified His sovereign pleasure to them, by the movement of the cloud above their heads. "Whether it were two days, or a month, or a year, that the cloud tarried upon the tabernacle, remaining thereon, the children of Israel abode in their tents, and journeyed not; but when it was taken up they journeyed. At the commandment of the Lord they rested in their tents, and at the commandment of the Lord they journeyed" (Num. ix. 22, 23).

Such was the happy condition of the Lord's redeemed, while passing from Egypt to Canaan. They never could have *their own way*, as regards their movements. If an Israelite had refused to move when the cloud moved, or to halt when it halted, *he would have been left to starve in the wilderness*. The rock and the manna followed them while they followed Jehovah; in other words, food and refreshment were alone to be found in the path of simple obedience. Just so was it with Elijah; he was not permitted to have a will of his own; he could not fix the time of his sojourn at Cherith, nor the time for his removal to Zarephath; "the word of the Lord" settled all for him, and when he obeyed it he found sustenance.

What a lesson for the Christian in all this! The path of obedience is alone the path of happiness. If we were more successful in doing violence to self, our spiritual condition would be far more vigorous and healthy than it is. Nothing so ministers to health and vigor of soul as undeviating obedi-

ence; there is strength gained by the very effort to obey. This is true in the case of all, but specially so as regards those who stand in the capacity of ministers of the Lord. Such must walk in obedience if they would be used in ministry. How could Elijah have said, as he afterwards did, upon Mount Carmel, "If the Lord be God, *follow Him*," if his own private path had exhibited a wilful and rebellious spirit? Impossible. The path of a servant must be the path of obedience, otherwise he ceases to be a servant. The word *servant* is as inseparably linked with *obedience*, as is *work* with *workman*. "A servant," as another has observed, "must move when the bell rings." Would that we were all more alive to the sound of our Master's bell, and more ready to run in the direction in which it summons us. "*Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth.*" Here is our proper language. Whether the word of the Lord summons us from our retirement into the midst of our brethren, or from thence into retirement again, may our language ever be, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth." The word of the Lord, and the attentive ear of a servant, are all we need to carry us safely and happily onward.

Now, this path of obedience is by no means an easy one; it involves the constant abandonment of self, and can only be pursued as the eye is steadily kept on God, and the conscience kept under the action of His truth. True, there is a rich reward in every act of obedience, yet flesh and blood must be set aside, and **this is no easy work.** Witness the

path of our prophet. He was first called to take his place by the brook Cherith, to be fed by ravens! How could flesh and blood understand this? Then again, when the brook failed, he is called away to a distant city of Zidon, there to be nourished by a destitute widow who seemed to be at the very point of dying of starvation! Here was the command: "Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which belongeth to Zidon, and dwell there: behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee."

And what confirmation did Elijah derive from appearances, upon his arrival at this place? None whatever; but everything to fill him with doubts and fears had he been looking at circumstances in the matter. "So he arose, and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, behold, the widow woman was there gathering of sticks; and he called to her, and said, Fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel, that I may drink. And as she was going to fetch it, he called to her, and said, Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand. And she said, As the Lord thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but a handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse: and behold, I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die."

This was the scene that presented itself to the eye of the prophet when he had arrived at his divinely appointed destination. Truly a gloomy and depressing one to flesh and blood. But Elijah conferred not with flesh and blood; his spirit was sus-

tained by the immutable word of Jehovah; his confidence was based upon the faithfulness of God, and he needed no aid from things around him. The horizon might look dark and heavy to mortal vision, but the eye of faith could pierce the clouds, and see beyond them all "the firm foundation which is laid for faith in Jehovah's excellent word."

How precious, then, is the word of God! Well might the psalmist say, "Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage forever." Precious heritage! Pure, incorruptible, immortal truth! How should we bless our God for having made it our inalienable portion—a portion which, when all sublunary things shall have vanished from view, when the world shall have passed away and the lust thereof, when all flesh shall have been consumed as withered grass, shall prove to the faithful a real, an eternal, an enduring substance. "Thanks be to God for His unspeakable gift."

But what were the circumstances which met the prophet's eye upon his approach to Zarephath? A widow and her son starving, two sticks, and a handful of meal! And yet the word was, "I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee." How trying, how deeply mysterious, was all this! Elijah, however, staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God. He knew that it was the Most High and Almighty God, the possessor of heaven and earth, that was to meet his necessities; hence, though there had been neither oil nor meal, it would

have made no matter to him, for he looked beyond circumstances to the God of circumstances. He saw not the widow, but God. He looked not at the handful of meal, but at the divine command; therefore his spirit was perfectly calm and unruffled in the midst of circumstances which would have crushed the spirit of one walking by sight, and he was able, without a shadow of doubt, to say, "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth."

Here we have the reply of faith to the language of unbelief. "Thus saith the Lord" settles everything. The moment the spirit apprehends God's promise, there is an end to the reasonings of unbelief. Unbelief puts circumstances between the soul and God; faith puts God between the soul and circumstances. This is a very important difference. May we walk in the power and energy of faith, to the praise of Him whom faith ever honors!

But there is another point in this lovely scene to be particularly noticed: it is the way in which death ever hovers around the spirit of one not walking by faith. "That we may eat it and die" is the language of the widow. Death and unbelief are inseparably linked together. The spirit can only be conducted along the path of life by the energy of faith: hence if faith be not in energy, there is no life, no power, no elevation. Thus was it with this poor widow: her hope of life was based upon the

barrel of meal and the cruse of oil: beyond these she saw no springs of life, no hope of continuance. Her soul knew not as yet the real blessedness of communion with the living God to whom alone belong the issues from death. She was not yet able against hope to believe in hope. Alas, what a poor, frail, tottering thing is that hope which rests only on a cruse of oil and a barrel of meal! How scanty must be those expectations which only rest on the creature!

And are we not all but too prone to lean upon something quite as mean and paltry in God's view as a handful of meal? Truly we are; and it must be so where God is not apprehended by the soul. To faith it is either God or nothing. A handful of meal will afford, in the hand of God and to the view of faith, as efficient materials as the cattle upon a thousand hills. "We have here but five loaves and two small fishes; but *what are these amongst so many?*" This is the language of the human heart; but faith never says what are *these* amongst so many? but what is *God* among so many? Unbelief says *we* are not able; faith says, but *God* is well able.

And would it not be well, ere we turn from this interesting point in our subject, to apply these principles to the poor, conscience-smitten sinner? How often is such an one found clinging to some vain resource for the pardon of his sins, rather than to the accomplished work of Christ upon the cross, which has forever satisfied the claims of divine jus-

tice, and ought therefore, surely, to satisfy the cravings of his guilty conscience. "I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool; but while I am coming, another steppeth down before me." Such is the language of one who had not as yet learned to look beyond all human aid, straight to Jesus. "*I have no man*," says the poor, guilty, unbelieving sinner: but I have *Jesus*, says the believer; and he may add, Thus saith the Lord, The cleansing efficacy of the blood shall not fail, nor its preciousness diminish, until the time that the Lord shall have safely housed His ransomed forever in His own heavenly mansions.

Hence, if these pages should meet the eye of any poor, halting, trembling, fearful sinner; I would invite him to take comfort from the precious truth that God has, in His infinite grace, set the cross of Jesus between him and his sins, if only he will believe the divine testimony. The great difference between a believer and an unbeliever is this: the former has Christ between him and his sins; the latter has his sins between him and Christ. Now, with the former, Christ is the all-engrossing object: he looks not at the enormity of his sin, but at the value of the blood and the preciousness of the person of Christ: he knows that God is not now on the judgment-seat, but on the mercy-seat: if He were on the former, His thoughts would be simply occupied about the question of sin, but being on the latter, His thoughts are, blessed be His name, as purely occupied about the blood. Oh for more

simple and abiding communion with the mind of Heaven, and more complete abstraction from the things and thoughts of earth! The Lord grant more of both to all His saints!

It has been already observed that the man of faith must be emptied from vessel to vessel; each successive scene and stage of the believer's life is but his entrance upon a new form in the school of Christ, where he has to learn some fresh and, of course, more difficult lesson. But, it may be asked, what more trying circumstances had Elijah to grapple with at Zarephath than at Cherith? Was it not better to be cast upon human sympathies than to have ravens as his channel of supply? And further, was it not more pleasing to the spirit to be domesticated with human beings than to dwell in the loneliness and solitude of the brook Cherith? All this might have been so, no doubt; yet solitude has its sweets, and association its trials. There are selfish interests which work amongst men, and hinder that refined and exquisite enjoyment which human society ought to yield, and which it will yield, when humanity stands forth in its divinely-imparted perfections.

Our prophet heard no such words as "*me and my son*" when he took up his abode by the brook. There was there no selfish interest acting as a barrier to his sustenance and enjoyment. No, but the moment he passed from his retirement into human society, then he was called to feel that the human heart does not like to have its own objects in the

least interfered with; he was called to enter into the deep meaning of the words "*me and my son*," which unfold the hidden springs of selfishness, which actuate humanity in its fallen condition.

But it will doubtless be observed that it was natural for the widow's heart to entertain thoughts of herself and her son in preference to any one else, and surely it was *natural*; it is what nature ever does. Harken to the following words of a genuine child of nature: "Shall I then take my bread, and my water, and my flesh that I have killed for my shearers, and give it unto men whom I know not whence they be?" (1 Sam. xxv. 11).

Nature will ever seek its own first; nor does it come within the compass of this perishing world so to fill the human soul as to make it overflow for the benefit of others. It is the province of God alone to do this. It is utterly in vain to try to expand the heart of man by any instrumentality save the abundant grace of God. This it is which will cause him to open wide the door of his affections to every needy applicant. Human benevolence may do much where abundant resources prevent the possibility of personal privation, but grace alone will enable a man to trample personal interests under foot to meet the claims of another. "Men will praise thee when thou doest well to thyself." This is the world's principle, and nothing can make us unlearn it but the knowledge of the fact that God has done well for us, and, moreover, that it is our best interest to let Him continue to do so unto the end.

Now it was the knowledge of this divine principle that enabled our prophet to say, "Make *me* thereof a little cake *first*, and bring it unto *me*, and *after* make for thee and thy son." Elijah was, in his address, simply putting in the divine claim upon the widow's resources; and, as we know, the result of a true and ready response to that claim will be a rich harvest of blessing to the soul. There was, however, a demand upon the widow's faith in all this. She was called to act a trying and difficult part, in the energy of faith in a divine promise, "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth."

And is it not thus with every believer? Undoubtedly it is; we must act in faith. The promise of God must ever constitute the great moving principle in the soul of the Christian. There would have been no room for the exercise of faith on the part of the widow had the barrel been full; but when it was exhausted, when she was reduced to her last handful, to be told to give of that handful to a stranger *first*, was surely a large demand, to which nothing but faith could have enabled her to respond. But the Lord often deals with His people as He dealt with His disciples in the matter of feeding the multitude. "This He said to prove them, for He Himself knew what He would do." He frequently tells us to take a step involving considerable trial, and in the very act of taking it we not only see the reason of it, but also get strength to

proceed. In fact, all the divine claims upon us for action are based upon the principle involved in the command to the children of Israel of old, "Speak to the children of Israel that they go forward." Whither were they to go? Through the sea. Strange path! Yet behind this trying command we see grace providing the ability to execute it in the word to Moses, "But lift thou up thy rod, and stretch out thy hand over the sea, and divide it; and the children of Israel shall go on dry ground through the midst of the sea" (Ex. xiv. 16). Faith enables a man, being called, to go out not knowing whither he goes.

But there is more than the mere principle of obedience to be learned from this truly interesting scene between Elijah and the widow of Zarephath: we learn, also, that nothing but the superior power of divine grace can lift the human mind above the freezing atmosphere of selfishness in which fallen man lives, and moves, and has his being. The effulgence of God's benevolence shining in upon the soul disperses those mists in which the world is enveloped, and enables a man to think and act upon higher and nobler principles than those which actuate the moving mass around him. This poor widow had left her house influenced by no higher motive than self-interest and self-preservation, and having no more brilliant object before her mind than death. And is it in any wise different with multitudes around us? Yea, is it a whit better in the case of any unregenerate man on earth? Not a whit. The

most illustrious, the most intellectual, the most learned—in a word, every man upon whose spirit the light of divine grace has never shone, will be found, in God's estimation, like this poor widow, influenced by motives of self-interest and self-preservation, and having no brighter prospect before him than death.

The truth of God, however, speedily alters the aspect of things. In the case of the widow it acted most powerfully: it sent her back to her house occupied about and interested for another, and with her soul filled with cheering thoughts of life. And so will it ever be. Let but the soul get into communion with the truth and grace of God, and it is at once delivered from this present evil world, it is turned aside out of the current which is rapidly hurrying millions away upon its surface. It becomes actuated by heavenly motives, and animated by heavenly objects. Grace teaches a man to live and act for others. The more our souls taste the sweetness of redeeming love, the more earnest will be our desire to serve others. Oh that we all felt more deeply and abidingly the constraining power of the love of Christ, in this day of lamentable coldness and indifference! Would to God we could all live and act in the remembrance that we are not our own, but bought with a price!

The widow of Zarephath was taught this truth. The Lord not only put in His claim to the handful of meal and the cruse of oil, but also laid His hand upon her son—the cherished object of her affec-

tions. Death visits the house in which the Lord's prophet, in company with the widow and her son, were feeding together on the precious fruits of divine benevolence. "It came to pass, after these things, that the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, fell sick; and his sickness was so sore that there was no breath left in him." Now this son, as we know, had, in common with herself, stood in her way in the matter of her ready response to the divine claim as put forward by Elijah; hence there is solemn instruction for the saint in the death of this child. So surely as we allow *any object*, whether it be parent or child, husband or wife, brother or sister, to obstruct us in our path of simple obedience and devotedness to Christ, we may rest assured that object will be removed. This widow had given her son a higher place in her thoughts than the Lord's prophet, and the son was taken from her that she might learn that it was not merely "the handful of meal" that should be held in subjection to the Lord and in readiness for Him, but also her dearest earthly object.

It needs no small measure of the spirit of Christ to hold everything in mere stewardship for God. We are so prone to look upon things as ours, instead of remembering that all we have, and all we are, belongs to the Lord, and should ever be given up at His call. Nor is this a mere matter of rightful obedience; it is for our lasting benefit and happiness. The widow responded to God's claim on her handful of meal; and what follows? She and her

house are sustained for years! Again the Lord lays His hand upon her son; and what follows? Her son is raised from the dead by the mighty power of God, thus teaching her that the Lord could not only sustain life, but impart it. Resurrection-power is brought to bear upon her circumstances, and she receives her son now, as she had received her supplies before, directly from the hand of the Lord God of Israel. How happy to be a dependent upon such bounty! How happy to go to our barrel of meal, or our cruse of oil, and find it daily replenished by our Father's generous hand! How happy to hold the dearest object of our affections in the power of resurrection ties! Such are the privileges of the weakest believer in Jesus.

Before, however, I turn from this branch of our subject, I would observe that the effect which the divine visitation produced upon this widow was to awaken a solemn inquiry in her conscience as to her sin. "Art thou come to call my sin to remembrance?" When the Lord comes near to us, there will always be observed a divine quickness and sensitiveness of conscience which are most earnestly to be sought after. One may often pass on from day to day in the ordinary routine of life, in the enjoyment, too, of a replenished barrel and cruse, without much deep exercise of conscience before God. The latter will only be found where there is really close walking with God, or some special visitation of His hand. Had the Lord merely met the poor widow's need from day to day, there might never have been

a question of "sin" raised in her mind; but when death entered, conscience began to work, for death is the wages of sin.

There is a twofold action in all the divine dealings with us, namely, an action of *truth*, and an action of *grace*. The former discovers the evil, the latter puts it away; that unfolds what man is, this what God is; that brings out into the light the hidden workings of evil in the heart of man, this brings out, in contrast, the rich and exhaustless springs of grace in the heart of God. Now, both are needful: *truth*, for the maintenance of God's glory; *grace*, for the establishment of our blessing; that, for the vindication of the divine character and attributes, this for the perfect repose of the sinner's heart and conscience. How blessed to know that both "grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." The divine dealings with the widow of Zarephath would not have been complete had they not elicited from her the confession contained in the last verse of our chapter, "By *this* I know thou art a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in thy mouth is *truth*." She had learnt *grace* in the marvelous supply of her need; she learnt *truth* in the death of her son.

And if we were only more spiritually sensitive and quick-sighted, we should at all times perceive these two features in our Father's mode of dealing with us. We are the constant recipients of His grace, and again and again we get examples of His truth in the dealings of His hand which are more particularly designed to bring out the evil from the

hidden chambers of the heart, in order that we may judge and put it away. While we see our barrel and cruse replenished, conscience is apt to slumber, but when Jehovah knocks at the door of our hearts by some chastening dispensation, forthwith it wakes up and enters with vigor upon the seasonable work of self-judgment.

