

THE SON OF HIS LOVE

PAPERS ON
THE ETERNAL SONSHIP

By
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“ Giving thanks unto the FATHER Who has . . . translated
us into the kingdom of the SON OF HIS LOVE ”
(*Colossians* i. 12, 13)

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**[NOTE.—Most of the quotations of Scripture in the Papers are taken
from J. N. Darby's New Translation]**

I.—INTRODUCTORY REMARKS : COMING FORTH FROM THE FATHER

THE series of papers which follow were written in the humble attempt to consider afresh what scripture teaches concerning the Eternal Sonship of our Lord Jesus Christ. This doctrine has been recently denied, and the denial of a cherished belief regarding One Whom we love and revere and adore touches our deepest sensibilities, and stirs our whole being to defence.

The first impulse of our renewed nature is to resent such a denial as a deadly affront to the glory of the Essential Being of our Blessed Lord, and to reject the implication as one of the many phases of anti-Christian doctrine against which we are warned. And, indeed, an unhesitating refusal to entertain for even a moment anything derogatory to the Son of God is an effective safeguard for the simple saints ; by turning at once from what appears to be evil, they are preserved from error and its defilement.

But, in the second place, while there is safety in being simple as to evil, the apostle exhorts us to be wise also concerning that which is good (Rom. xvi. 19). And we remember that to this end the scriptures alone are able to make us " wise unto salvation " from the erroneous teachings of men. For this reason, special reference has been made to this authority in these papers, particularly to those words of our Lord and to that witness of the Spirit, which bear upon the pre-incarnate Sonship.

It has been sought to avoid mere carnal contention, and to weigh every written word of God in a spirit of meekness and godly fear, and to receive these profound unfoldings as in the presence of Him to Whose Person they refer. It is always a salutary experience for our

souls when the bold challenges of the enemy drive us to the feet of our Lord for instruction. When Hezekiah received the letter of the king of Assyria reproaching the living God, he sought the presence of Jehovah of hosts, and the Lord heard and answered his prayer for guidance and deliverance (Isa. xxxvii).

The modern challenge of reproach is that the names of God revealed in the New Testament—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—do not apply to Him in the Godhead or Deity. It is said, for example, with reference to these names of the Trinity: “To insist that this order, and the relation of the Persons to One Another, including the names attaching to Them thus seen, are the same as existed in the pre-incarnate absolute (this word is used as the converse of relative) conditions of Deity, is to force or disregard scripture, and is intruding into things we have not seen.”

The gist of this long sentence is that in the pre-incarnate “conditions” of Deity there was, according to their view of scripture, no relationships of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is implied that these relations, expressed in the threefold Name (Matt. xxviii. 19), are associated with the incarnation of our Lord, and that it was then that He became the Son. This latter part of the threefold denial we now wish to examine in the light of scripture.

Coming Forth from the Father

What did our Lord Himself say with regard to His own appearance in this world? Not many of His utterances relate to His pre-incarnate state; but to those that do, we must pay the utmost heed, yet seeking in them to find food for the heart rather than material for the intellect. One word of His, which declared that He was the Son before His entrance into the world, would be sufficient to establish the truth for us, regardless of all human reasoning to the contrary.

In the closing sentences of His farewell instructions to His disciples on the night of His betrayal, the Lord

made reference to His coming into the world, and also to His departure out of it. He had come from a Person to a place, and was leaving that place to return to that Person. He named the Person—the Father; and the place—the world. -His words were: “I came out from the Father and have come into the world; again I leave the world and go to the Father” (John xvi. 28).

Here we have the fact of the incarnation, viewed from its divine side and described as coming into the world. The Son is speaking of what He Himself is inwardly cognizant, or Self-conscious, as it is sometimes expressed. So, on another occasion, the Lord said to the Pharisees, “I know whence I came and whither I go” (John viii. 14). Now, to “His own,” He declares more explicitly whence He came, but not from a place: “I came forth from beside the Father.” Then He adds that He was going away to the same Person from Whom He came out—the Father.

It is evidently implied in these words that the relationship of Father subsisted before He (the Son) came out from Him. And the same pre-incarnate relationship stands revealed in the Lord’s frequent saying that the Father sent Him (the Son); see John v. 30, 37; vi. 29; viii. 16, 18; x. 36; xii. 49; xiv. 24. The sense of these passages, without forcing their meaning, is plain and unmistakable that the Lord came forth from the One Who was the Father, and came into the world; and that He was sent into the world by the One of Whom He speaks both as “the Father” and as “My Father” (John x. 29; xiv. 28; xx. 17, 21).