Now, while we cannot too strongly deprecate that form of self-examination which frequently genders doubt as to the fact of the soul's acceptance, yet we must remember that *self must be judged* or we shall break down altogether. The believer is not told to examine himself with any such idea as that the examination may issue in the discovery that he is not in the faith. This idea is often based upon an unsound interpretation of 2 Cor. xiii. 5, "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith," etc. Now, the idea in the mind of the apostle was the very reverse of what is sought to be deduced from his words, as may at once be seen by a little attention to the context. It would seem that the assembly at Corinth had given a place amongst them to certain false apostles who presumed to call in question the ministry of the apostle Paul, thus rendering it necessary for the latter to enter upon a defense of his apostleship, which he does, first, by a reference to his general course of service and testimony; and secondly, by a touching appeal to the Corinthian saints. "Since," says he, "ye seek a proof of Christ speaking in me, . . . examine yourselves." The most powerful and, to them at least, affecting

proof of the divine authority of his apostleship was to be deduced from the fact that they were in the faith. It cannot therefore for a moment be supposed that he would have told them to examine themselves in order to prove his heavenly mission if that examination were to issue in the discovery that they were not in the faith at all: on the contrary, it was because he had a well-grounded assurance that they were "sanctified in Christ Jesus," that he could confidently appeal to them as an evidence that his mission was from above.

There is, however, considerable difference between what is called "self-examination" and self-judgment; not so much in the abstract things themselves as in the ideas which we attach to them. It is a most blessed exercise to judge nature—honestly, solemnly and rigidly to judge that evil nature which we carry about with us, and which ever clogs and hinders us in running the race set before us. The Lord grant us all more spiritual power to exercise this judgment continually. But then we must take great care that our examination of self does not savor of mistrusting God. It is upon the ground of God's grace and faithfulness that I judge myself. *If God be not God, there is an end of everything.*

But there was also a voice in this visitation for Elijah. He had presented himself to the widow in the character of a man of God, and he therefore needed to establish his claims to that character. This Jehovah graciously did for him by the resur

rection of the child. "By *this* I know," said she, "that thou art a man of God." It was resurrection that vindicated his claim upon her confidence. There must be the exhibition of a measure of resurrection power in the life of the man of God ere his claim to that character can be fully established. This power will show itself in the form of victory over self in all its odious workings. The believer is risen with Christ—he is made a partaker of the divine nature, but he is still in the world, and bears about with him a body of humiliation; and if he does not deny himself, he will soon find his character as a man of God called in question.

It would, however, be but a miserable object merely to seek *self-vindication*. The prophet had a higher and nobler aim, namely, to establish the truth of the word of the Lord in his mouth. This is the proper object of the man of God. His own character and reputation should be matters of small moment with him, save as they stand connected with the word of the Lord in his mouth. It was simply for the purpose of maintaining the divine origin of the gospel which he preached that the apostle Paul entered upon the defense of his apostleship in his epistles to the Galatians and Corinthians. It mattered little to him what they thought of Paul, but it mattered much what they thought of Paul's gospel. Hence, for their sakes, he was anxious to prove that the word of the Lord in his mouth was truth. How important, then, was it for the prophet to have such a testimony to the divine ori-

gin of his ministry before entering upon the scenes in which he is seen moving in chap. xviii.! He gained thus much at least by his retirement at Zarephath; and surely it was not a little. His spirit was blessedly confirmed; he received a divine seal to his ministry; he approved himself to the conscience of one with whom he had sojourned for a long period, and was enabled to start afresh upon his public career with the happy assurance that he was a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in his mouth was truth.*

* I may just add a word here on the subject of self-vindication. It is truly sorrowful when the servant of God is obliged to vindicate himself; it shows there must be something wrong either in himself or in those who have rendered it needful for him thus to act. When, however, such a course becomes necessary, there is one grand object to be kept clearly before the mind, namely, the glory of Christ, and the purity of the truth committed to his trust. It too frequently happens that when any charge is brought either against our ministry or our personal character, the pride of our hearts is drawn out, and we are quick to stand up in self-defense. Now, we should remember that, apart from our connection with Christ and His saints, we are but vile atoms of the dust, utterly unworthy of a thought or word; it should therefore be far from our thoughts to seek the establishment of our own reputation. We have been constituted the depositaries, to a certain extent, of the reputation of Christ; and provided we preserve that unsullied, we need not be careful about self.

The Lord grant us all grace to walk in the abiding consciousness of our high dignities and holy responsibilities as the "epistle of Christ, known and read of all men"!

We have now arrived at the close of a very important stage of Elijah's history, embracing a period of three years and a half, during which he was hidden from the view of Israel. We have been occupied simply with the consideration of those principles of truth which lie on the surface of Elijah's personal history. But may we not draw instruction from his course viewed in a mystic sense? I believe we may. The reference of Christ Himself to the prophet's mission to the Gentile widow may justly lead us to see therein the blessed foreshadowing of the gathering of the Gentiles into the Church of God. "But I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up for three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land; but unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Zidon, unto a woman that was a widow" (Luke iv. 25, 26). The Lord Jesus had presented Himself to Israel as the prophet of God, but found no response; the daughter of Zion refused to hear the voice of her Lord. "The gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth" were answered by the carnal inquiry, "Is not this Joseph's son?" He therefore finds relief for His spirit, in the view of Israel's scorn and rejection, in the happy reflection that there were objects beyond Jewish bounds to whom the divine grace of which He was the channel could flow out in all its richness and purity. The grace of God is such that if it be stopped by the pride, unbelief, or hardness of heart of some,

it will only flow more copiously to others, and so, "Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the Lord, and My God shall be My strength. And He said, It is a light thing that Thou shouldst be My servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give Thee for *a light to the Gentiles*, that Thou mayest be My salvation unto the end of the earth" (Isa. xlix. 5, 6). The precious truth of the call of the Gentiles is largely taught in Scripture, both by type and precept, and it might be serviceable at another time to enter fully upon the consideration of it in its various ramifications; but my object, in this paper, is rather to consider the life and ministry of our prophet in a simple and practical way, with the hope that the Lord would be graciously pleased to acknowledge such simple reflections for the comfort and edification of His people of every name and denomination.

*SECTION III.*THE HOUSE OF AHAB

WE must now leave our prophet, for a season, and turn our attention to the sad condition of things in Israel during the time that he was hidden with God. Terrible indeed must be the condition of things on earth when "the heaven is shut up." Sterile and dreary must be the aspect of this lower world when heaven withholds its refreshing showers, and specially of that land which was to "drink water of the rain of heaven." Egypt might not have regarded much the shutting up of heaven, seeing she had never been wont to look thither for her supplies. She had her resources in herself. "My river is mine own," was her independent language. But such was not the case with the Lord's land—"the land of hills and valleys." If heaven yielded not its supplies, all was parched and sterile. Israel could not say, "My river is mine own." No; they were ever taught to look up; their eyes were always to be upon the Lord, as the Lord's eyes were ever upon them. Hence, when anything arose to hinder the intercourse between heaven and earth, the land of Canaan was made to feel it with painful intensity.

Thus it was "in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months,

when great famine was throughout all the land." Israel was made to feel the dreadful consequences of departure from their only source of real blessing. "There was sore famine in Samaria, and Ahab said unto Obadiah, Go into the land, unto all fountains of water, and unto all brooks; peradventure we may find grass to save the horses and mules alive, that we lose not all the beasts. So they divided the land between them, to pass throughout it; Ahab went one way by himself, and Obadiah went another way by himself." Israel had sinned, and Israel must feel the rod of Jehovah's righteous anger. What a humbling picture of God's ancient people, to see their king going forth to look for grass! What a contrast between all this and the rich abundance and glory of Solomon's day! But God had been grossly dishonored, and His truth rejected. Jezebel had sent forth the pestilential influence of her principles by the instrumentality of her wicked prophets—Baal's altar had superseded the altar of God; hence the heaven above was iron, and the earth beneath brass; the physical aspect of things was but the expression of Israel's hardness of heart and low moral condition.

Now there is not so much as a word about God in Ahab's directions to his servants—not a syllable about the sin that had called down the heavy displeasure and judgment of God upon the land. No; the word is, "Go unto all fountains and brooks." Such was Ahab's thought, his poor groveling thought; his heart turned not, in true humility, to Jehovah;

he cried not to Him in the hour of his need; hence his word is, "peradventure *we may find grass*." God is shut out, and self is the all-engrossing object. Provided he could find *grass*, he cared not about finding *God*. He could have enjoyed himself in the midst of Jezebel's idolatrous prophets, had not the horrors of famine driven him forth: and then, instead of searching out the cause of the famine, in true self-judgment and humility, and seeking for pardon and restoration at the hand of God, he goes forth, in impenitent selfishness, to look for grass. Alas! he had sold himself to work wickedness; he had become the slave of Jezebel; his palace had become a cage of every unclean bird; Baal's prophets, like so many vultures, hovered around his throne, and from thence spread the leaven of idolatry over the whole land. Oh, it is a truly awful thing to allow the heart to depart from the Lord. One cannot tell where it may end. Ahab was an Israelite, but he had allowed himself to be ensnared by a false religious system, at the head of which was Jezebel his wife; he had made shipwreck of faith and a good conscience, and was driven headlong into the most abandoned wickedness. There is no one so bad as the man who turns aside from the ways of God. Such an one is sure to plunge into more profound depths of wickedness than even the ordinary victims of sin and Satan. The devil seems to take special delight in making such an one an instrument in carrying out his malignant designs against the truth of God.

Reader, if you have ever been taught to value the ways of truth and holiness, if you have ever taken delight in God and His ways, be watchful; "keep thy heart with all diligence;" beware of false religious influence; you are moving through a scene in which the very atmosphere you breathe is noxious, and destructive of spiritual life. The enemy has with hellish sagacity—a sagacity sharpened by well-nigh six thousand years' acquaintance with the constitution of the human mind—laid his snares on all sides of you, and nothing but permanent communion with your heavenly Father will avail to preserve your soul. Remember Ahab, and pray continually to be kept from temptation.

The following passage of Scripture may well be used, in connection with Ahab, as a solemn and seasonable warning: "Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord. For he shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good cometh; but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land and not inhabited" (Jer. xvii. 5, 6).

Such was the wretched Ahab—wretched though favored with a diadem and a sceptre. He cared neither for God nor his people. In his sayings and doings, on the melancholy occasion to which we are referring, we find as little about Israel as about God. There is not one word about the people that had been committed to his care, and who ought, after God, to have been his great object. His

earthly mind seems to have been unable to reach beyond "the horses and mules." Such were the objects of Ahab's anxious solicitude in the day of Israel's direful calamity. Alas, what a contrast between all this low and groveling selfishness and the noble spirit of the man after God's own heart, who, when the land was trembling beneath the heavy stroke of Jehovah's chastening rod, could say, "Is it not I that have commanded the people to be numbered: *even I it is that have sinned and done evil indeed*; but as for *these sheep*, what have they done? let Thy hand, I pray Thee, O Lord my God, be on me, and on my father's house; but not on Thy people, that they should be plagued" (1 Chron. xxi. 17).

Here was the true spirit of a king. David, in the spirit of his blessed Master, would expose his own bosom to the stroke, in order that the sheep might escape; he would "stand between them and the foe;" he would turn the sceptre into a shepherd's crook; he thought not of his "horses and mules;" yea, he thought not of himself or his father's house, but of the people of God's pasture, and the sheep of His hand. Happy, ineffably happy, will it be for Israel's scattered tribes to find themselves again under the tender care of the true David.

It might be profitable to follow out a little more fully the history of Ahab; to dwell upon his unprincipled treatment of the righteous Naboth; of the alluring influence exerted by him over the mind of the good king Jehoshaphat, and of many other cir-

cumstances in his unhappy reign ; but all this would lead us too far from our subject. We shall therefore advert for a few moments to the character of an important member of Ahab's household, and then return to Elijah.

Obadiah, the governor of Ahab's house, was one who, in the secret of his own spirit, feared the Lord, but who was planted in a most unhallowed atmosphere. The house of the wicked Ahab, and his still more wicked consort, must have been a painful school for the righteous soul of Obadiah ; and so he found it. He was hindered in service and testimony. What he did for the Lord was done by stealth. He was afraid to act openly and decidedly ; yet he did quite enough to show what he would have done had he been planted in a more congenial soil, and cherished by a more healthful atmosphere. "He took a hundred prophets, and hid them by fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water." This was a most precious token of devotedness of heart to the Lord—a blessed triumph of divine principle over the most untoward circumstances.

Thus it was with Jonathan in the house of Saul. He, too, was sadly hindered in his service to God and to Israel. He should have stood forth in more entire separation from the evil in which his father lived, and moved ; his place at Saul's table should have been vacant as well as David's ; the cave of Adullam would have been his proper place, where, in holy companionship with the rejected David and his despised band of followers, he might have found

a wider and more suited range in which to manifest his affectionate devotedness to God and His anointed.

Human expediency, however, might, and doubtless would, have recommended Jonathan to remain in Saul's house, and Obadiah to remain in Ahab's house, as being "the sphere in which Providence had placed them;" but expediency is not faith, nor will it aid a man in his path of service, whatever it may be. Faith will ever lead a man to break through the freezing rules of human expediency, in order that it may express itself in a way not to be mistaken. Jonathan felt constrained at times to leave the table of Saul in order that he might embrace David: but he should have abandoned it altogether; he should have cast in his lot entirely with David; he ought not to have rested satisfied with speaking *for* his brother, he should have identified himself *with* him. But he did not do so, and therefore he fell on Mount Gilboa, by the hand of the uncircumcised. Thus, in his life he was harassed and hindered by the unrighteous principle of rule which Saul had set up to entangle and bind the consciences of the faithful, and in his death he was ingloriously mingled with the uncircumcised.

Just so it was with Obadiah. It was his lot to stand in connection with the man who occupied the lowest step of that ladder of apostasy whereby the kings of Israel had descended from original principles. Hence he was obliged to act stealthily for God and His servants; he was afraid of Ahab and Jezebel; he lacked boldness and energy to stand

out in decided testimony against all abominations; he had no room for the development of his renewed energies or affections; his soul was withered by the noxious vapors around him, and he could therefore exert but little influence on his day and generation. Hence, while Elijah was boldly confronting Ahab, and openly serving the Lord, Obadiah was openly serving Ahab, and stealthily serving the Lord. While Elijah was breathing the holy atmosphere of Jehovah's presence, Obadiah was breathing the polluted atmosphere of Ahab's wicked court. While Elijah was receiving his daily supplies from the hand of the God of Israel, Obadiah was ranging the country in search of grass for Ahab's horses.

Truly a most striking contrast! And is there not at this moment many an Obadiah similarly occupied? Is there not many a God-fearing man sharing, in common with the children of this world, its death and misery, and laboring in co-operation with them to avert its impending ruin? Doubtless there is. And is this fit work for such? Should "the mules and horses" of an ungodly world engross the thoughts and energies of the Christian, instead of the interests of the Church of God? Ah no! it should not be so. The Christian should have a nobler end in view—a higher and more heavenly sphere in which to use his energies. God, and not Ahab, demands and deserves our devotion.

This is a very wide question, and there are few amongst us that may not learn a lesson from it. Let us ask ourselves honestly, as before the Searcher

of hearts, what are we doing? What object are we carrying out? What end have we in view? Are we sowing to the flesh? Are we working for merely earthly objects? Have we no higher end in view than self or this present world?

Oh these are searching questions, when rightly put! The tendency of the human heart and affections is ever downward—ever toward earth and the things of earth. The palace of Ahab holds out far more powerful attractions to our fallen nature than the lonely banks of Cherith or the house of the starving widow of Zarephath. But ah, *let us think of the end!* 'The end alone is the true criterion by which to judge in such matters. "Until I went into *the sanctuary of God*; then understood I *their end*" (Psa. lxxiii. 17).

Elijah knew, by being in the sanctuary, that Ahab stood in a slippery place; that his house would speedily crumble in the dust; that all his pomp and glory was about to end in the lonely tomb, and his immortal spirit to be summoned to render its final account. These things the holy man of God thoroughly understood, and he was therefore well content to stand apart from it all. His leathern girdle, his homely fare, his lonely path, were far better, he felt, than all the pleasures of Ahab's court. Such was his judgment, and we shall see, ere we close this paper, that his judgment was sound. "The world passeth away, and the lust thereof, but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever." Would that all who love the name of Jesus were more un-

compromising and energetic in their testimony for Him! The time is rapidly approaching when we would give worlds that we had been more *true and real* in our ways here below. We are too lukewarm, too much inclined to make terms with the world and the flesh, too ready to exchange the leathern girdle for the robe in which Ahab and Jezebel are most willing to array us.

May the Lord give all His people grace to testify against this world that the deeds thereof are evil, and to stand apart from its ways, its maxims and principles; in a word, from everything which properly belongs to it. "The night is far spent, and the day is at hand." Let us then cast off the works of darkness and stand clothed in the armor of light; let us, as those that are risen with Christ, set our affection on things above, and not on things on the earth; having "our citizenship in heaven," let us, with unceasing eagerness, "look for the Saviour from thence, who shall change the body of our humiliation, that it may be fashioned like unto the body of His glory, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things to Himself."

SECTION IV.

THE PROPHET ON MOUNT CARMEL

IN the opening verse of chapter xviii. a new order is issued to our prophet. "And it came to pass, after many days, that the word of the Lord came to Elijah in the third year, saying, Go show thyself unto Ahab, and I will send rain on the earth."

Here Elijah is summoned away from his retirement at Zarephath, to make his appearance in public and stand again before king Ahab. To one occupying the position, and exhibiting the spirit, of a true servant, it matters not what summons he receives. Whether it be "Go *hide* thyself," or "Go *show* thyself," he is ready, through grace, to obey. The Lord had been training His servant for three years and a half in secret. At Cherith and Zarephath He had taught him many important lessons; and when the time was come for his showing unto Israel, he was called to leave the desert and appear again as the public witness of Jehovah.

Nor did he hesitate. No, not for a moment, however much he might have preferred retirement to the stormy scenes and harassing vicissitudes of public life. Elijah was *a servant*, and that was enough. He was as ready to confront the angry Ahab, and all the prophets of Baal, as he had been to seclude

himself for three years and a half. Truly we may well covet the spirit of a servant—a humble, obedient servant. Such a spirit will carry us through many difficulties; will save us from much contention; will send us along the path of service while others are disputing about it. If only we be willing to obey, and to serve, we shall never lack opportunity, nor be at a loss as to the path we should pursue.*

We have already had occasion to notice the prophet's unhesitating obedience to the word of the Lord. Such obedience will ever involve the abandonment of self. To be told, for example, to leave one's sweet retreat in order to appear before an angry tyrant who, with his wicked queen, led on to the

* In every age the servant character is marked by the Holy Ghost as one of special value. It is, in fact, the only thing that will stand in times of general declension. Of this we have numerous examples in Scripture. When the house of Eli was about to fall before the divine judgment, Samuel occupied the position of a servant whose ear was opened to hear. His word was, "Speak, Lord, for *Thy servant* heareth." When all Israel had fled from the face of the Philistine champion, the servant character again stood prominently forth. "*Thy servant* will go and fight," etc. The Lord Jesus Himself had the title of Servant applied to Him by Jehovah, in the words of the prophet, "Behold my *Servant*," etc. Furthermore, when the Church had failed, and had become "the great house," "the *servant* of the Lord" was told how he ought to carry himself. And lastly, it is mentioned as one of the special features of the heavenly Jerusalem, that "*His servants* shall serve Him." The Lord grant us more of this spirit!

contest a host of idolatrous prophets, called for no small measure of self-renunciation. But Elijah, through grace, was ready. He felt he was not his own. *He was a servant*, and as such ever stood with girded loins and open ears to attend his Master's summons, whatever it might be. Blessed attitude! May there be many found therein!

Elijah, therefore, goes to meet king Ahab, and we are called to follow him now into one of the most important scenes of his life.

Before, however, he comes in contact with Ahab, he crosses the path of Obadiah, and his meeting with him is perfectly characteristic. Obadiah certainly does not meet the prophet with that affectionate cordiality which ought to appear in the bearing of one brother towards another, but rather in the cold formality of one who had been moving much in the world's society. "Art thou that *my lord* Elijah?"

Now, though all this might have been occasioned by the overawing solemnity of Elijah's appearance and manner, still the thought forces itself upon one that there ought to have been more holy familiarity between two servants of the Lord. Elijah, too, seems to maintain this distance. "I am," said he; "go tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here." Elijah felt himself to be the depositary of the secret of the Lord, of which secret his brother knew nothing.

And how could he? Ahab's house was not the place to obtain an entrance into the divine counsels. Obadiah was out on a mission perfectly in

keeping with the place from whence he had come, and with the person who had sent him; and so was Elijah. The former had as his immediate object grass—if peradventure he might find it; and as his ultimate object, the preservation of Ahab's horses and mules; the latter had as his immediate object the announcement of Jehovah's indubitable purpose concerning rain; and as his ultimate object, the bringing back of the nation to its early faith and devotedness.

True they were both men of God; and, moreover, it may be said by some that Obadiah was as much in his place as Elijah, seeing he was serving his master. No doubt he was serving his master; but should Ahab have been his master? I believe not. I believe his service to Ahab was not the result of communion with God. True it did not rob him of his name and character as one that feared the Lord greatly, for the Holy Ghost has graciously recorded this concerning him; but truly it was a miserable thing for one that feared the Lord greatly to own as his master the worst of Israel's apostate kings. Elijah would not have done so. We cannot think of him as going forth on such a mission as that which was commanding the energies of his more worldly brother. Elijah would not own Ahab as his *master*, though he was bound to own him as his *king*.

There is a great difference between being a *subject* and one in a position under a monarch. People argue thus: "The powers that be are ordained of God," therefore it is right to hold office under them. But

those who argue thus seem to lose sight of the manifest distinction between being *subject to* and *co-operating with* the powers that be: the former is a sound and scriptural service—an act of positive obedience to God; the latter is an unsound and unscriptural assumption of worldly authority, for the wielding of which we have no direction, and which, moreover, will be found a sad obstruction in the path of the servant of God.

We would not enter into judgment upon those who feel they can enlist their energies in the government of this world; but this much we would say—they will find themselves in an extremely awkward position in reference to the service of their heavenly Master. The principles of this world are diametrically opposed to those of God, and it is therefore hard to conceive how a man can be carrying out both at the same time.

Obadiah is a remarkable example of this. Had he been more openly on the Lord's side, he would have had no need to say, "Was it not told my lord what I did?" His hiding the prophets seems, in his estimation, to have been such a remarkable thing that he wondered if all had not heard it. Elijah had no need to ask such a question; it was well known "what he did." His acts of service to God were no phenomena in his history. And why? Because he was not trammelled by the arrangements of Ahab's house. *He was free*, and could therefore act for God without reference to the thoughts of Ahab or Jezebel.

In acting thus, however, he had to lie under the charge of troubling Israel. "Art thou he that troubleth Israel?" The more faithful one is to God and His truth, the more exposed he is to this charge. If all be allowed to sleep "in dead supineness," the god of this world will be well pleased, and his domain untroubled; but only let some faithful one make his appearance, and he is sure to be regarded as a troubler, and an intruder upon peace and good order. But it is well to have that peace and order broken up which stand connected with the open denial of the Lord's truth and name. The hearts of the earthly-minded may only be occupied with the question, "Is it peace?" utterly regardless as to whether that peace is procured at the expense of truth and holiness. Nature loves ease, and may often be found, even amongst Christians, pleading for peace and quietness, where faithfulness to Christ and His principles would call for plain dealing with unsound doctrine or evil practice.

The tendency of the age is to hold all religious questions in abeyance. The things pertaining to the world and the flesh are of far too much importance, in the estimate of this generation, to have them interfered with for a moment by questions of eternal importance. Elijah, however, thought not so. He seems to have felt that the peaceful slumber of sin must be interrupted at all cost. He beheld the nation wrapped in the deep sleep of idolatry, and he thought it well to be the instrument of raising a storm around them.

So it was, and so it is. The storm of controversy is always preferable to the calm of sin and worldliness. Truly happy is it when there is no need of raising such a storm; but when it is needed—when the enemy would stretch forth over the people of God “the leaden sceptre” of unholy repose—it is a matter of thankfulness to find that there is life enough even to break in upon such repose. Had there been no Elijah in Israel in the days of Ahab and Jezebel, had all been like Obadiah or the seven thousand, Baal and his prophets might have held undisputed sway over the minds of the people. But God raised up a man who cared not about his own ease; no, nor about the nation’s ease, if that ease were to be purchased at the expense of God’s honor and Israel’s early principles. He feared not, in the strength of the Lord, to face a terrific array of eight hundred and fifty prophets, whose living depended upon the nation’s delusion, headed, as they were, by a furious woman who could turn her weak-minded lord whithersoever she would.

All this, surely, called for no small amount of spiritual vigor and energy. It needed deep and powerful convictions of the reality of divine truth, and a very clear insight into Israel’s low and degraded condition, to enable a man to leave his quiet retreat at Zarephath and burst into the midst of Baal’s votaries, thus to bring upon himself a fierce storm of opposition from every quarter. Elijah might, to speak after the manner of men, have remained in quiet retirement, in undisturbed repose, had he been

satisfied to let Baal alone, and to allow the strongholds of idolatry to remain untouched. But this he could not do, and therefore he comes forth and meets the angry Ahab with these solemn and heart-searching words, "I have not troubled Israel; but thou and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and thou hast served Baalim."

This was tracing the evil up to its right source. It was departure from God and His holy commandments that had brought all this trouble upon them. Men are ever prone to forget the sin that has occasioned trouble, and think only of the trouble; but true wisdom will ever lead us to look from the trouble to the procuring cause.

Thus, too, when unsound doctrine has insidiously crept in, and gained power over many minds,—if some faithful one should feel called to make a firm and decided stand against it, he must count upon being regarded as a troubler, and as being the cause of all the commotion consequent upon such acting; whereas the intelligent and reflecting mind will at once trace the matter, not to the faithful one who has made a stand for truth against error, but to him who may have introduced the error, and to those who have received and entertained it.

True, the defender of truth will need to watch his spirit and temper, lest, while he attacks error in doctrine, he fall into evil in practice. Many who have set out in real sincerity of heart to vindicate some neglected or disputed truth have failed in this

particular, and have thus, in a great degree, nullified their valuable testimony; for their sagacious enemy is always ready to act upon the narrow-mindedness and unreasonableness of men by leading them to fasten upon the petty infirmities of temper, and lose sight of the important principle advocated.

But our prophet entered the arena well equipped; he had come from "the secret place of the Most High;" he had been learning, in solitude, those lessons of self-judgment and self-subjugation which could alone qualify him for the momentous scenes on which he was about to enter. Elijah was no angry or stormy controversialist; he had been too much in the secret of the divine presence for that; he had been blessedly solemnized in his spirit ere he was called to confront Baal's host of prophets. Hence he stands before them in all the calm elevation and holy dignity which ever marked his bearing. We see no haste about him, no perturbation, no hesitancy. He was before God, and therefore he was self-possessed and tranquil.

Now it is in such circumstances that a man's spirit is really tested. Nothing but the mighty power of God could have maintained Elijah in his extraordinary position on Mount Carmel. "He was a man of like passions with us;" and being the only one of his day who possessed sufficient moral courage and spiritual power to make a public stand for God against the power of idolatry, the enemy might readily suggest to his poor heart, "What

a great man you are to stand forth thus as the solitary champion of Israel's ancient faith!" But God held up His dear servant so far. He carried him through this very trying scene, because he was His witness, and His servant.

And so it will ever be. The Lord will ever stand by those that stand by Him. Had Obadiah only made a stand against Ahab and Jezebel, the Lord would have owned him and carried him through, so that instead of being the servant of Ahab, he might have been the yokefellow of Elijah in his great reformation. But this was not the case, and therefore, like Lot of old, "his righteous soul was vexed" by the errors and evils of an idolatrous house.

O dear Christian reader, let us aim at something beyond this! Let us not be chained down to earth by deliberate connection with this world's systems or plans. Heaven is our home; there, too, our hope is; we are not of the world; Jesus has purchased us, and delivered us from it, in order that we might shine as lights and walk as heavenly men while passing onward to our heavenly rest.

However, it was not merely in his deportment and manner that Elijah acquitted himself as a servant of God; he also showed himself to be one taught of God in reference to those principles on which the needed reformation should be based. Personal deportment and manner would avail but little if soundness in the faith were lacking. It would be an easy thing to put on a leathern girdle, and assume a solemn and dignified manner; but

nothing save a spiritual apprehension of divine principles will enable any one to exert a reforming influence on the men of his age. But Elijah possessed all those needed qualifications. Both his appearance and his faith were such as, in an eminent degree, suited a thorough reformer. Conscious, therefore, that he was in possession of a secret which would deliver the spirits of his brethren from the unhallowed thralldom of Baal, he says to Ahab, "Now, therefore, send and gather to me all Israel unto mount Carmel, and the prophets of Baal four hundred and fifty, and the prophets of the groves four hundred, which eat at Jezebel's table.

He is determined to bring Baal and the God of Israel face to face, in the view of the nation. He felt that matters should be brought to a test. His brethren must no longer be left to "halt between two opinions." What strength there is in the prophet's word as he stands before the assembled thousands of Israel! "How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow Him; but if Baal, then follow him."

This was very simple. The prophets of Baal could not gainsay nor resist it. The prophet only asked for decision of character. There could be nothing gained on either side by vacillating ways. "I would ye were either cold or hot." We know from the Lord's own words to Elijah, in the next chapter, that there were seven thousand in Israel who had not bowed the knee to Baal, and who, we

may suppose, were only waiting for some vigorous hand to plant the standard of truth in order that they might rally round it. No one amongst them would seem to have had power for such a bold step, but they would no doubt rejoice in Elijah's boldness and ability to do so. This has often been the case in the history of the people of God. In times of greatest darkness there have always been those whose spirits mourned in secret over the widespread evil and apostasy, who longed for the bursting in of spiritual light, and were ready with joy to welcome its earliest beams. God has never left Himself without a witness; and although it is only here and there we can perceive a star of sufficient magnitude and brilliancy to pierce through the clouds of night and enlighten the benighted Church in the wilderness, yet we know, blessed be God, that let the clouds be ever so dark and gloomy, the stars have been there in every age, though their twinkling has been but little seen.

Thus it was in the days of Elias; there were seven thousand such stars whose light was obscured by the thick clouds of idolatry—who would not yield to the darkness themselves, though they lacked power to enlighten others; yet was there but one star of sufficient power and brightness to dispel the mists and create a sphere in which others might shine. This was Elijah the Tishbite, whom we now behold, in heavenly power and light, breaking into the very stronghold of Baal, upsetting Jezebel's

table,* writing folly upon the whole system of Baal's worship, and in fact, by God's grace, effecting a mighty moral change in the nation—bringing the many thousands of Israel down into the dust in real self-abasement, and mingling the blood of Baal's prophets with the waters of Kishon.

How gracious of the Lord to raise up such a deliverer for His deluded people! And what a death-blow to the prophets of Baal! We may safely assert they never offered a more unwilling sacrifice to their idol than that which our prophet suggested. It was the sure precursor of his downfall, and of theirs also. What a sad aspect they present, "crying and cutting themselves with knives and lancets till the blood gushed out," and crying out, with unavailing earnestness, "O Baal, hear us!" Alas, Baal could not hear nor answer them! The true prophet, conscious in his inmost soul of the sinful folly of the whole scene, mocks them: they cry more earnestly, and leap with frantic zeal upon the altar; but all in vain. They were now to be unmasked in the view of the nation. Their craft was in imminent danger. Those hands which, through their influence, had so often been lifted up in the diabolical worship of a sinful absurdity, were

* False religion has always sought the sunshine of this world's favor, whereas true religion has always been more pure and genuine when the world has frowned upon it. "*The prophets of the groves eat at Jezebel's table.*" If Jezebel had had no table, she would have had no prophets either; it was *her table*, and not *her soul*, they sought.

speedily about to seize them and drag them to their merited fate. Well, therefore, might they cry, "O Baal, hear us!"

How solemn, how immutably true, are those words of Jeremiah, "Cursed is the man whose heart departeth from the Lord"! It matters not on whom, or on what, we place our confidence: whether it be a religious system or a religious ordinance, or anything else, it is a departure of the heart from God; a curse follows it, and when the final struggle comes the Baal will be invoked in vain; "there will be neither voice, nor any to answer, nor any to regard."

How awful is the thought of departure from the living God! How dreadful to find, at the end of our history, that we have been leaning upon a broken reed! O reader, if you have not found solid and abiding peace for your guilty conscience in the atoning blood of Jesus, if you have a single emotion of fear in your heart at the thought of meeting God, let me put the prophet's question to you, "How long halt ye between two opinions?" Why do you stand aloof when Jesus calls you to come unto Him and take His yoke upon you? Believe me, the hour is coming when, if you have not fled for refuge to Jesus, a greater than Elijah will mock at your calamity. Harken to these solemn words: "Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out My hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at naught all My counsel, and would none of My reproof; I also will laugh at your calamity; I will

mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you" (Prov. i. 24-27).

Awful words! inconceivably awful! How much more awful the reality! Reader, flee to Jesus. Betake yourself to the open fountain, and there find peace and refuge, ere the storm of divine wrath and judgment bursts upon your head. "When once the master of the house has risen up and shut to the door," you are lost, and lost forever. Oh think of this, I implore of you, and let not Satan drag your precious soul into everlasting perdition!

We now turn to another side of the picture. The prophets of Baal were signally defeated. They had leaped, cut themselves, and cried to no purpose. Their whole system had been proved a gross fallacy; the superstructure of error had been trampled to the ground, and it only now remained to rear the magnificent superstructure of truth in the view of those who had been so long enslaved by vanity and lies. "And Elijah said unto all the people, Come near unto me. And all the people came near unto him. *And he repaired the altar of the Lord that was broken down.* And Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, unto whom the word of the Lord came, saying, Israel shall be thy name: and with the stones he built an altar in the name of the Lord."