The relationship, then, of Father and Son existed before the great errand of the Son was undertaken in incarnation. So, illustratively, Jesse was father and David was son before the latter appeared in the camp of Israel with his present of food (1 Sam. xvii). How the gift was enhanced in value because the bearer from Bethlehem was, not the servant but, the son of the giver!

But in describing His incarnation by the words, “I

came out (*exerkomai*) from the Father ” more is taught than the separate existence of the Two Persons and that the Father was known to Him as Father before that coming. The name, Father, is not a mere abstract term, but a name pregnant with the deepest and most precious spiritual meaning. Coming forth from the side of the Father, the Son came into the world enjoying the full communion of the Father’s deep affection, the Father’s secret will, the Father’s eternal counsel. As He said, “ I and the Father are One ” (John x. 30).

Coming Forth from God

Again, Sonship is a relation to God as well as to the Father, and the Lord referred to both names on this occasion. He spoke first as the Son abiding in intimate communion with His Father during His lowly service in the world ; and He made known to His disciples the special love the Father had for them because they had believed on Him, the Son, while the world at large disowned and hated Him. He said encouragingly to them, “ The Father Himself has affection for you, because ye have had affection for Me, and have believed that I came out (*exerkomai*) from God ” (xvi. 27).

What gracious words of appreciation are these, addressed, as they were, to those who that same night “ all forsook Him and fled ! ” The Lord recorded with appreciation their affection for Himself, the “ despised and rejected of men,” which had drawn out the Father’s affections to them. He also noted their faith that He had come forth from beside God ; He did not say, from the Father. Their faith had not reached this point. The measure of their attainment in knowledge was small, for the Holy Spirit had not yet come. But they had received by faith the Lord’s own teaching, “ I came forth from God and am come [from Him] ” (John viii. 42).

This last sentence is remarkable in its twofold bearing. “ I proceeded forth from God ” expresses the Son’s

august movement in the Godhead. "I am come" expresses His historical appearance in the world. In the Godhead, He had His Own place, being "over all, God blessed for ever" (Rom. ix. 5). Yet from God, He came, as He said; but not as One apart from God, for "God was in Christ" (2 Cor. v. 19). Though come in flesh, He still comprehended in Himself all that God is in light and love; for God is light and God is love (1 John i. 5; iv. 16).

Oh, the marvels of grace! Such a divine Plenipotentiary as this coming forth from God could be none other than His Son, God manifest in flesh. This Sonship of the living God, Simon Bar-jonas, taught by the Father's revelation, confessed, and was blessed in doing so (Matt. xvi. 16). And other lips may own Him too, for "whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God" (1 John iv. 15).

It will have been observed that in the New Testament the "Son of the Blessed" is sometimes named "the Son of God," and sometimes "the Son" simply. Each form is appropriate to its context, where its special significance must be sought. As a general distinction with varying shades of meaning, "Son of God" appears to be the name expressive of His coming forth from God, while "Son" is the name expressive of His coming forth from the Father; He is the Son of the Father, the Son of His love (2 John 3; Col. i. 13).

Coming Forth and Being Sent

In pursuing the teaching of the Holy Spirit on this theme, we must not overlook the distinction made in scripture between the Son's coming from God and the Father, and His being sent by God and the Father. Both truths bear upon the Son's pre-incarnate existence, but their distinctness is emphatic, especially when they occur in the same sentence.

Thus, in speaking to His Father, the Son said of His disciples, "The words which Thou hast given Me I

have given them, and they have received [them], and have known truly that I came out from Thee, and have believed that Thou sentest Me" (John xvii. 8). And, to the Jews, the Lord said, "I came forth from God, and am come from Him; for neither am I come of Myself, but *He* has sent Me" (John viii. 42). In both passages, the coming and the sending are named separately and in the same sequence.

It is of the first importance to observe that one statement is supplementary to the other, and not a mere repetition in different words. In His coming forth, the Son acted in His own Personal rights and of His own will; in His being sent, the Son came into the world as the accredited Delegate of God.

"Coming forth" (*exerkomai*) is rarely applied to departure from a person; it more often means leaving a place, as, for instance, when the Lord came out of Pilate's judgment hall: "Then came Jesus forth, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe" (John xix. 5). In the Old Testament (LXX), however, we have an instance of this verb being used for departure from a person. We read that "Moses went out (came forth, *exerkomai*) from Pharaoh" (Exod. viii. 30; x. 18).

This record of the incident may serve to illustrate (though illustration is scarcely needed) the saying of our Lord. But attention is drawn to two persons in each case. In Egypt, Moses, the servant of God, came away from Pharaoh, the obstinate king. In the Lord's words, "I came forth from the Father," there are two Persons antecedent to the coming, the incarnation—"I" and the Father. The "I" is the Son, and He was along with the Father before He came forth from Him. The Father was there, and if the Father, the Son was there also in blessed filial relationship to Him.

The Son came out from God and the Father into the world, where creature measurements of time and space apply. But in the Godhead such terms have no application, and in that timeless and boundless state where the Deity is all, the Father and Son abide in

continuous union and communion. Then, in the fullness of time, from God, from the Father, the Son came forth, and came into the sphere of creation.

In like manner, two Persons are involved in the act of sending—the Sender and the Sent: and “the Father sent the Son to be Saviour of the world” (1 John iv. 14). “The Son” was what He was before sending; the “Saviour of the world” was what He was to become when sent. In this verse, the pre-incarnate Sonship of our Lord lies upon the surface as it does in other passages also.

From God and From the Father

The knowledge of the Father and the Son was not made known to Jehovah's earthly people. And by this revelation of His own Personal relations to God and the Father, the Lord laid the foundation of the heavenly character of Christianity. It was His closing word to His disciples, for whom He had kept the “good wine” until the end.

Having been rejected by Israel and the world as the Messiah and the Son of God, He declared Himself as come from the Father. In Him, the Son, were hidden reserves of blessing superior to the promises made to Abraham, and to all God's dispensational dealings with the earth. And the Lord linked these revealing words with the affection the Father had for them, because they had affection for the Son, and had also believed that He came out from God.

It was to this faith of theirs that He had come out from God that the Lord added the knowledge that He had come forth from the Father, and, again, that He was departing out of the world unto the Father (xvi. 27, 28). They were thus put into possession of these secret divine relations, though they little dreamed what wealth of blessing for them was embodied therein and would be derived therefrom. For the knowledge of the Father and the Son was the basis of the truth which the Holy Spirit at His coming would confirm and

develop for them and within them during the Lord's absence.

Moreover, the Lord Himself had reserved something further which He would say to them concerning God and the Father before He ascended to the Father. After His death and resurrection, His first message to His own related to God and the Father. It not only reminded them of His farewell words on this theme, but added that henceforth they should share in that relationship. To Mary of Magdala the Lord said, "Go to My brethren, and say to them, I ascend to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God" (John xx. 17).

Later, we note a further stage. When the Holy Spirit, through Paul, revealed to the church the unique character of our heavenly calling in Christ, He begins with the declaration that every spiritual blessing that we possess is associated with the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (Eph. i). As God, He has chosen us in Christ before the world's foundation (ver. 4); as Father, He marked us out beforehand for adoption (sonship) to Himself (ver. 5).

If we go on to trace the exposition of the heavenly mystery in this Epistle, which unfolds the dignities of the assembly, we shall not fail to mark repeatedly how closely these truths are connected with God and the Father. Indeed, it is God, so named, Who alone enables the saints to apprehend these exalted truths (see the prayers, i. 17; iii. 14). These blessings in the heavenlies, so widely differentiated from those of the earthly kingdom, flow out of the Lord's message sent to His own through Mary of Magdala—"My Father and your Father . . . My God and your God." We are blessed through and in and with Him, Who is the Son of the Father's love.

The company of His own in the world but not of it are the Father's gift to Him, the Son. And in His resurrection, believers became related to the Father and the Son in the most intimate way—"My Father and your Father." The promised Abrahamic and Davidic

blessings through Him being postponed because He was refused by His own nation, the Son introduced a scheme of celestial blessing founded upon His own Person, apart from His terrestrial offices as King, Priest, and Prophet. And the Lord's saying in private to His own circle, "I came forth from beside the Father," prepared the way for the Holy Spirit's teaching that believers upon Him in the time of His rejection are specially and peculiarly blessed with the Son according to the good pleasure of the Father's will.