It is always well to wait patiently, and allow evil and error to find their own level. Time will surely

bring the truth to light; and let error array itself ever so carefully in the venerable robes of antiquity, yet will time strip it of these robes, and display it in all its naked deformity. Elijah felt this, and therefore he could stand quietly by and allow all the sands of Baal's glass to run out ere he began to exhibit the pattern of a more excellent way. Now it needs a very real apprehension of divine principles to enable one to adopt this patient course. Had our prophet been shallow-minded, or badly taught, he would have been in much greater haste to display his system and raise a storm of opposition against his antagonists. But a spirit gifted with true elevation is never in haste, never perturbed; he has found a centre round which to move, and in revolving round that he finds himself carried out of the region of every other influence. Such an one was Elijah, a really elevated, independent, holy man—one who in every scene of his extraordinary career maintained a heavenly dignity which is earnestly to be sought after by all the Lord's servants. When he stood on mount Carmel, beholding the fruitless bodily exercise of Baal's prophets, he presented the appearance of one who was fully conscious of his heavenly mission; and not only in his manner, but also in his principles of acting, he acquitted himself as a prophet of the Lord.

What, then, were those principles on which Elijah acted? They were, in a word, those on which the unity of the nation was based. The first thing he

does is to "repair the altar of the Lord that was broken down." This was Israel's centre, and to this every true reformer directed his attention. Those who seek to carry out a one-sided reformation may rest satisfied with merely throwing down that which is false, without proceeding further to establish a sound basis on which to erect a new superstructure: but such reformation will never stand; it will carry with it too much of the old leaven to admit of its being a testimony. The altar of Baal must not only be thrown down, but the altar of the Lord must be set up.

Some there are who would sacrifice to the Lord on the altar of Baal; in other words, they would retain an evil system, and rest satisfied with giving it a right name. But no; the only centre of unity which God can recognize is the name of Jesus—simply and exclusively that. The people of God must not be looked at as members of a system, but as members of Christ. God sees them as such, and it should be their business to reckon themselves to be what God tells them they are, and manifestly to take that blessed place.

And we may further remark that Elijah in his actings on mount Carmel does not stop short of the recognition of Israel's unbroken unity. He takes *twelve stones*, according to *the number of the sons of Jacob*, unto whom the word of the Lord came, saying, "*Israel shall be thy name.*" This was taking high ground—yea, the very highest. Solomon could have taken no higher. To recognize the

twelve tribes of Israel at a time when they were divided, and weakened, and degraded, evidenced true communion with the mind of God in reference to His people. Yet this is what the Spirit will ever suggest. "Our twelve tribes" must never be given up. True they may, through their own weakness and folly, become scattered and divided; yet the God of Israel can only think of them in that unbroken unity which they once exhibited, and which, moreover, they will exhibit again when, having been united by the true David, they shall in holy fellowship tread the courts of the Lord forever.

Now the prophet Elijah, through the Spirit, saw all this. With the eye of faith, he penetrated the long, dreary time of Israel's humiliating bondage, and beheld them in their visible unity, no longer Judah and Israel, but *Israel*, for the word is, "*Israel shall be thy name.*" His mind was occupied, not with what Israel was, but with what God had said. This was faith. Unbelief might say, "You are taking too high a stand; it is presumption to talk about twelve tribes when there are but ten; it is folly to speak of unbroken unity when there is nothing but division." Such will ever be the language of unbelief, which can never grasp the thoughts of God, nor see things as He sees them. But it is the happy privilege of the man of faith to rest his spirit on the immutable testimony of God, which is not to be nullified by man's sinful folly. "*Israel shall be thy name.*" Precious promise! Most precious! Most permanent! Nothing could for a moment

interfere with it—neither Rehoboam's childishness nor Jeroboam's cunning policy; no, nor yet Ahab's vileness could hinder Elijah from taking the loftiest position that an Israelite could take, even the position of a worshiper at an altar built of twelve stones, according to the names of the twelve tribes of Israel.

Now in Elijah the Tishbite we have an example of the power of faith in the promise of God at a time when everything around him seemed to stand opposed. It enabled him to rise above all the evil and sorrow around him, and to build an altar of twelve stones with as much holy confidence and unclouded assurance as did Joshua when, amid the triumphant hosts of Israel, he erected his trophy on the banks of Jordan.

But I must bring this section to a close, having already extended it further than I had intended. We have seen the principle upon which our prophet desired to carry out the reformation. It was a sound one, and God honored it. The fire from heaven at once confounded the prophets of Baal, confirmed the prophet's faith, and delivered the people from their sad condition of halting between two opinions. Elijah's faith had given God room to act; he had made a trench and filled it with water; in other words, he had made the difficulty as great as possible in order that the divine triumph might be complete: and truly it was so. God will always respond to the appeal of simple faith. "Hear me," said the prophet, "O Lord, hear me;

that this people may know that Thou art the Lord God, and that Thou hast turned their heart back again."

This is intelligent prayer. The prophet is engaged solely about God and His people. He does not say, "Hear me, that this people may know that I am a true prophet." No; his only object was to bring the people back to the God of their fathers, and to have the claims of God established in their consciences, in opposition to the claims of Baal. And God harkened and heard; for no sooner had he concluded his prayer than "the fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. And when all the people saw it they fell on their faces: and they said, "The Lord, He is the God; the Lord, He is the God."

Truth triumphs! The prophets are confounded! The prophet, in holy indignation, mingles their blood with the waters of the Kishon, and thus, evil being judged, there remains no further hindrance to the communication of the divine blessing, which Elijah announces to Ahab in these words, "Get thee up, eat and drink, for there is a sound of abundance of rain." How do these words convey to us Ahab's true character! "*Eat and drink.*" This was all he knew, or cared to know. He had come forth to look for grass, and nothing more; and the prophet conveyed to him that intelligence which he knew he desired. He could not ask him

to come and join him in thanksgiving to God for this glorious triumph over evil, for he knew well he would meet with no response. And yet they were both Israelites: but one was in communion with God, and the other was the slave of sin; hence, while Ahab found his enjoyment in getting up to "eat and drink," Elijah sought his in retirement with God. Blessed, holy, heavenly enjoyment!

But mark the difference between Elijah's bearing in the presence of man and in the presence of God. He had met Obadiah, a saint in wrong circumstances, with an air of dignity and elevation; he had met Ahab in righteous sternness; he had stood amid the thousands of his deluded and erring brethren with the firmness and grace of a true reformer; and lastly, he had met the wicked prophets of Baal with mocking, and then with the sword of vengeance. Thus had he carried himself in the presence of man. But how did he meet God? "He cast himself down upon the earth, and put his face between his knees." Thus he carried himself before God. All this is lovely. Our prophet knew his place both before God and man. In the presence of man he acted in the wisdom of the Spirit, as the case demanded; in the presence of God he prostrated himself in unfeigned and reverent humility. Thus may all the Lord's servants know how to walk in all their complicated relations here below.

We must now accompany our prophet to widely different scenes.

*SECTION V.*THE PROPHET ON MOUNT HOREB

THERE are few who have taken a prominent place in the history of the Church of God whose course has not been marked, in a special manner, by vicissitude: of such, as of "those that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters," it may be said, "They mount up to the heaven, they go down again to the depths; their soul is melted because of trouble." They are sometimes seen on the mount, sometimes in the valley; at one time basking in the sunshine, at another beaten by the storm.

Nor is this the case merely with prominent characters; almost every Christian, be his path ever so retired and noiseless, knows something of this vicissitude. Indeed, it would seem as if no one could run the race which is marked out for the man of faith without finding inequalities in his way. The path through the desert must be rough, and it is well that is so; for there is no right-minded person who would not rather be set in a rough than in a "slippery" way. The Lord sees our need of being exercised by roughness and hardness, not only that we may find the rest at the end sweeter, but also that we may be the more effectually trained and fitted for the place we are yet to occupy.

True we shall have no need for trials in the Kingdom, but we shall have need of those graces and habits of soul which were formed amid the trials and sorrows of the wilderness. We shall yet be constrained to acknowledge that our path here below was not a whit too rough, but that on the contrary we could not have done without a single exercise of all those that had fallen to our lot. We now see things indistinctly, and are often unable to see the needs-be for many of our trials and sorrows; moreover our impatient nature may often feel disposed to murmur and rebel; but only let us be patient and we shall be able without hesitation, and with the full assent of every thought and feeling, to say, "He led us forth by *a right way*, that He might bring us to *a city of habitation*."

The above train of thought is suggested by the circumstances of our prophet in chapter xix. He seems to have had little anticipation of the terrific storm which was about to burst upon him: he had come from the top of mount Carmel, and in the energy of the Spirit outstripped Ahab in his chariot to the entrance of Jezreel; but there he was destined to receive a check, and that, too, from one who had hitherto kept herself in the background. This was the wicked Jezebel. I say, she had kept herself in the background; but she had not been idle there. She had no doubt influenced her weak-minded lord, and used his power for her wicked ends. She had opened her house and spread a table for the prophets of Baal. These things

she had done in furtherance of her master's interests.

Jezebel is not to be looked at merely as an individual: she stands before the spiritual mind as the representative of a class—yea, more, as the impersonation of a principle which has from age to age been working in hostility to the truth of God, and which appears in its full maturity in the person of the great whore spoken of in the Apocalypse. The spirit of Jezebel is a persecuting spirit—a spirit that will carry its own point in opposition to everything—an active, energetic, persevering spirit, in which satanic vigor appears very manifestly.

Very different is the Ahab spirit. In Ahab we see one who, provided he could attain the gratification of his carnal and worldly desires, cared but little about religion. He troubled himself but little to decide between the claims of Jehovah and those of Baal. To him they were all alike. Now it was such an one that Jezebel could wield according to her mind. She took care to have his desires gratified while she actively and sagaciously used his power in opposition to the truth of God. The Ahabs are always found to be fit instruments for the Jezebels; hence, in the Apocalypse, where all those principles which have been, are now, or are yet to be, at work, are seen in their full maturity, we find the woman riding the beast: that is, corrupt religion wielding the secular power, or the full-grown Jezebel-spirit making use of the full-grown Ahab-spirit.

All this has a solemn voice for the present generation; and those that have ears to hear, let them hear. Men are becoming increasingly heedless as to the interests and destinies of the truth of God in the earth. Christ and Belial are all alike, provided the wheels of the vast machine of utilitarianism be not clogged in their movement. You may hold what principles you please provided you hold them in the background; and thus men of the most conflicting principles can unite and hold those principles in abeyance while with ardor and energy they pursue the phantom of worldliness.

Such is the spirit and tendency of the age, and all that is needed is that a Jezebel spirit should arise and lead men on along the path upon which they have manifestly entered—a path which will most assuredly end in the blackness of darkness forever. Solemn, most solemn thought! Again I say, “He that hath ears to ear, let him hear.”

But we have said it was from Jezebel that the prophet Elijah received the check which seems so to have overwhelmed his spirit. “And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and withal how he had slain all the prophets with the sword.” Observe, “Ahab told Jezebel;” he had neither sufficient interest in the matter to lead him to take an active part himself, nor, even if he had the interest, did he possess sufficient energy. To him, perhaps, the abundance of rain seemed to stand connected with the death of the prophets, and therefore he could quietly stand by and see them put to death.

What was Baal to him, or Jehovah either? Nothing. Let Ahab and all of that school get enough to "eat and drink," and all questions of truth and religion will be but lightly regarded. Gross and unmeaning abomination! Miserable, infatuated sensualism! Ye children of this world, whose sentiments are expressed in the words "let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die," think of Ahab; remember his terrible end—the end of his eating and drinking. What was it? "The dogs licked his blood." And as to his soul—ah, eternity will unfold its destinies!

But in Jezebel we see one who lacked neither interest nor energy. To her the controversy was one of the deepest moment, and she was determined to act with decision. "Then Jezebel sent a messenger unto Elijah, saying, So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by to-morrow about this time."

Here then the prophet was called to endure the storm of persecution. He had been on mount Carmel, where he had stood against all the prophets of Baal; his course had hitherto been a triumphant one, the result of communion with God; but now his sun seemed, in his view, to be about to go down, and his horizon to become dark and gloomy. "And when he saw that, he arose *and went for his life*, and came to Beersheba, which belongeth to Judah, and left his servant there. But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree: and he requested for himself

that he might die; and said, It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers."

Elijah's spirit sinks altogether; he looks at everything through the dark cloud in which he was enveloped; all his labor seems, in his view, to have been for nought and in vain, and he has only to lie down and die. His spirit, harassed by what he deemed fruitless efforts to bring the nation back to its faith, longed to enter into rest.

Now, in all this we perceive the workings of impatience and unbelief. Elijah said nothing about longing to depart when he stood on mount Carmel. No; there all was triumph; there he seemed to be achieving something—he seemed to be of some use, and therefore he thought not of his departure. But the Lord would show His servant not only what he "must do," but also what he "must suffer." The former we like well enough, the latter we are not so well prepared for. And yet the Lord is as much glorified in a patient sufferer as in an active servant. The graces that are developed by one who is enabled to endure protracted suffering are as fragrant in their perfume as all the fruits of active service. This our prophet should have borne in mind. But ah, the heart can well understand and sympathize with him in his gloom and despondency.

There are few of the Lord's servants who have not, at some time or other, eagerly desired to put off their harness and cease from the toils of conflict,

particularly at times when all their labor and testimony would seem to be in vain, and when they are disposed to look upon themselves as mere cumberers of the ground. Yet we must wait God's time, and until then seek to pursue our way in patient, uncomplaining service. There is a vast difference between longing to get away from trial and sorrow, and longing to be at home in our Father's house. No doubt the thought of rest is sweet, ineffably sweet, to the laboring man. It is sweet to think of the time when our own gracious God shall wipe away all tears from our eyes, sweet to think of those green pastures and living fountains to which the Lamb will lead His flock throughout the coming ages of glory. In a word, the whole prospect presented to the view of faith is sweet and cheering; yet we have no right to say, "O Lord, take away my life." Nothing but an impatient spirit could ever dictate such language.

How different is the spirit breathed in the following words of the apostle Paul! "For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ, which is *far better*. Nevertheless, to abide in the flesh is *more needful for you*. And having this confidence, I know that *I shall abide and continue with you all, for your furtherance and joy of faith*" (Phil. i. 23-25).

These words exhibit a truly Christian spirit. The servant of the Church should seek the Church's good, and not his own advantage. If Paul had considered himself, he would not have tarried a mo-

ment on earth ; but when he considered the Church, he desired to abide and continue for the purpose of furthering its joy and faith. This should have been Elijah's desire too : he should have desired to remain for the benefit of the nation. But here he failed. He had fled into the wilderness under the influence of unbelief, and for the purpose of saving his life, and then desired that his life might be taken away simply to escape from the trials which his position involved.

In all this we may learn a most profitable lesson. Unbelief is sure to drive us from the place of testimony and service. So long as Elijah walked by faith, so long he occupied the place of a servant and a witness ; but the moment his faith gave way, he abandoned both and fled into the wilderness. Unbelief ever unfits us for the place of service, and renders us useless. We never can act for God save in the energy of faith. We should remember this at a time like the present, when so many are giving up and turning aside. I suppose we may lay it down as a fixed principle of truth, that whenever a man abandons any distinctive position of testimony, it is from positive unbelief in the truth which led him into it.

Thus, for example, at the present day we see many who at one time took up a very distinct and prominent position from having learnt (as they stated) that great truth, the presence of the Holy Ghost in the Church. Now, when this truth is really learnt, and held in power, it delivers from

man's authority in matters of faith, and leads Christians out of those systems where such authority is acknowledged and defended. If the Holy Ghost rules in the Church, then man has no right to interfere, no right to decree and institute ceremonies; for in doing so he is most presumptuously interfering with the divine prerogative. If therefore a man sincerely believe this important truth, his belief will certainly influence his conduct so far that he will feel himself called upon to bear testimony against every system in which this truth is practically denied, by separating from it.

It is not a question of what or whom he will attach himself to. No; this is another, and an after, consideration. A man's first business is to "cease to do evil," and after that to "learn to do well."

However, many who once professed to see this truth, and to act upon it, have since lost confidence in it, and as a consequence have retired from their distinct position, and gone back to those systems from which they had emerged. Like Elijah, they had not realized all their expectations; the results which they looked for have not appeared, therefore they have fled from the scene, and doubtless many have felt disposed to say, "*It is enough.*" Yes, many a heart which once cherished high and fond expectations respecting the Church is now bowed down with sorrow and disappointment. Those who professed to see and act upon the truth of the presence of the Holy Ghost in the Church, and other

collateral truths, have, to say the least, failed to carry them into practice, and not only failed, but in many instances have made a most humiliating exhibition of themselves; and the enemy has not been backward in making his own use of all this. He has used it especially to discourage the hearts of those who, no doubt, desired to stand in testimony for Christ, but who, seeing the failure of everything like corporate testimony on the earth, have given up in despair. However, let Christians observe this: it was unbelief that made Elijah fly into the wilderness, and it is unbelief which causes any one to give up that position of testimony into which the truth of the Holy Ghost's presence in the Church would necessarily lead him.