From the foregoing considerations, therefore, we believe (1) that the Lord's eternal Sonship is involved in His own words, "I came forth from the Father"; (2) that His revelation of the Father and our association for blessing with the Son is the essence of Christianity, distinguishing it by this heavenly character from all other divine dealings, both past and future; and (3) that the denial of the Eternal Sonship of Christ Jesus is anti-Christian in its effect, since it impairs the doctrine of the Father and the Son, and, also, by consequence, the central truth and privileges of the assembly.

Confessing the Son or Denying Him

The apostle John in his Epistles emphasizes the seriousness of tampering with the doctrine of the Son, which is declared to be inseparable from the doctrine of the Father: "Whoever denies the Son has not the Father either; he who confesses the Son has the Father also" (1 John ii. 23). Christianity is the confession of the Son. To speak disparagingly of the Son is to dishonour both the Son and the Father Whom He revealed.

There are in Christendom many forms of denying the Son, some gross, some subtle. Unitarianism comprehends many varieties of disbelief in the Deity of Christ. Christadelphianism and similarly perverted creeds deny the eternal Sonship of Christ, teaching that the "title," Son of God, should only be predicated of the human nature, born in time. The adherents of

Christian Science, and those of some other modern cults, hold in a restricted sense that Jesus Christ was the Son of God, but all of them deny that He was such from all eternity, that is, in virtue of His Own Essential Being.

These varied forms of antichristian denial are all repulsive and abhorrent to the spiritual mind, since they all agree in denying that Christ is God. Another form is perhaps more specious than the classes mentioned, but hardly seems less deadly in its nature.

In this case, a writer, referring to the "sonship of Christ," asserts that "There is no ground for the assumption that it (the sonship) was a relationship of Deity carried into manhood," And, to this assertion that His sonship began with His manhood, the writer adds, "Luke clearly bases our Lord's sonship on the great divine transaction of the incarnation," quoting Luke i. 35 in its support.

This passage in Luke has often been misunderstood and shamefully mis-handled in connection with this subject. Christadelphians, Swedenborgians, and others have mis-applied it for the like purpose—namely, that of denying that Christ was the Son of God before His conception by the Virgin Mary under the power of the Holy Spirit and the overshadowing of the Highest. They all unite in ignoring the true significance of the angel's words to Mary, "The Holy Thing also which shall be born shall be called Son of God," and in enfeebling their meaning by declaring that He was to be called so merely because of His miraculous birth.

But the truth is that, while He was the Son of God at His birth, He was so before His birth. This name was His Personal right at His incarnation, because He was the Son of the Father from eternity. Other scriptures, such as John's Gospel, the Colossian and the Hebrew Epistles, fully establish the truth of the Eternal Sonship, and Luke i. 35 does not contradict them. The Third Gospel deals specially with the humanity of Christ, and at the outset we learn from it that the "Holy Thing" to be born of Mary should be called

the Son of God. This name is not a new one conferred, but the original one confirmed.

This passage is profound, its subject sacred, and all comment upon it is attended with risk. But, surely, the action of the Holy Spirit was to exclude the poisonous taint otherwise derivable from Mary, and to ensure immaculate holiness for the One to be born by virtue of the miraculous conception. Moreover, the energy of the Deity was engaged in taking this holy humanity into indissoluble union with the Son. "Wherefore," said the angel, "the Holy Thing . . . shall be called Son of God."

By reason of His pre-incarnate Sonship, the Lord Jesus differed *in toto* from Adam and the angels, who are also called in scripture sons of God. They are so designated because of the manner of their creation and the status given them. But our Lord carried His name, Son, into His incarnate state. In Deity, He was the Son ; in flesh, He was the Son of God. The angel's words guard His Holy Person against any evil thought that His eternal Sonship was in any degree weakened or dishonoured when He became flesh. When He appeared in manhood, not in maturity as Adam in Eden, but as the Babe in Bethlehem, He should be called the Son of God, and the Son of the Highest.

The Knowledge of the Father and the Son

The Only-begotten Son has declared God and revealed the Father (John i. 18 ; Matt. xi. 27) ; while the Father reveals the Son (Matt. xvi. 17 ; Gal. i. 16) ; and the knowledge of the Son of God is the theme of the Spirit's ministry in the assembly (Eph. iv. 13), and moreover, the ambition of every Spirit-taught saint (Phil. iii. 8-10).

In the Old Testament, the nation of Israel was taught the unity of Jehovah, their God (Deut. vi. 4) ; in the Christianity of the New Testament, we have revealed to us the Trinity of the Godhead, the " name " of the three Persons to be confessed in baptism (Matt. xxviii.

19). Not only did the Son come forth from the Father Who sent Him, but the Spirit proceeded from the Father, and was sent by the Father and the Son (John xv. 26 ; xiv. 26).

We are now told, however, that there is still an unrent veil of "infinite inscrutability" between us and the true God. Though "we walk in the light as He is in the light," the Deity still dwells in thick darkness, and "God in absoluteness" is unknown and unknowable. The names, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, do not apply to the Persons in the Godhead, because these terms involve "graded relations" and "relative inferiority" between the Persons!

Now is not this speaking "in words taught by human wisdom," and not "in those taught by the Spirit"? We do not find such thought justified by the record God has given of His Son. Instead of gradation and inferiority, scripture teaches unity and equality among the Divine Persons revealed.

We are, for example, taught in Matt. xxviii. 19 that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are comprehended under a single "name." Though there are three Persons, there are not three names, but one; there are not three "grades," but one Tri-personal Unity.* The Lord also said, "I and the Father are One" (John x. 30); and "The Son can do nothing of Himself save whatever He sees the Father doing"; and "The Father knows Me, and I know the Father" (John v. 19; x. 15). These and other passages teach unity and community of nature between the Father and the Son.

While the Incarnate Son continuously displayed absolute subjection to the will of the Father, this sacred servitude was equally the exercise of His own will, uniform, as this will was, both in Deity and in manhood. But the unique glory of the obedience of the Son is at once dimmed by the bold assumption that He was inferior to the Father, whether in essential

* See Appendix A (page 185).

nature or in relationship. Even in human relationships, filial inferiority is not true in all cases. Could it be said that Abraham was inferior to Terah? or Moses to Amram? or David to Jesse? What right then is there to assume inferiority between Divine Persons, the Son and the Father?

It is also alleged that the order in which the Names are presented in scripture indicates that They are not co-equal. But while the order, Father and Son, preponderates in accordance with the scheme of revelation, this order is not invariable, but is reversed in John viii. 16, 18; x. 30; xiv. 10, 11; 1 John ii. 24. In these instances, there are didactic reasons for the reversal, but the exceptions are sufficient to disprove the unsavoury theory that the Son is inferior to the Father because He is mentioned in the second place.

Again, we are informed that the cherished meditations of the saints on John i. 18 have been unwarrantably exaggerated. The passage, it is said, is true of the Son in manhood, but not eternally in the Deity. "In the bosom of the Father" was the position "*reached*" by the Only-begotten Son in declaring God, but has no prior application!

Such statements are surely self-condemned. And on this account, there is no need to dwell here upon the awkward and jejune attempt made to prove this interpretation by the Greek preposition. It will immediately shock every honest and pious soul to be told that the words, "the Only-begotten Son, Who is in the bosom of the Father," must be understood to mean that the Only-begotten Son *came into* the bosom of the Father. Such an exposition honours neither the Father nor the Son, and is opposed to the whole tenor of scripture, especially of John's Gospel and Epistles.

Though the Son spoke to His Father of being loved by Him before the foundation of the world (John xvii. 24), it is now contended that only in manhood did He come into the Father's affections, into the Father's bosom. And Luke xvi. 22 is cited in an effort to prove by analogy of phrase that this is the meaning of John

i. 18. Are we, however, content to believe that as Lazarus was not in Abraham's bosom until the angels carried him there, so He Who is the Only-begotten Son was not in the Father's bosom until He "came" there in the days of His flesh?

What is gained by these denials of the eternity of Sonship? If it is denied that He Who appeared among men as the Son was not in the bosom of the Father, where was He then? If He revealed as Son was not always the Object of supreme affection to Him revealed as the Father, in what fashion was He regarded by Him? They give no reply, for, they say, nothing is known. They take away the eternal glory of the Only-begotten Son, Who is the worshipping joy of the believing soul, and what do they offer in exchange? Only a locked door, and an impassable barrier—the inscrutableness of abstract form and relations—an Unknown Deity!