Those who thus retreat prove that it was not with God and His eternal truth, but with man and his circumstances, that they had to do. If God's truth be the basis of our acting, we shall not be affected by man's mutability and failure. Man may, and assuredly will, fail in his very best and purest efforts to carry out the truth of God; but shall man's failure make the truth of God of none effect? "God forbid; yea, let God be true and every man a liar." If those who profess to hold the blessed doctrine of the unity of the Church should split into parties; if those who hold the doctrine of the Spirit's presence in the Church for the purpose of rule and ministry should nevertheless practically lean upon man's authority; if those who profess to be looking for the personal appearance and reign of the Son of

man should be found grasping with eagerness after the things of this present world, shall these things nullify those heavenly principles? Certainly not. Thank God, truth will be truth to the end. God will be God, though man should prove himself a thousandfold more imperfect than he is. Wherefore, instead of giving up in despair because men have failed to make a right use of God's truth, we should rather hold fast that truth as the only stay of our souls amid universal ruin and shipwreck. Had Elijah held fast the truth which filled his soul when he stood on mount Carmel, he would never have been found beneath the juniper tree, nor would he have given utterance to such words as "Take away my life, for I am not better than my fathers."

Yet the Lord can graciously meet his poor servant even asleep under a juniper tree. "He knoweth our frame, He remembers that we are dust," and therefore, instead of granting the petulant request of His harrassed and disappointed servant, He rather seeks to feed and strengthen him for further exertion. This is not "the manner of man," but it is, blessed forever be His name, the manner of God, whose ways and thoughts are not as ours. Man would often deal roughly and harshly with his fellow, making no allowance for him, but acting towards him in haste and severity. Not so God. He ever deals in the deepest pity and tenderness. He understood Elijah, and He remembered the stand he had recently made for His name and truth,

and therefore He would minister to him in the season of his depression. "And as he lay and slept under a juniper tree, behold, then an angel touched him, and said unto him, Arise and eat. And he looked, and behold, there was a cake baken on the coals, and a cruse of water at his head. And he did eat and drink, and laid him down again. And the angel of the Lord came again the second time, and touched him, and said, Arise and eat; because the journey is too great for thee. And he arose, and did eat and drink, and went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights unto Horeb the mount of God" (chap. xix. 5, 8).

The Lord knows better than we do the demands that may be made on us, and He graciously strengthens us according to His estimate of those demands. The prophet wished to sleep for sorrow, but the Lord wished to strengthen and nerve him for future service. Like the disciples in the garden, who, overwhelmed with deep sorrow at the apparent failure of all their fondly cherished hopes, allowed themselves to sink into profound slumber while their blessed Master would have had them girding up their loins and nerving their arms for the trying scenes on which they were about to enter.

But Elijah did eat and drink; and being thus strengthened, he proceeded to mount Horeb. Here again we have to trace the sorrowful actings of an impatient spirit. Elijah seems determined to retire from his place of service and testimony altogether.

If he cannot sleep under the juniper tree, he will hide himself in a cave. "He came thither unto a cave, and lodged there." When once a man allows himself to slip aside from the position in which faith would keep him, there is no accounting for the extremes into which he may run. Nothing but abiding faith in the word of God can maintain any one in the path of service, because *faith makes a man satisfied to wait for the end*, whereas unbelief, looking only at surrounding circumstances, sinks into complete despondency.

The Christian must make up his mind to meet with nothing but trial and disappointment here. We may often dream of rest and satisfaction in some condition or other here; but it is only a dream. Elijah had no doubt hoped to see a mighty moral change brought about by his instrumentality; and instead of that, his life was threatened. But he ought to have been prepared for this. The man who had fearlessly faced Ahab and all the prophets of Baal ought surely to have been able to bear a message from a woman. Yet no; his faith had given way. When a man's faith gives way, his own shadow will deter him. In contemplating the prophet's position on Mount Horeb, one is disposed to ask, Can it be the same man whom we saw so recently standing on Mount Carmel, at an altar of twelve stones, and there so blessedly vindicating the God of Israel in the presence of his brethren? Alas! what a powerless creature man is when not sustained by simple faith in the testimony of God!

David could, at one time, meet Goliath in the power of faith, and afterwards say, "I shall one day perish by the hand of Saul." Faith gets above circumstances and looks at God; unbelief loses sight of God, and looks only at circumstances. Unbelief says, "We were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so were we in their sight;" faith says, "We are well able to overcome them."

However, the Lord does not leave His servant in the cave; He still follows him, and seeks to bring him again and again back to that post which he had abandoned in his impatience and unbelief. "And behold, the word of the Lord came to him, and He said unto him, What doest thou here, Elijah?" What a reproof! Why did Elijah thus bury himself in a cave? Why had he retreated from the honorable post of testimony? Because of Jezebel's message, and because his ministry had not been as fully owned as he expected. He thought to have reaped a more cheering harvest from all his labor than a threatening message and apparent desertion, and therefore he had sought the retirement of a mountain cave, as a place suited to indulge his feelings.

Now, it must be admitted that there was much—very much to wound the prophet's spirit; he had come from his quiet retreat at Zarephath to face the whole nation, headed by Jezebel and a host of wicked priests and prophets. He had confounded the latter, through God's grace; God had sent down fire from heaven in answer to his prayer; all Israel had seemed to acknowledge the truth as proclaimed

by him. All these things must have raised his expectations to no ordinary height; yet, after all, his life is threatened, he sees no one to stand by him, he is enveloped in a thick cloud, he abandons the field of conflict, and hides himself in a cave.

It is much easier to censure another than to act aright, and we must be exceedingly slow in pronouncing judgment upon the actions of so honored a servant as Elijah the Tishbite. But though we should not deal much in censure, we may, at least, draw instruction and warning from this section of our prophet's history. We may learn a lesson of which we stand very much in need. "What doest thou here?" is a question which might justly be put to many of us from time to time, when, in impatience or unbelief, we leave our proper place of service amongst our brethren, to sleep under a juniper tree, or hide ourselves in a cave.

Are there not many at this moment who, aforetime, were powerful advocates of the principles connected with the unity and worship of the people of God, to be found either asleep or hidden in caves? that is, they are doing nothing for the furtherance of those truths which they once advocated. This is a truly sorrowful reflection. To such the question, "What doest thou here?" should come with special force. Yes, what are such doing? or rather, what are they not doing in the way of positive mischief to the sheep of Christ? A man who thus retires is not merely harmless, he is noxious; he is really injuring his brethren. It would

be far better never to have appeared as the advocates of important truth, than having done so to retire; to call special attention to some leading principles of divine truth, and then to abandon them, is most culpable. "If any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant." We can pity ignorance, or endeavor to instruct it; but the man, who, having professed to see truth, afterwards abandons it, can neither be looked upon as an object of pity, nor a subject for instruction.

But it is not merely unbelief and disappointment in reference to certain truths that drive men into unhappy isolation; apparent failure in ministry has the same effect. The latter was, perhaps, what more especially affected Elijah. The triumph on Mount Carmel had, doubtless, led to much elation of spirit in reference to the results of his ministry, and he was not prepared for the sad reverse.

Now, the sovereign remedy for both these maladies, that is, for unbelief in important truth and disappointment as regards our ministry, is to keep the eye simply and steadily fixed on Jesus. If, for example, we see men professing those two grand and all-important truths—the unity of the Church, and the abiding presence of the Holy Ghost in the Church—professing, I say, to see these things, and yet failing most sadly in carrying them out, shall we turn aside, and say there is no unity, and no abiding presence of the Holy Ghost? God forbid. This would be to make God's truth dependent upon man's faithfulness, which cannot be en-

dured for a moment by the spiritual mind. No, let us rather look into the precious word of God, and see the Church as the body of Christ, each member thereof written in God's book from everlasting to everlasting.

And, in like manner, when we see Jesus at God's right hand in the heavens, we see the unfailing ground of the Spirit's presence in the Church. Thank God for the blessed stability of all this. "The gifts and calling of God are without repentance."

Finally, if any be tried in the matter of their ministry, if the enemy would endeavor to make them give up in chagrin or disappointment, let them try to keep their eyes more simply on Jesus, remembering that, however depressing the aspect of things here may be, the time is speedily approaching when all who have served the Lord simply, from love to Him, shall reap a full reward. We must take care, however, that we allow not our ministry, or the fruits thereof, to get between our souls and Christ. There is great danger of this. A man may set out in unaffected devotedness to his Master, and yet, through the craft of the enemy, and the weakness of his own heart, he may, ere long, give his work a more prominent place in his thoughts than Christ Himself. Had Elijah kept the God of Israel more before him, he would not have given up in despair.

But we learn the real state of the prophet's soul from his reply to the divine challenge; "I have

been very jealous," said he, "for the Lord God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant, thrown down Thine altars, and slain Thy prophets with the sword: and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life to take it away." How different is this language from that which dropped from his lips on Mount Carmel! There he vindicated God,—here he vindicates himself; there he endeavored to convert his brethren by presenting before them the truth of God,—here he accuses his brethren, and recounts their sins before God.*

"I have been very jealous;" but "they have forsaken," etc. This was the strain in which the disappointed prophet spoke from his cave on Mount Horeb. He seems to have looked upon himself as the only one that had done, or was doing, anything for God. "I only am left, and they seek my life to take it away." Now all this was the natural consequence of his position. The moment a man retires from his place of testimony and service among his brethren, he must begin to extol himself, and accuse them; yea, his very act expresses at once the assumption of his faithfulness, and their failure.

* It is instructive to observe the order in which Elijah recounts the sins of Israel: 1st—"they have forsaken Thy covenant;" 2nd—"they have thrown down Thine altars;" 3rd—"they have slain Thy prophets with the sword." The ground of all this evil was their having forsaken the covenant of God, the natural consequence of which was the throwing down of God's altars, and the abandonment of His worship, which latter was followed out by killing the prophets. We can understand this order.

But to all who thus separate from, and accuse their brethren, the searching question is, "What doest thou here?" "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear."

Our prophet, however, is called forth from his isolated place. "Go forth," said Jehovah, "and stand upon the Mount before the Lord. And, behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake: and after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire *a still small voice.*"

The Lord, by these solemn and varied exhibitions of Himself and His wondrous actings, would teach His servant most impressively that He was not to be confined to one agent in carrying out His designs. The wind was an agent, and a powerful one, yet it did not accomplish the end; and the same might be said of the earthquake and the fire. They, by their very terribleness, served but to pave the way for the last, and apparently the weakest agent, namely, the still small voice.

Thus the prophet was taught that he must be satisfied to be an agent, and one of many. He might have thought that all the work was to have been done by him. Coming, as he did, with all the terrible vehemence of the mighty wind, he supposed he should have carried off every obstacle, and brought the nation back to its place of happy alle-

giance to God. But ah! how little does even the most elevated instrument apprehend his own insignificance! The most devoted, the most gifted and the most elevated are but stones in the superstructure, screws in the vast machine; and whoever supposes he is *the* instrument, will find himself much mistaken. "Paul may plant, and Apollos water, but God giveth the increase." And so Elijah had to learn that the Lord was not confined to him. He had other shafts in His quiver, which He would discharge in due time. The wind, the earthquake, and the fire must all do their work, and then the still small voice could be heard distinctly and effectually. It is the sole province of God to make Himself heard, even though He speak in "a still small voice." Elijah remained in the cave until this voice reached his ear, and then "he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entering in of the cave."

It is only "before the Lord" that we get into our right position. We may conceive high thoughts of ourselves and our ministry, until we are brought into the divine presence, and then we learn to wrap our face in a mantle; in other words, we learn, in reality, to hide ourselves. When Moses found himself in the divine presence "he trembled, and durst not behold." When Job found himself there, "he abhorred himself, and repented in dust and ashes;" and so has it been with every one who has ever gotten a view of himself in the light of God's presence; he has learned his own thorough nothingness,

he has been led to see that God could do without him. The Lord is ever ready to acknowledge the smallest act of service done to Him, but the moment a man makes a centre of his service, the Lord will teach him that He wants him no longer. Thus it was with Elijah. He had retired from the field of labor and conflict, and earnestly desired to be gone: he thought himself a solitary witness, a forsaken and disappointed servant, and Jehovah makes him stand forth before Him, and there, as it were, give up his commission, and hear the names of his successors in the field of labor. "The Lord said unto him, Go, return, on thy way to the wilderness of Damascus; and when thou comest, anoint Hazael to be king over Syria: and Jehu the son of Nimshi shalt thou anoint to be king over Israel: and Elisha the son of Shaphat, of Abel-meholah, shalt thou anoint to be prophet in thy room. And it shall come to pass, that him that escapeth the sword of Hazael shall Jehu slay; and him that escapeth the sword of Jehu shall Elisha slay. Yet I have left Me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him."

This statement must have thrown much light on the prophet's mind. Seven thousand! although he had thought himself left alone. Jehovah will never be at a loss for instruments. If the wind will not do, He has the earthquake; and if the earthquake will not do, He has the fire; and last of all, He has "the still small voice." And so Elijah was taught

that Israel had to be acted upon by other ministry besides his: Hazael, Jehu, and Elisha had yet to appear on the scene, and as the still small voice had proved effectual in drawing him forth from his mountain cave, so would the gracious ministry of Elisha prove effectual in drawing forth from their lurking-places the thousands of faithful ones whom he had altogether overlooked. Elijah was not to do all. He was but one agent. "The eye cannot say to the hand I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you."

Such, I believe, was the important lesson taught to our prophet by the impressive scenes on Mount Horeb. He had gone up thither full of thoughts of himself alone; he stood there filled with the idea that he was *the* witness, the *only* witness; he went down from thence with the humbling yet wholesome consciousness that *he was but one of seven thousand*. A very different view of the case indeed. None can teach like God. When He desires to teach a lesson He can teach it effectually, blessed be His name. He had so taught Elijah his own insignificance that he was satisfied to retrace his steps, to come forth from his cave and down from the Mount, to lay aside all his complaints and accusations, and humbly, silently, obediently, and willingly cast his prophetic mantle over the shoulders of another.

All this is most instructive. The silence of Elijah, after he hears of the seven thousand, is most remarkable. He had learnt a lesson which mount

Carmel could not teach him—a lesson which neither Zarephath nor Cherith had taught him. In these places he had learnt much about God and His truth, but on Horeb he had learnt his own littleness, and as the result of that learning he comes down from the mount and gives up his office to another; and not merely this, but in so doing he says, “What have I done?”

In a word, we see in this dear servant the most complete renunciation of self from the moment he learnt that he was but one of many. He delivers a message to Ahab in the vineyard of Naboth; a message to Ahaziah in his sick chamber; then he takes his departure from earth, leaving the work which he had begun to be finished by other hands. Like John the Baptist, who, as we know, came in the spirit and power of Elias, he was satisfied to usher in another and then retire.

Oh that we all knew more of this humble, self-renouncing spirit—the spirit which leads a man to do the work and think nothing of it; or if it should be so, to see the work done by others and rejoice therein. The Baptist had to learn this as well as the Tishbite; he had to learn to be content to end his brilliant career in the gloom of a prison while another was doing the work. John too thought it strange that it should be thus with him, and sent a message to Christ to inquire, “Art Thou He that should come, or look we for another?” As if he had said, Can it be possible that He to whom I have borne witness is indeed the Christ and

yet I am left to perish, neglected, in Herod's dungeon?

Thus it was, and John had to learn to be content. He had said at the commencement of his ministerial course, "He must increase, but I must decrease;" but it may be he had not just counted upon such a mode of decreasing: yet such was the divine counsel concerning this honored servant. How different are God's thoughts from those of man! John, after having fulfilled a most important mission, even the mission of ushering in the Son of God, was destined to have his head cut off at the will of a wicked woman, and lest an ungodly tyrant should break his oath.

Just so was it with Elijah the Tishbite. His course, no doubt, had been a most brilliant one; he had passed before the eyes of Israel in all the dignity and majesty of a heavenly man—a heavenly messenger. Divine truth had fallen from his lips, and God had abundantly honored him in his work; yet the moment he began to think of himself as anything; the moment he began to say, "*I* have been very jealous, and *I* only am left," the Lord taught him his mistake, and told him to appoint his successor.

May we learn from all this to be very humble and self-renouncing in our service, whatever it be. Let us not presume to survey ourselves as if we were anything, or our service as if we had achieved some great thing. And even though our ministry should be unproductive, and we ourselves despised

and rejected, may we be able *to look forward to the end*, when everything shall be made manifest. This was what our blessed Master did. He kept His eye fixed on "the joy that was set before Him," and regarded not the thoughts of men as He passed along. Nor did He complain of or accuse those who rejected, despised, and crucified Him. No; His dying words were, "Father, forgive them." Blessed Master, impart unto us more of Thy meek, loving, gracious and forgiving spirit! May we be like Thee, and tread in Thy steps across this dreary world!