II.—THE FATHER'S LOVE

UNDOUBTEDLY the love of the Father is the most exalted theme in the revelation of Christianity. "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called the sons [children] of God" (1 John iii. 1). The love of the Father specially irradiates the family circle of grace. The love of God is for the whole world in its illimitable measure, and is proclaimed to all men for the ears of faith. "God so loved the world that He gave His Only-begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John iii. 16). And nothing can separate those who believe from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. viii. 39). But the **Father's love!**

What Manner of Love?

What sort of love, then, is it that the Father has given us, and that we are exhorted to behold? Is it a love which was awakened and even caused by our dire need? We are too apt to assume hastily and somewhat selfishly that the Father's love derives its special character from the fact that we, the sinful and unworthy subjects of divine grace, are, because of its abounding energy, enabled to stand before Him in the relationship of beloved children. And if this is our only viewpoint of His love, we may learn perhaps a little of its depths, but we shall miss its invisible heights altogether, as well as its boundless length and breadth.

No, love receives its prime quality from the Lover rather than from the loved one. And our highest joy, therefore, is not that we are the objects of divine love, though we should never forget the love that made us and calls us the children of God. We who know

Him that is from the beginning rejoice, not only in the love that is of God, but in the God Who is love (1 John iv. 7, 8), in Him Who loves as only the God Who is love can love. Moreover, in a deeper intimacy still, we bless the Father, not merely, nor even chiefly, because we are loved of Him, but because the Father Himself loves us, and because He loves us as only the Father Who is God can love. **The Father's love !**

Incomprehensible Love

Here it would be fitting to pause in adoring contemplation of the Father Whose love has been revealed to us. And we may also ask ourselves whether we really understand " what manner " of love the Father's is. We speak to one another of His love, we sing of that love, we rejoice in that love, but what do we know of the extent and manner of that love? We believe sometimes that the tiny vessels of our poor hearts are filled to overflowing with that love ; but can we take the measure of its " ocean fullness " from our own conception or experience of it ?

It is useless, of course, to attempt to measure the love of God by man's cubits and ephahs, and yet how can we worship the Father in spirit and truth unless we know " what manner " of love He has bestowed upon us? Its staggering immensity may fill us with amazement, as the disciples were amazed when they beheld the behaviour of the Lord in the tempest, saying, " What manner of man is this that even the winds and the sea obey him ? " (Matt. viii. 27). The mighty power of the Lord bewildered them, but astonishment is not the worship in spirit and in truth which the Father seeks from His worshippers.

The Father's love learned in the Son

But we who are begotten of God ought not to be bewildered by the love of the Father. Its greatness may be, and is, utterly beyond our comprehension, but

its beauty and its sweetness are not beyond our contemplation and delight, for we behold the blessedness of the Father's name revealed in the soft radiance of the Son. Whoever has seen the Son has seen the Father. Jesus said to Philip, "Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me?" (John xiv. 10.) In the Son therefore we know the Father, and in the Son we learn the Father's love, which otherwise would baffle our understanding and overwhelm our hearts.

We ought not to lose sight altogether of the fact that the love of God the Father is in itself, abstractedly, an incomprehensible subject to us. This humbles us. We cannot describe His love to others nor communicate to them its sweetness. We cannot understand it even for ourselves. At the same time the knowledge of the Father is characteristic of the youngest in the family of God: "I write to you, little children [babes], because ye have known the Father" (1 John ii. 13). The newly-begotten are here said to be in a place of realized relationship to God the Father. The babes even know that One is their Father, even God, and also that they are dependent upon Him for divine nature and its nurture, for love and for counsel. How could they know the Father's love apart from the Son?

God Unseen, the Father Declared

We are now considering especially the love of the Father, made known to us in the New Testament. God is the general name of the Deity, reflecting His absolute nature as the self-subsisting One, beyond creature knowledge. But the name, Father, implies the name, Son, also, the two being correlated terms. Moreover, the name, Son, implies, among other things, the most familiar acquaintance with the affections of the Father. Hence we read, "No one has seen God at any time; the only-begotten Son, Who is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared [Him]" (John i. 18). The Father, therefore, is now made known

In this instructive passage both names, **God and Father**, occur. On the one hand, the inscrutability of God in His essential Being is first stated ; “ dwelling in unapproachable light ; Whom no man has seen, nor is able to see,” as it is expressed in another place (1 Tim. vi. 15, 16). On the other hand, the same text shews that what the creature could not by any means discover has been made known by the Son, Who alone knew Him, being the Only-begotten Son in the bosom of the Father. Marvellous revelation this ! for it includes not only God’s hand in its omnipotent power, not only God’s mind in omniscient wisdom and knowledge, but also, and chiefly in this passage, God’s heart in its infinite and eternal love as the Father.

“ Yet deeper, if a calmer, joy
The Father’s love shall raise,
And every heart find sweet employ
In His eternal praise.

Nor is its sweetness, now unknown,
Well proved in what is done ;
Our Father’s love with joy we own,
Revealed in Christ the Son.”

The Secret of the Father’s Love

Thus, the secrets of the Father’s bosom are now made known, the love of the Father being declared by and in the Son.

“ . . . The Son Who knows—
He only—all His love ;

Dwells in His bosom ; knoweth all
That in that bosom lies ;
And came to earth to make it known
That we might share His joys.”

Who indeed, save the Son of God, could know the heart of God ? Who, save the Only-begotten Son, could interpret to man the profound emotions of the Godhead ? There is an unfathomable depth of riches in the wisdom and knowledge of God ; His judgments

are unsearchable ; His ways are untraceable (Rom. xi. 33). But how much more intimately associated with the mysteries of the Godhead is the love of the Father ! for God Himself is love (1 John iv. 8, 16) as truly and absolutely as God is light (1 John i. 5).

Competency to undertake the revelation of this love of the Father is found alone in Him Who is described in the brief phraseology of John i. 18 as " the only-begotten Son, Who is in the bosom of the Father." Love is essentially comprehended in the relationships of Father and Son. " The Father loves the Son, and has given all things [to be] in His hand " (John iii. 35). " That the world may know that I [the Son] love the Father, and as the Father has commanded Me, thus I do " (John xiv. 31). There was, therefore, according to the testimony of the Son Himself on earth, mutual love between the Father and the Son. Nor was this love a new experience to the Son, for He also declared, " Thou [the Father] lovedst Me before the foundation of the world " (John xvii. 24), thereby revealing Himself as the Eternal Son of the Father's love.

III.—THE BELOVED OF THE FATHER

WE may do well to meditate still further upon the Son as the Revealer of the Father. In this work He alone is before our adoring hearts, for He alone is competent to make the Father known. His own words come to us : “ The world has not known Thee, but I have known Thee ” (John xvii. 25 ; also viii. 55). This conscious knowledge of the Father by the Son was personal to Himself, and from any such intimacy the world of created intelligences was necessarily excluded. But if the Son’s omniscience embraced all things concerning the Father, how fully and perfectly He knew the Father’s love ! how able too to declare that love !

In heaven’s language, the Son must be One upon Whom heavenly love rests. Accordingly when the title, “ Jesus Christ our Lord,” is associated in scripture with the Son of God (as in Rom. i. 3), the very name, “ Son,” implies that the love of the Godhead (for “ God is love ”) is in active exercise towards Him. Moreover, there being the Son, Who is loved, there is also the Father, Whose love is ever proceeding to the Son. Could there be a Father’s bosom or a Father’s house without the **Son of the Father’s love** ?

The Son may in the fullness of time assume the office of a Servant, and thereby invest His service with His own incomparable dignity, with absolute fidelity, and with infinite worth, but, apart from and before all such service, deepest affection is conveyed in the relationship of Son. In the imperfect examples of sonship found in this sin-laden world, it is even so. When David was “ much moved ” at the news of the death of wicked and rebellious Absalom, the paternal love of his bleeding heart stood revealed in the pathetic repetition of two words, “ my son.” With bitter tears he said, “ O my

son Absalom, my son, my son, my son Absalom, would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son ” (2 Sam. xviii. 33). Though without a princely virtue, Absalom’s filial relationship to David remained. “ My son,” said the king. Death had touched a chord in the father’s love, however unworthy its object, and however wronged the father had been by that son.