SECTION VI

THE PROPHET'S RAPTURE

FROM the moment that Elijah had cast his mantle upon the shoulders of Elisha we may consider his prophetic career as almost ended. He delivered a message or two, as has already been noticed; but as regards his ministerial connection with Israel, it may be looked upon as closed from the moment that Elisha the son of Shaphat, of Abel-meholah, was anointed to be prophet in his room. Indeed, he abandoned the work himself. "He arose, and fled for his life;" so that it was, to speak after the manner of men, high time to think of appointing a successor.

But we must not confine our thoughts to Elijah's ministerial character when reflecting upon his life and times. We must not only look at him as a *prophet*, but also as a *man*; not only as a *servant*, but also as a *child*; not only *officially*, but also *personally*. As a prophet, the steady continuance and successful termination of his course would depend, in a great measure, on his own faithfulness. Hence, when he allowed himself to be carried away by a spirit inconsistent with the character of a genuine servant, he had to resign his office into the hands of another.*

* It may be needful just to notice an objection which may be made to the view I have taken of the prophet's actings.

There were, however, better things in store for Elijah. He might be hasty; he might hide himself in a cave, and from thence make intercession against Israel; he might impatiently long to depart from the trying scene in which he had been called to move; he might do all this, and in consequence thereof be called to resign his place: still the blessed God had thoughts of grace about him which never could have entered into his heart.

How truly blessed to allow God to adopt His own manner in dealing with us! We are sure to sustain loss when we interfere with the divine method of proceeding; and yet it has ever been man's tendency thus to interfere. Man will not allow God to adopt His own method of justifying him, but will ever be intruding into the wondrous plan of redemption: and even when he has submitted himself, through the operation of the Holy Ghost, to God's righteousness, he will again and

It may be said that he was raised up at a special era of Israel's history, and for a special purpose, and that when that purpose had been effected another kind of instrument was needed. All this is most true. Yet we can have no difficulty in perceiving the haste and impatience of Elijah in desiring to resign his post because things had not turned out as he had expected. God's counsels and man's actings are very distinct. The ministry of Elijah had filled its proper place in the nation's history, no doubt; and moreover, another kind of instrument might be needed; yet this leaves quite untouched the question of his spirit and actings in the matter. Joshua might be needed to succeed Moses; and yet it was for hastiness of spirit that Moses was refused permission to go over Jordan.

again, notwithstanding repeated experience of God's superior wisdom, seek to interfere with the divine method of training and leading him; as if he could make better arrangements for himself than God! Presumptuous folly!—the fruits of which, to some, will be eternal perdition; to others, present forfeiture of blessing in the way of enlarged knowledge and experience of God's character and ways.

Had Elijah received his request, how much he would have lost! How much better to be carried up to heaven in a chariot of fire, than to be taken away in a fit of impatience! Elijah asked for the latter, but God gave him the former. "And it came to pass, when the Lord would take up Elijah into heaven by a whirlwind, that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal" (2 Kings ii. 1).

It would be foreign to my present design to dwell upon the circumstances of Elisha's introduction into the prophetic office, his slowness at first in accompanying Elijah, and his unwillingness afterward to leave him. We find him in this chapter accompanying Elijah from Gilgal to Bethel, and from Bethel to Jericho, and from Jericho to Jordan. All these places were famous in Israel's history. Bethel, or the house of God, was the spot where Jacob of old had seen the mystic ladder stretching from earth to heaven, the apt expression of God's future purposes concerning the heavenly and earthly families. To this same place did Jacob return, by the express command of God, after he had cleansed himself from the defilement of Shechem (Gen. xxxv. 1).

Bethel, therefore, was a spot of deep interest to the heart of an Israelite. But alas, it had become polluted! Jeroboam's calf had effectually obliterated the sacred principles of truth taught by Jacob's ladder. The latter conducted the spirit from earth to heaven—it led upward and onward; upward to God's eternal purpose of *grace*; onward to the display of that purpose in *glory*. The former, on the contrary, bound the heart down to a degrading system of political religion—a system in which the *names* of things heavenly were used to secure for self the things earthly. Jeroboam made use of *the house of God* to secure for himself *the kingdom of Israel*. He was well content to remain at the bottom of the ladder, and cared not to look upward. His earthly heart desired not to scale those sublime heights to which Jacob's ladder led; earth and its glory were all he wanted; and provided he obtained these, he cared not whether he worshiped before Baal's calf at Bethel, or Jehovah's altar at Jerusalem. What was it to him? Jerusalem, Bethel, or Dan, was but a name in the estimate of this politico-religious man—yea, and in the estimate of every other such man. Religion is but an instrument in the hands of the children of this world—an instrument by which they dig into the bowels of the earth; not a ladder by which they mount from earth to heaven. Man pollutes everything sacred. Place in his hands the purest, the most heavenly truth, and ere long he will defile it: commit to his guardianship the most precious, the most impressive ordi-

nance, and he will ere long convert it into a lifeless form, and lose therein the principles sought to be conveyed. So was it with Bethel. So was it with everything sacred that man had anything to do with.

Then as to Gilgal, the place from whence the two prophets started: it too was a place of interest. It was there the Lord rolled away the reproach of Egypt from His people; there Israel kept their first passover in the land of Canaan, and were refreshed by the old corn of the land. Gilgal was the rallying-point for Joshua and his men of war; from thence they went forth in the strength of the Lord to obtain glorious triumphs over the uncircumcised, and thither they returned to enjoy the spoils. Thus was Gilgal a place round which the affections of a Jew might well entwine themselves—a place of many hallowed recollections. Yet it too had lost all its reality. The reproach of Egypt had rolled back upon Israel. The principles which once stood connected with Gilgal had lost their sway over the hearts of God's professing people. Bochim (the place of weepers) had long since taken the place of Gilgal in reference to Israel, and Gilgal had become an empty form—ancient, no doubt, but powerless, for Israel had ceased to walk in the power of the truth taught at Gilgal.

Again, as to Jericho. There it was that the hosts of the Lord, under their mighty Captain, gained their first victory in the land of promise, and exhibited the power of faith. And lastly, at Jordan it was

that Israel had had such an impressive manifestation of Jehovah's power in connection with the ark of His presence. Jordan was the place where death had been, in type, overcome by the power of life; and in its midst, and on its banks, it presented the trophies of victory over the foe.

Thus were these varied places—namely, Bethel, Gilgal, Jericho, and Jordan—deeply interesting to the heart of a true child of Abraham; but their power and meaning were lost: Bethel had ceased to be the house of God save in name; Gilgal was no longer valued as the place where the reproach of Egypt had been rolled away. The walls of Jericho which had been destroyed by faith were built again. Jordan was no longer viewed as the scene of Jehovah's power. In a word, all these things had become mere form without power, and the Lord might, even in Elijah's time, have to speak to the house of Israel concerning them in the following impressive words: "Thus saith the Lord unto the house of Israel, *Seek ye Me*, and ye shall live: but seek not Bethel, nor enter into Gilgal, and pass not to Beersheba: for Gilgal shall surely go into captivity, and Bethel shall come to naught. Seek the Lord, and ye shall live" (Amos v. 4-6). Here is an important truth for all those whose hearts are prone to cling to ancient forms. We are taught by this striking passage that nothing but the divine reality of personal communion with God will stand. Men may plead in defense of forms their great antiquity, but where can we find greater antiquity

than that which Bethel and Gilgal could boast? Yet they failed and came to naught, and the faithful were admonished to abandon them all and look up in simple faith to the living God.

Through all the above places, then, our prophet passed in the energy and elevation of a heavenly man. His destination lay beyond and above them all. He would seek to leave Elisha behind him while he pressed onward along his heavenward path; but the latter clings to him, and accompanies him as it were to the very portals of heaven, and checks the busy intrusion of his less intelligent brethren by the words "Hold ye your peace." But Elijah moves on in the power of his heavenly mission. "The Lord hath sent me," says he; and in obedience to the divine command he passes through Gilgal, Bethel, Jericho, and on to Jordan; leaving far behind him all those ancient forms and sacred localities which might engage the affections of any who were not, like Elijah the Tishbite, carried forward by a heavenly hope. The sons of the prophets might tarry amid those things, and perhaps, too, have many a hallowed recollection awakened by them; but to one whose spirit was filled with the thought of his rapture to heaven, things of earth, be they ever so sacred, ever so venerable, could present no attraction. Heaven was his object, not Bethel or Gilgal. He was about to take his departure from earth and all its harassing scenes; he was about to leave Ahab and Jezebel behind to meet their terrible doom; to pass beyond the region of broken

covenants, ruined altars, and slain prophets—in a word, to pass beyond the gloom and sorrow, trial and disappointment of this stormy world; and that not by the agency of death, but by a heavenly chariot. Death was to possess no power against this heavenly man. No doubt his body was changed in the twinkling of an eye, for “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, neither doth corruption inherit incorruption;” but death can have no power over him; he rather stepped like a conqueror into his triumphal chariot, and thus passed away into his rest.

Happy man! his conflict was over, his race run, his victory secure. He had been a stranger here—unlike the men of this world; yea, unlike many of the children of the kingdom. He had come forth from the mountains of Gilead as the girded witness, and the stern intruder upon the course of a professing world. He had no home or resting-place here below, but as a stranger and pilgrim pressed onward toward his heavenly rest.

Elijah's path from first to last was a unique one. Like John the Baptist, he was a voice “crying in the wilderness,” away from the haunts of men; and whenever he did make his appearance, he was like some heavenly meteor, the origin and destiny of which were alike beyond the reach of human conception. The man with the leathern girdle was only known as the witness against evil—the bearer of the truth of God. He had no fellowship with man as such, but in all his ways maintained an elevation

which at once repulsed all intrusion and secured reverence and respect. There was so much of the sacred solemnity of the sanctuary about him that vanity or folly could not live in his presence. He was not, like his successor Elisha, a social man; his path was solitary. "He came neither eating nor drinking." In a word, he was peculiar in everything; peculiar in his entrance upon his prophetic career, peculiar in his passage out of it. He was an exception, and a marked one. The very fact of his not being called to pass through the gates of the grave would be quite sufficient to draw special attention to him.

But let us observe the path pursued by our prophet as he journeyed toward the scene of his rapture. He retraced the path of the camp of old. Israel had journeyed from Jordan to Jericho, but Elijah journeyed from Jericho to Jordan. In other words, as Jordan was that which separated the wilderness from the land, the prophet crossed it, thus leaving Canaan behind him. His chariot met him, not *in the land, but in the wilderness*. The land was polluted, and was speedily to be cleansed of those who had introduced the pollution; the glory was soon to take its departure from even the most favored spot. Ichabod might be written upon it all; wherefore the prophet leaves it and passes into the wilderness, thus pointing out to the spiritual mind that nothing remained for heavenly men but the wilderness and the rest above. Earth was no longer to be the resting-place, or portion, of the man of

God; it was polluted. The Jordan had been divided to allow Israel to pass from the wilderness to Canaan; it was now to be divided to allow a heavenly man to pass from Canaan to the wilderness where his chariot awaited him, ready to convey him from earth to heaven. Earthly things and earthly hopes had passed away from the mind of Elijah, he had learnt the thorough vanity of everything here below, and nothing now remained for him but to look beyond it all. He had toiled amid Israel's broken altars; he had labored and testified for years among a disobedient and gainsaying people; he had longed to depart and be at rest; and now he was about to do so in a way worthy of God—Jehovah Himself was about to place His everlasting arms around and underneath His servant to shield him from the power of death. In his case death was to have no sting and the grave no victory. Elijah was privileged, as he stood upon the sand of the wilderness, to look right upward and, unimpeded by the humiliating circumstances of sickness and death, see heaven open to receive him. Not one of the circumstances of fallen humanity fell to the lot of our prophet in the matter of his exit from earth. He exchanged his prophet's mantle for a chariot of fire. He could cheerfully let his mantle drop to earth while he ascended to heaven. To him earth was but a perishable and polluted speck in God's creation, and most happy was he to lay aside everything which marked his connection with it.

What a position! And yet it is only the position which every heavenly man should occupy. Nature and earth have no longer any claims on the man who believes in Jesus. The Cross has broken all the chains which once bound him to earth. As Jordan separated Elijah from Canaan, and brought him into the wilderness to meet Jehovah's chariot, so the Cross has introduced the believer into new ground; it has brought him into purely wilderness circumstances; it has placed him, too, at the other side of death, with no other object before him than his rapture to meet the Lord in the air.

Such is the real, unquestionable portion of every saint, be he ever so weak, ever so ignorant. The happy experience thereof is, of course, a very different thing. To attain to this we need to be much alone with God, and much in the exercise of a spirit of self-judgment. Flesh and blood can never be brought to understand the rapture of a heavenly man.

Indeed, we find that the sons of the prophets did not understand it either, for they say to Elisha, "Behold now, there be with thy servants fifty strong men: let them go, we pray thee, and seek thy master, lest, peradventure, the Spirit of the Lord hath taken him up, and cast him upon some mountain, or into some valley." Here was their highest thought about the prophet's rapture—"The Spirit of the Lord hath cast him upon some mountain, or into some valley." They could not conceive such a thing as his being carried up to heaven

in a chariot of fire.* They still tarried amid the things of earth, and had not their spiritual senses sufficiently exercised to perceive and appreciate a truth so glorious. Elisha yielded to their importunity, but they learnt the folly of their thoughts by the fruitless toil of their messengers. Fifty strong men could nowhere find the raptured prophet. He was gone; and it required other strength than that of nature to travel the same road. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." Those who walk in the Spirit will best understand the prophet's privilege in being delivered from the claims of mortality, and being introduced in a manner so glorious into his heavenly rest.

Such, then, was the end of our prophet's course. A glorious end! Who would not say, "Let my last end be like his"? Blessed be the love that so arranged it that *a man* should be thus honored! Blessed be the grace that led the Son of God—the Prince of life—to stoop from His glory in the heavens and submit to a shameful death upon the cross, by virtue of which, even though yet only in prospect, the prophet Elijah was exempted from the penalty of sin, permitted to pass into the regions of

* It has been observed by another that the little children who came out of Bethel, and said to Elisha, "Go up, thou bald head," were mocking the idea of rapture. If this be so, they afford a sample of the world in their thoughts about the rapture of the Church.

light and immortality without the smell of death having passed upon him! How we should adore this love, dear Christian reader! Yes; while we trace the footsteps of the remarkable man whose history we have been dwelling upon; while we follow him from Gilead to Cherith, from Cherith to Zarephath, from Zarephath to Carmel, from Carmel to Horeb, and from Horeb TO HEAVEN, we must feel constrained to cry out, "Oh, the matchless love of God!" Who could conceive that mortal man could tread such a course? Who but God could bring about such things? The path of Elijah the Tishbite magnifies exceedingly the grace of God, and confounds the wisdom of the enemy. The rapture of a saint to heaven is one of the richest fruits and most magnificent results of redemption. To save a soul from hell is in itself a glorious achievement, a splendid triumph; to raise up the body of a sleeping saint is even a more marked display of divine grace and power; but to take a living man, in the freshness and energy of his natural existence, and carry him from earth to heaven, is a finer display of the power of God and the value of redemption than anything we can conceive.

Thus it was with Elijah. It was not merely the salvation of his soul, nor the resurrection of his body; but it was the rapture of his person—"body, soul, and spirit." He was taken away from the midst of all the turmoil and confusion around him. The tide of evil might yet have to flow onward; men and principles might continue to work and

show themselves. The measure of Israel's iniquities might still have to be filled up and the proud Assyrian enter the scene as the rod of Jehovah's anger to chastise them; but what was all this to the raptured prophet? Nothing. Heaven had opened upon him as he stood a homeless wanderer in the wilderness. He was now to be done with the land of Canaan, with its defilement and degradation, and to take his place above, there to await those momentous scenes in which he was, and is yet, to take a part.

Having thus seen our prophet go into heaven, our reflections on his life and times might naturally close. Yet there is one scene in particular in which he appears in the New Testament; and did we not dwell for a little upon it, our sketch of him would be incomplete. I allude to the mount of transfiguration, where Moses and Elias appeared in glory, and spoke with the Lord Jesus Christ of His decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem.

The Lord Jesus had taken with Him Peter, James, and John, and brought them up into a high mountain, apart, in order to exhibit in their view a sample of His future glory, that thus their spirits might be fortified against the trying scenes through which both He and they had yet to pass.

What a company! The Son of God, in white and glistening raiment: Moses, type of those who sleep in Jesus; Elias, type of the raptured saints; and Peter, James, and John, who have been styled the pillars of the New Testament Church! Now

it is evident that our Lord designed to prepare His apostles for the scene of His sufferings by showing them a specimen of the glory that should follow. He saw the cross, with all its accompanying horrors, in the distance before Him. Shortly before His transfiguration He said to them, "The Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and chief priests, and scribes, and be slain, and be raised the third day:" but previous to His entering into all this, He would show them something of His glory. The Cross is in reality the basis of everything. The future glory of Christ and His saints, the joy of restored Israel in the land of Canaan, and the deliverance of creation from the bondage of corruption, all hang upon the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. His sorrows and sufferings have secured the Church's glory, Israel's restoration, and the blessing of the whole creation. No marvel, therefore, that the Cross should form the subject of discourse between Christ and His glorious visitors. "They spoke of His decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem." Everything hung upon this. The past, the present and the future all rested on the Cross as upon an immortal basis. Moses could see and acknowledge in the Cross that which superseded the law, with all its shadowy rites and ceremonies; Elijah could see and acknowledge in it that which could give efficacy to all prophetic testimony. The law and the prophets pointed to the Cross as the foundation of the glory which lay beyond it.

How profoundly interesting, therefore, was the subject of converse upon the mount of transfiguration, in the midst of the excellent glory! It was interesting to earth, interesting to heaven, interesting to the wide creation of God. It forms the centre of all the divine purposes and counsels; it harmonizes all the divine attributes; it secures upon immutable principles the glory of God and the sinner's peace; on it may be inscribed in indelible characters "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." No marvel, therefore, again I say, that Moses and Elias could appear in glory and talk of such a momentous subject. They were about to return to their rest, while their blessed Master had to descend again into the arena of conflict to meet the Cross in all its tremendous reality; but they knew full well that He and they would yet meet in the midst of a glory which shall never be overshadowed by a cloud—a glory of which He, the Lamb, was to be the source and the centre forever—a glory which shall shine with everlasting brilliancy when all human and earthly glories shall be overcast by the shadows of an eternal night.

But what of the disciples during all this wondrous converse? How were they employed? They were asleep! Asleep while Moses and Elias conversed with the Son of God concerning His cross and passion! Marvelous insensibility! Nature can sleep in the very presence of the excellent glory.* "And

* It is not a little remarkable that we find these same disciples asleep during the season of our Lord's agony in the

when they were awake they saw His glory, and the two men that stood with Him. And it came to pass, as they departed from Him, Peter said unto Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here; and let us make three tabernacles—one for Thee, one for Moses, and one for Elias—not knowing what he said.” No doubt it was good to be there—far better than to go down from their elevation and glory to meet all the contradiction and trying obloquy of man. When Peter saw the glory, and Moses and Elias, it instantly occurred to his Jewish mind that there was no hindrance to the celebration of the feast of tabernacles. He had been asleep while they spoke of “the decease;” he had been indulging nature whilst his Master’s sufferings had formed the subject of discourse; and when he awoke, he would fain pitch his tent in the midst of that scene of peace and glory, beneath the open heavens. But ah, he knew not what he said. It was but a passing moment.

garden. They slept in the view of the glory, and also in the view of the cross. Nature can as little enter into the one as the other. And yet the blessed Master does not rebuke them in either case, save to say to the most prominent and self-confident among them, “Couldst *thou* not watch with Me one hour?” He knew whom He had to do with; He knew that “the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.” Gracious Master, Thou wast ever ready to make allowance for Thy poor people, and didst say, “Ye are they who have continued with Me in My temptation,” to those who had slept on the mount, slept in the garden, and who were about to deny and desert Thee in the hour of Thy deepest need!

The heavenly strangers were soon to depart; the Lord Jesus was to be delivered into the hands of men. He was to pass from the mount of glory to the place of suffering; Peter himself, too, had yet to be sifted by Satan—to be deeply humbled and broken under a sense of his shameful fall—to be girded by another, and carried whither he would not; a long and a dreary season, a dark night of sorrow and tribulation, was in store for the Church; the armies of Rome were yet to trample the holy city in the dust, and lay waste her bulwarks; the thunders of war and political revolution were yet to roll, with terrible vehemence, over the whole civilized world;—all these things, and many more, were to come to pass, ere the fond thought of poor Peter's heart could be realized on earth. The prophet Elijah must visit the earth again "before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord" (Mal. iv. 5). "Elias must first come and restore all things."

How long, O Lord? May this be the continual inquiry of our hearts as we pass along to that rest and glory which lie before us. "Time is short," and eternity, with all its divine and glorious realities, is at hand. May we live in the light of it! May we ever be able, by the eye of faith, to see the bright beams of the millennial morning—the morning without clouds—irradiating the distant hills! Everything points to this; every event that happens, every voice that reaches the ear, tells of the speedy approach of the kingdom: the sea and the

waves may be heard roaring—nations are convulsed, thrones overturned;—all these things have a voice for the circumcised ear, and the voice is, “Look up!” Those who have received the Holy Ghost have received the earnest of the future inheritance; and the earnest, as we know, is part of the thing to be received. They have been on the mount; and although the cloud may overshadow them too,—although they too may have to come down from the mount to meet the trial and sorrow below,—yet they have a foretaste of the joy and blessedness which shall be theirs forever; and they can unfeignedly thank God, as they journey on from day to day, that their hopes are not bounded by this world’s gloomy horizon, but that they have a home beyond it all.

“Oh wondrous grace, oh love divine,
To give us such a home!
Let us the present things resign,
And seek this rest to come.
And gazing on our Saviour’s cross,
Esteem all else but dung and dross;
Press forward till the race be run,
Fight till the crown of life be won.”

CONCLUDING REMARKS

ALTHOUGH, in the character of his ministry, Elijah the Tishbite much resembled John the Baptist, as has been already observed, yet looking at him personally, and considering his unearthly and pilgrim path, and specially his rapture to heaven, he stands before us as a remarkable illustration of the Church, or heavenly family. Taking this view of him, I think a few observations on the important doctrine of the Church will not be considered out of place as a conclusion to the foregoing sketch of his life and times.

It is of the utmost importance that the Christian reader should understand the doctrine of the Church's heavenly character. It will be found to be the only preservative against the varied forms of evil and unsound doctrine which prevail around us. To be soundly instructed in the heavenly origin, heavenly position, and heavenly destiny of the Church, is the most effectual safeguard against worldliness in the Christian's present path, and also against false teaching in reference to his future hopes. *Every system of doctrine or discipline which would connect the Church with the world, either in her present condition or her future prospects, must be wrong, and must exert an unhallowed influence.* The Church is not of the world. Her life, her position, her hopes, are all heavenly in the very highest sense

of that word. The calling and existence of the Church are, humanly speaking, consequent upon the present rejection of Israel and the world. The garden of Eden and the land of Canaan were successively the scenes of divine operation; but sin, as we have often heard, marred them both, and now all who believe the gospel of the grace of God, preached to them in the name of a crucified, risen and ascended Saviour, are constituted living members of the body of Christ, and are called upon to abandon every earthly hope. Being quickened by the voice of Him who has passed into the heavens, and not only so, but being united to Him by the Holy Ghost, they are called to occupy the place of strangers and pilgrims on earth. The position of Elijah the Tishbite as he stood on the wilderness side of Jordan, waiting for his rapture to heaven, aptly represents the condition of the Church collectively or the believer individually.* The Church, properly so called, finds (as another has said) "the termini of her existence to be the cross and the coming of the Lord;" and surely, we may say, earth has no place between these sacred bounds. To think of the Church as a worldly corporation, be it ever so sound and scriptural, is to sink far below the divine thought about it.

* When I say the wilderness side of Jordan, I only speak of Jordan in reference to the prophet's path. If we look at it in reference to the path of Israel from Egypt to Canaan, we learn a different truth. The spiritual reader will understand both.

The doctrine of the Church's heavenly character was developed in all its power and beauty by the Holy Ghost in the apostle Paul. Up to his time, and even during the early stages of his ministry, the divine purpose was to deal with Israel. There had been all along a chain of witnesses, the object of whose mission was exclusively the house of Israel. The prophets, as has been already observed in the opening of this paper, bore witness to Israel, not only concerning their complete failure, but also the future establishment of *the kingdom* agreeably to the covenant made with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and David. They spoke not of the Church as the body of Christ. How could they, when the thing was a profound mystery, "not revealed to the sons of men"? The thought of a Church composed of Jew and Gentile, "seated *together* in the heavenlies," lay far beyond the range of prophetic testimony. Isaiah, no doubt, speaks in very elevated strains of Jerusalem's glory in the latter day; he speaks of Gentiles coming to her light, and kings to the brightness of her rising; but he never rises higher than the kingdom, and as a consequence never brings out anything beyond the covenant made with Abraham, which secures everlasting blessedness to his seed, and through them to the Gentiles. We may range through the inspired pages of the law and the prophets, from one end to the other, and find nothing concerning "*the great mystery*" of the Church.

Then, again, in the ministry of John the Baptist

we observe the same thing. We have the sum and substance of his testimony in these words: "Repent, for *the kingdom* is at hand." He came as the great precursor of the Messiah, and sought to produce moral order amongst all ranks. He told the people what they were to do in that transition state into which his ministry was designed to conduct them, and pointed to Him that was to come. Have we anything of the *Church* in all this? Not a syllable. The *kingdom* is still the very highest thought. John led his disciples to the waters of Jordan—the place of confession in view of the kingdom; but it was not yet that character of repentance produced in them who are made members of the body of Christ.

The Lord Jesus Himself then took up the chain of testimony. The prophets had been stoned; John had been beheaded; and now "the Faithful Witness" entered the scene, and not only declared that the kingdom was at hand, but presented Himself to the daughter of Zion as her King. He too was rejected, and, like every previous witness, sealed His testimony with His blood. Israel would not have God's King, and God would not give Israel the kingdom.

Next came the twelve apostles, and took up the chain of testimony. Immediately after the resurrection they inquired of the Lord, "Wilt thou at this time restore again *the kingdom* to Israel?" Their minds were filled with the thought of the kingdom. "We trusted," said the two disciples

going to Emmaus, "that it had been He which should have redeemed Israel." And so it was. The question was, *when?* The Lord does not rebuke the disciples for entertaining the thought of the kingdom; He simply tells them, "It is not for you to know *the times or the seasons*, which the Father hath put in His own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be *witnesses* unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth" (Acts i. 7, 8).

Agreeably to this, the apostle Peter, in his address to Israel, offers them *the kingdom*. "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, and the times of refreshing shall come from the presence (*απο προσώπου*) of the Lord; and He shall send Jesus Christ which before was preached unto you; whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began."

Have we here the development of the Church? No. The time had not yet arrived for this. The revelation of the Church was yet to be, as it were, forced out as something quite extraordinary—something quite out of the regular course of things. The Church as seen in the opening of the Acts exhibits but a sample of lovely grace and order, exquisite indeed in its way, but not anything beyond what man could take cognizance of and value. In

a word, it was still the kingdom, and not the great mystery of the Church. Those who think that the opening chapters of Acts present the Church in its essential aspect have by no means reached the divine thought on the subject.

Peter's vision in Acts x. is decidedly a step in advance of his preaching in chapter iii. Still, however, the grand truth of the heavenly mystery was not yet unfolded. In the council held at Jerusalem for the purpose of considering the question that had arisen in reference to the Gentiles, we find the apostles all agreeing with James in the following conclusion: "Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for His name. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up; that the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom My name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things" (Acts. xv. 14-17).

Here we are taught that the Gentiles, as such, are to have a place with the Jews in the kingdom.

But did the council at Jerusalem apprehend the truth of the Church, of Jews and Gentiles so truly formed in "one body" that they are no more Jew nor Gentile? I believe not. A few members might have heard it from Paul (see Gal. ii. 1, 2), but as a whole they do not seem to have understood it as yet.

We infer, therefore, that the preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles by the mouth of Peter was not the development of *the great mystery* of the Church, but simply the opening of *the kingdom*, agreeably to the words of the prophets, and also to Peter's commission in Matt. xvi.: "And I say unto thee that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of *the kingdom* of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind *on earth* shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose *on earth* shall be loosed in heaven."

Mark, it is "the kingdom," and not the Church. Peter received the keys of the kingdom, and he used those keys, first to open the kingdom to the Jew, and then to the Gentile. But Peter never received a commission to unfold the mystery of the Church. Even in his epistles we find nothing of it. He views believers on earth; as strangers, no doubt, but yet on earth; having their hope in heaven and being on their way thither, but never as the body of Christ seated there in Him.

It was reserved for the great apostle of the Gentiles to bring out, in the energy and power of the Holy Ghost, the mystery of which we speak. He was raised up, however, as he himself tells us, before the time. "Last of all, He was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time." Things were not sufficiently matured for the development of the new revelation of which he was made the peculiar min-

ister, and hence he styles himself one born *before* the time; for such is the real force of the original word. And how was he before the time? Because Israel had not as yet been finally set aside. The Lord was still lingering over His beloved city, unwilling to enter into judgment; for, as another has said, "Whenever the Lord leaves a place of mercy, or enters a place of judgment, He moves with a slow and measured pace."

This is most true; and hence, although the apostle of the Gentiles had been raised up and constituted the depositary of a truth which was designed to carry all who should receive it far away beyond the bounds of Jewish things, yet did he make the house of Israel his primary object; and in so doing he worked in company with the twelve, although not a debtor to them in any one way. "It was necessary," says he to the Jews, "that the word of God should *first* have been spoken to you; but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles" (Acts xiii. 46).

Why was it necessary? Because of God's long-suffering and grace. Paul was not only the depositary of the divine counsels, but also of divine affections. As the former, he should act upon his peculiar commission; as the latter, he would linger over "his brethren, his kinsmen according to the flesh:" as the former, he was called upon to lead the Church into the knowledge of "a mystery which in other ages was not made known to the

sons of men;" as the latter, he would, like his Master, with "a slow and measured step," turn his back upon the devoted city and the infatuated nation.

In a word, as the gospel with which he was entrusted could only be proclaimed upon the ground of the total abandonment of earth, the earthly city, and the earthly nation, and as Paul's heart yearned over that nation and city, therefore it was that he was so slow to make known publicly the gospel which he preached. He delayed for fourteen years, as he himself informs us. "Then fourteen years after I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and took Titus with me also. And I went up by revelation, and communicated unto them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to them which were of reputation, lest by any means I should run, or had run, in vain" (Gal. ii. 1, 2). This is a very important passage on the question now before us. Paul had been raised up quite out of the regular course of things; his ministry was totally divested of the earthly, human and Jewish element; so much so indeed as to give rise to numerous questions as to its divine origin.*

* There have not been wanting modern teachers who have labored to deprive Paul's ministry of its peculiarly heavenly character by placing him among the regular college of apostles, whose aspect and bearing were manifestly Jewish. This they do by calling in question the election of Matthias. But to all those who need more than the exercise of spiritual judgment to guide them in this matter it may be sufficient to say that the Holy Ghost raised no question as to the va-

To him was committed what he emphatically styles *his* gospel. But, as has been remarked, it was a question whether things were ripe as regards the divine counsels respecting Israel, for the public development of this gospel. The apostle felt this to be a momentous question: hence his caution in communicating it *severally* to a few. He could not, even in the midst of the Church at Jerusalem, speak openly on this grand question, because he feared that the full time had not come, and that, should he develop it prematurely, few had sufficient spiritual intelligence or largeness of mind to understand or enter into it. His fears, as we know, were well grounded. There were few at Jerusalem who were at all prepared for Paul's gospel. Even some years later we find James, who seems to have taken a very prominent place in the Church at Jerusalem, inducing Paul to purify himself and shave his head. And what was this for? Just to prevent a break-up of the earthly thing. "Thou seest, brother," said James, "how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law. And they are informed of thee that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs.

lidity of Matthias's election, for He fell upon him in common with his fellow-apostles. However, we can well understand why those who feel themselves called upon to uphold human systems should labor so diligently to reduce our apostle's ministry to a human, or earthly level.

What is it therefore? The multitude must needs come together; for they will hear that thou art come. Do therefore this that we say to thee: we have four men which have a vow on them; them take, and purify thyself with them, and be at charges with them, that they may shave their heads; and all may know that those things whereof they were informed concerning thee are nothing, but that thou thyself also walkest orderly, and keepest the law" (Acts xxi. 20-24). Here, then, we have abundant proof of the fact that the great mystery was not understood and would not be received by the Church at Jerusalem.*

Now, one can well understand how the spirit of James would have shrunk from the terrible break-up which must have resulted from the public declaration of Paul's gospel amongst those whose hearts still clung to the earthly thing. True, it was the privilege of believing Jews to breathe a purer atmosphere than that of an earthly sanctuary, yet they were not prepared for the strong meat of Paul's gospel, and moreover the heart would cling with peculiar fondness to the thought that Jerusalem was to be a great focus of Christian light and testimony

* The circumstance to which allusion is made in the above quotation occurred some years later than the visit to which Paul refers in Gal. ii. The latter would seem to have been occasioned by the controversy respecting the Gentiles. This fact gives additional force to the expression "Severally to them which were of reputation." Paul could not communicate his gospel to them *en masse*.

from whence the rays of gospel truth should emanate to enlighten all around. But if the mystery which Paul had communicated to them privately were to be made known to the multitude, "the many thousands of Jews" would not receive it, and thus the great centre of light would have become the centre of division.

Moreover, the very same motive which had actuated Paul on the occasion of his former visit to Jerusalem, when he communicated his gospel only to a few, lest he should run in vain if things were not ripe for the revelation—the same motive, we say, might have led him at a later period to hold his gospel in abeyance, and accommodate himself to the thoughts and feelings of those who had not as yet got beyond the earthly order of things. Every affection of Paul's heart as a man and a Jew would have led him to linger at Jerusalem, and also to hesitate in the development of a doctrine which would cast Jerusalem and all earthly things into the shade, and raise the thoughts and affections into a far higher and purer region than had yet been realized. Paul knew full well the vanity and emptiness of vows and purifications. He saw nothing in the temple and its splendid ceremonies save a vast system of shadows of which the substance was in heaven. Yet his affectionate heart yearned over his brethren who were still captivated by it all, and therefore he hesitated to let the full blaze of the light which had been communicated to him shine upon them, lest it should dazzle them, ha-

situated as they were to the shadows of bygone days.

If this be a sound view of the conduct of our apostle in the matter of the vow, etc., it places him before us in a most truly interesting point of view, and also brings out very distinctly the two features of his character, namely, as the participator in the divine affections towards Israel, and also as the depositary of the divine counsels respecting the Church. Both these are lovely in their way. His fervent affection for Israel and his faithfulness to his own peculiar commission are both exquisite. Some may think he allowed the former to interfere at times with the latter, as in the matter of the vow; but it was an interference which we can well understand and account for. His heart, however, led him to tarry in Jerusalem; yea, to tarry until the Lord had to compel him to leave it. His commission was to the Gentiles; and yet, again and again he betakes himself to Jerusalem, and in his unwillingness to depart from it reminds us of the "slow and measured steps" with which the glory as seen by Ezekiel had departed from the temple. But the Lord would insist upon His servant's leaving Jerusalem. "*Make haste,*" said He, "*and get thee quickly* out of Jerusalem; for they will not receive *thy* testimony concerning Me." Paul's Jewish heart still lingers. He replies, "They know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on Thee; and when the blood of Thy martyr Stephen was shed, I was also standing by and consenting

unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him."

What pleading is here! "Their unbelief is all my fault; my vileness acts as the great barrier to their reception of the testimony—only let me remain." Impossible! "Depart: for I will send thee *far hence, to the Gentiles.*" Yes; the truth must be brought out; the divine counsels must be fulfilled; the time was come, and it was in vain for James to seek to stem the mighty current of events, or for Paul to linger or hesitate any longer: the crisis had arrived, and if Paul will after all this return to Jerusalem again, he must be carried away from it in bonds! He does return again. The passage we have just quoted is Paul's own account of what the Lord had said to him on a former occasion, to which we have no allusion till now. Thus, although he had been expressly told to depart from Jerusalem because they would not receive his testimony, he goes thither again; and we know the result of this visit. It was his last. The very thing that James dreaded and sought to avoid came upon them: an uproar was raised, and Paul was delivered over into the hands of the Gentiles. The Lord was determined to send him to the Gentiles. If he would not go as a free man, he must go as "an ambassador in bonds." He could say, however, that it was for "the hope of Israel that he was bound with this chain." If his heart had not longed so after Israel, he might have escaped the bonds. He

left Israel without excuse, but he himself became a prisoner and a martyr.

Thus then, at length, Paul took leave of Jerusalem. He had visited it again and again, and would have tarried there; but it was not his place. Jerusalem had been for ages the object of divine regard and the centre of divine operation, but it was speedily about to be trodden down of the Gentiles; its temple was about to be laid in ruins, and the flock of Christ that had been gathered there was about to be scattered abroad; a few short years, and that spot which had stood so long connected with all God's thoughts about earth would be laid low, even with the dust, beneath the rude foot of the Roman.

Now Paul's departure may be looked upon as the immediate precursor of all this. The peculiar truth of which he was the depositary could only be brought out in all its fulness and power in connection with the abandonment of earth as the *manifested* scene of divine operation. Hence Paul's journey from Jerusalem to Rome must be viewed with deepest interest by the intelligent and reflecting Christian.*

* It is a thought full of interest, in connection with the subject before us, that Paul's voyage to Rome gives us the history of the Church as regards its earthly destinies. The vessel sets out in due order, as a compact and well regulated thing, framed to endure the violence of the stormy ocean over which it had to pass. After a time the apostle offers a certain suggestion, which, being rejected, the ship is dashed to pieces by the waves. There was, however, an important distinction between the vessel and the individuals on board.

But we may ask did our apostle, when he turned his back upon Jerusalem, take leave also of Israel? No; he did not yet despair. True they had not received his testimony at Jerusalem, but perhaps they might receive it at Rome: they had not given him a place in the East, perhaps they would in the West. At all events he would try. He would not abandon Israel, though Israel had rejected him. Hence we read that "after three days (from the time of his arrival at Rome) Paul called *the chief of the Jews* together; and when they were come together, he said unto them, Men and brethren, though I have committed nothing against the people or customs of our fathers, yet was I delivered prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans. . . . For this cause therefore have I called for you, to see you,

the former was lost, the latter were all saved. Let us apply all this to the history of the Church in its earthly path. The testimony, as we know, emanated from Jerusalem, whence Paul started on his way to Rome. Apostolic testimony was designed to guide the Church in its earthly course, and preserve it from shipwreck; but this being rejected, failure and ruin were the consequences. But, in the progress of the failure, we perceive the distinction between the preservation of the Church's corporate testimony and individual faithfulness and salvation. "He that hath ears to hear" will always find a word of instruction and guidance for him in times of thickest darkness. The waves may dash in pieces the corporate thing—everything connected with earth may vanish away, "but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever." The above picture might be traced far more minutely by those who feel they have intelligence and warrant to do so.

and to speak with you; because that for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain. . . . And when they had appointed him a day, there came many to him into his lodging; to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses and out of the prophets, from morning till evening" (Acts xxviii. 17, 20, 23).

Here, then, we have this blessed "ambassador in bonds" still seeking out "the lost sheep of the house of Israel," and offering them, in the first place, "the salvation of God." But "they agreed not among themselves," and at last Paul is constrained to say, "Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers, saying, Go unto this people and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive; for the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed, lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted and I should heal them. BE IT KNOWN THEREFORE UNTO YOU, THAT THE SALVATION OF GOD IS SENT UNTO THE GENTILES, AND THAT THEY WILL HEAR IT."

There was now no more hope. Every effort that love could make had been made, but to no purpose; and our apostle, with a reluctant heart, shuts them up under the power of that judicial blindness which was the natural result of their rejection of the salvation of God. Thus every obstacle to the clear and

full development of Paul's gospel was removed. He found himself in the midst of the wide Gentile world—a prisoner at Rome and rejected of Israel. He had done his utmost to tarry among them; his affectionate heart led him to delay as long possible ere he would reiterate the prophet's verdict; but now all was over—every expectation was blasted—all human institutions and associations present to his view nothing but ruin and disappointment; he must therefore set himself to bring out that holy and heavenly mystery which had been hid in God from ages and generations—the mystery of the Church as the body of Christ united to its living Head by the Holy Ghost.

Thus closes the Acts of the Apostles, which, like the Gospels, is more or less connected with the testimony to Israel. So long as Israel could be regarded as the object of testimony, so long the testimony continued; but when they were shut up to judicial blindness, they ceased to come within the range of testimony, wherefore the testimony ceased.

And now let us see what this "mystery," this "gospel," this "salvation," really was, and wherein its peculiarity consisted. To understand this is of the utmost importance. What, therefore, was Paul's gospel? Was it a different method of justifying a sinner from that preached by the other apostles? No; by no means. Paul preached both to the Jews and also to the Gentiles "repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." This was

the substance of his preaching. The peculiarity of the gospel preached by Paul had not so much reference to God's way of dealing with *the sinner* as with *the saint*; it was not so much how God justified a sinner as what He did with him when justified. Yes; it was the place into which Paul's gospel conducted the *saint* that marked its peculiarity. As regards the justification of a sinner, there could be but one way, namely, through faith in the one offering of the Lord Jesus Christ. But there could be numerous degrees of elevation as regards the standing of the saint. For example, a saint in the opening of Acts had higher privileges than a saint under the law. Moses, the prophets, John, our Lord in His personal ministry, and the twelve, all brought out varied aspects of the believer's position before God. But Paul's gospel went far beyond them all. It was not the kingdom offered to Israel on the ground of repentance, as by John the Baptist and our Lord; nor was it the kingdom opened to Jew and Gentile by Peter in Acts iii. and x.; but it was *the heavenly calling of the Church of God composed of Jew and Gentile, in one body, united to a glorified Christ by the presence of the Holy Ghost.*

The epistle to the Ephesians fully develops the mystery of the will of God concerning this. There we find ample instruction as to our heavenly standing, heavenly hopes, and heavenly conflict. The apostle does not contemplate the Church as a pilgrim *on earth*, (which, we need not say, is most true,) but as sitting *in heaven*: not as toiling *here*,

but resting *there*. "He hath raised us up together, and made us *sit* together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." It is not that He *will* do this, but "He hath" done it. When Christ was raised from the dead, all the members of His body were raised also; when He ascended into heaven, they ascended also; when He sat down, they sat down also; that is, in the counsel of God, and to be actualized in process of time by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven.

Such was the thought and purpose of the divine mind concerning them. Believers did not know this at the first; it was not unfolded by the ministry of the twelve, as seen in the Acts of the Apostles, because the testimony to Israel was still going on; and so long as earth was the manifested scene of divine operation, and so long as there was any ground of hope in connection with Israel, the heavenly mystery was held back; but when earth had been abandoned and Israel set aside, the apostle of the Gentiles, from his prison at Rome, writes to the Church, and opens out all the glorious privileges connected with its place in the heavens with Christ. When Paul arrived at Rome as a prisoner, he had, as it were, arrived at the end of all human things. He no longer thought of the Church as exhibiting anything like a perfect testimony on earth. He knew how things would turn out as regards the Church's earthly path; he knew that it would fare with it even as it had fared with the vessel in which he had sailed from Jerusalem to Rome; but his

spirit was buoyed up by the happy assurance that nothing could touch the unity of the body of Christ, because it was a unity infallibly maintained by God Himself.* This was the spring of Paul's joy as he lay a despised and neglected prisoner in the dungeon of Nero. He was not ashamed, for he knew that the Church, though broken in pieces here, was nevertheless held in the everlasting grasp of the Son of God, and that He was able to keep it until the happy moment of its rapture to meet Him in the air.†

But it may be asked : How can believers be said to be seated in heavenly places when they are yet in

* I believe it is of the deepest moment that the believer should avoid all looseness of thought, or indifference, in reference to the presence of the Holy Ghost in the Church and the unity of the body of Christ. The man who holds the former will assuredly seek the latter.

† A letter has been put into my hand, from a dear and valued servant of Christ, from which I extract the following statements, which are well worthy of attention : "The Holy Ghost came down from heaven to form one body on the earth ; 'for by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body.' This is the unity we are responsible to maintain—the unity of the Spirit ; the other, final one, God secures infallibly. If God set in the Church 'healings,' it certainly is not in heaven. One has only to read 1 Cor. x. 11 to learn that the unity of the Church on earth is a fundamental, essential, divine institution—the cardinal truth which will distinguish, I believe, those who have faith to walk devotedly in these last days, and without which the expectation of Christ will be only personal deliverance, and not 'The Spirit and the Bride say, Come.' "

the world, struggling with its difficulties, its sorrows and temptations? The same question may be asked in reference to the important doctrine of Rom. vi.: How can believers be represented as dead to sin when they find sin working in them continually? The answer to both is one and the same. God sees the believer as dead with Christ, and He also sees the Church as raised with and seated in Christ; but it is the province of faith to lead the soul into the reality of both. "Reckon yourselves to be" what God tells you you are. The believer's power to subdue indwelling corruption consists in his reckoning himself to be dead to it; and his power of separation from the world consists in his reckoning himself to be raised with Christ and seated in Him. The Church, according to God's estimation, has as little to do with sin and the world as Christ has; but God's thoughts and our apprehensions are very different things.

We must never forget that every tendency of the human mind not only falls short of but stands actually opposed to all this divine truth about the Church. We have seen how long it was ere man could take hold of it—how it was forced out, as it were, and pressed upon him; and we have only to glance at the history of the Church for the last eighteen centuries to see how feebly it was held and how speedily it was let go. The heart naturally clings to earth, and the thought of an earthly corporation is attractive to it. Hence we may expect that the truth of the Church's heavenly character

will only be apprehended and carried out by a very small and feeble minority. It is not to be supposed that the Protestant reformers exercised their thoughts on this momentous subject. They were made instrumental in bringing out the precious doctrine of justification by faith from amid the rubbish of Romish superstition, and also in letting in upon the human conscience the light of inspiration in opposition to the false and ensnaring dogmas of human tradition. This was doing not a little: yet it must be admitted the position and hopes of the Church engaged not their attention. It would have been a bold step from the church of Rome to the Church of God; and yet it will be found in the end that there is no distinct neutral ground between the two; for every church, or, to speak more accurately, every religious corporation, reared up and carried on by the wisdom and resources of man, be its principle ever so pure and ever so hostile to Catholicism, will be found, when judged by the Spirit, and in the light of heaven, to partake more or less of the element of the Romish system. The heart clings to earth, and will with difficulty be led to believe that the only time wherein God ceases to be manifestly occupied about earth—that the only unnoticed interval in the history of time—is just the period wherein He, by the Holy Ghost, is gathering out the Church to form the body of Christ; and moreover, that when God was dealing publicly with earth, the Church, properly so called, was not contemplated; and that when He shall resume His

public dealings with the earth and with Israel, the Church will be out of the scene.

To understand all this requires a larger measure of spirituality than is to be found with many Christians.* The question naturally arises in the mind of the inquirer after truth, "What is the most scriptural form of Church government?" To what body of Christians should I attach myself?" The answer to such questions is, "Attach yourself to those who are 'endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.'" Sects are not the Church, nor religious parties the body of Christ. Hence, to be attached to the sects is to find ourselves in some of those numerous tributary streams which are rapidly flowing onward into the terrible vortex of which we read in Rev. xvii. and xviii. Let us not be deceived—principles will work, and systems will find their proper level. Prejudice will operate, and hinder the carrying out of those heavenly principles of which we speak. Those who will maintain Paul's gospel will find themselves, like him, deserted and

* The reader will, I trust, understand the distinction between God's *public* actings and His secret operations by His providence. The former ceased when Israel was set aside, and will be resumed when Israel comes again into notice; the latter are going on now. God controls the wheels of government and the counsels of kings to bring about His own great designs.

"Deep in unfathomable mines
Of never-failing skill,
He treasures up His bright designs,
And works His sovereign will."

despised amid the splendid pomp and glitter of the world. The clashing of ecclesiastical systems, the jarring of sects, and the din of religious controversy, will surely drown the feeble voices of those who would speak of the heavenly calling and rapture of the Church. But let the spiritual man who finds himself in the midst of all this sad and heart-sickening confusion remember the following simple principle: *Every system of ecclesiastical discipline, and every system of prophetic interpretation, which would connect the Church, in any one way, with the world, or things of the world, must be contrary to the spirit and principles of the great mystery developed by the Holy Ghost in the apostle of the Gentiles.*

The Church stands in no need of the world's aid in the matter of order or discipline. The Holy Ghost dwells in the Church, broken and scattered though it be, notwithstanding all man's unbelief about it; and if there be any introduction of the earthly or human element, it can only have the sad effect of grieving Him whose presence is the very light of believers and the spring and power of ministry and discipline.

/ And then, as to the Church's hope, "we look for the Saviour," and not for the accomplishment of any earthly event. Thank God, believers are not taught to wait for the revelation of Antichrist, but for the appearing of the blessed Son of God, who loved them and gave Himself for them. Christians should understand that they have nothing to look for save their rapture into the air to meet the Lord.

The world may ridicule the idea, and false teachers may build up systems hostile to it, for the purpose of shaking the faith of the simple-minded; but through grace we will continue to "comfort one another" with the assurance that "the days are at hand, and the effect of every vision."

I must now close this paper. I am deeply conscious of how feebly and incoherently I have developed what I have in my mind concerning the doctrine of the Church; but I have no doubt of its real importance, and feel assured that as the time draws near much light will be communicated to believers about it. At present, it is to be feared, few really enter into it. If it were understood, there would be far less effort to attain a name and a place on earth. Paul, the great witness of the Church's heavenly calling, must have exhibited a poor spectacle in the view of the children of this world, and so will all who maintain his principles and walk in his steps; but he comforted his spirit with the thought that "the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, the Lord knoweth them that are His;" and he also knew that in the very darkest time there would be a few who would "call on the Lord out of a pure heart." May our lot be cast among such, in the midst of this sorrowful scene, until we shall see Jesus as He is, and be made like Him forever!

C. H. M.