The Beloved Son

Our theme of meditation just now is the highest and holiest, and we may surely say the sweetest, of all themes—God’s Beloved Son. Leaving ourselves and all the world out of account, as unworthy objects of divine love, we desire to contemplate the ineffable love that links the Father and the Son. This love is not vague and visionary, but is made the subject of definite revelation. Scripture contains actual expressions of mutual love between Themselves. Such utterances are of the supremest order of communion in the Godhead, and have been preserved by the Holy Spirit for our reverent meditation and worship. Nothing could be choicer than these Divine endearments expressed in human words for earthly ears.

Oh, what heavenly treasures the word of God contains! Are we alive to their intrinsic value? How transcendently gracious that we should possess the inspired record of what the Father said to the Son, and of what the Son said to the Father! It is indeed remarkable to have the Father’s saying, “ Thou art My beloved Son,” and to have also the Son’s words to Him, “ The love wherewith Thou hast loved Me ” (Mark i. 11 ; John xvii. 26). In the hearing of men the Father acknowledged His Beloved Son, and the Son acknowledged the Father’s love for Him. This is indeed the unveiling of a holy mystery ; but it was needful for us to know it, that we might the better understand the truth revealed concerning the Persons of the Father and the Son, and so worship the Father “ in truth,” as He seeks (John iv. 23).

The Father's Love for the Son

With all meekness and lowliness of mind, we listen to every word of the Incarnate Son as He reveals the Father in the course of His ministry. But when His subject is the love of the Father for Himself, the Son, our interest is intensified to the utmost. This is a secret of the heaven of heavens, of the "heavenly things" of the dwelling-place of God, and it concerns the Beloved Son of the Father, Who is also our Beloved. "The Father loves the Son." The theme is mighty, but the words are simple. Such words, easily uttered, easily remembered, are suited to the "babes" of the household of God, to whom the Holy Spirit reveals the "depths of God." The Son, speaking out of that intimate acquaintance with the Father, ever possessed and enjoyed by Himself only, declares in our wondering ears, "The Father loves the Son" (John v. 20).

We note that the act of loving is placed in the present tense: "the Father loves," not "has loved." It was true on the day of utterance in Jerusalem without doubt, and in all the days of His humiliation assuredly. But the saying unfolds much more also. That love is necessarily true throughout the co-existence of the Father and the Son. Looking onward or backward, whenever there was a Father to love and a Son to be loved, it was true that "the Father loves the Son and shews Him all things that Himself does." Such love o'erleaps all barriers of beginning and ending, and is the outflow of eternal relationship.

How overwhelming are these precious words, redolent with the ineffable joy of all that Sonship meant to His heart Who uttered them! The love of the Father for the Son is immeasurable and undefinable. We are lost in its immensity. In human love, our thoughts are more at home. We understand the record that the love of David exceeded that of Jonathan, that Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah, and that the assembly at Ephesus had a "first" love which was lost; these who loved had "like passions" with ourselves. But

the statement, "The Father loves the Son," we cannot handle with our understandings, for, apart from divine unfoldings, we know neither the Father nor the Son in their essential Being; how then can we know Their mutual love?

Food for the Heart

Why, then, did the Lord make Himself known to us as the Beloved of the Father? Not that the mind should seek to comprehend what is incomprehensible, but that the hearts of His own should believe His words, and cherish this glimpse into the profundities of a love exceeding the limits of time and space.

"The Father loves!" What infinite emotions, what unfathomable depths of affection are in the Father's heart, since in essential Being "God is love"! It is true that "God only knows the love of God." And we may say also that only the infinite and immeasurable heart of the Son can receive in its fullness and reciprocate with equal fullness the outgoings of the infinite and immeasurable heart of the Father. **"The Father loves the Son!"** Such is the communion above the heavens revealed for those who now worship in the "holiest." Whatever love fills the Father's heart finds its perfect acceptance and fullest response in the heart of the Son. Should not this love be the key-note of our loftiest praise?

Has this revelation of matchless love no interest for our hearts? **The Father!** It is He Who sent the Son a propitiation for our sins. **The Son!** It is He Who revealed the Father to us. We are stirred as we remember that the Father Himself loves **us**, and that the Son of God loves **us** and gave Himself **for us**. It is indeed fitting that we should rejoice that the love of the Father and the Son rests upon **us**. But ought we not to be stirred to a deeper depth by the knowledge that, apart from ourselves, love is the eternal bond between the Father and the Son? Shall the bride be insensible to the glories of her Beloved, Who exceeds

every other beloved, since He is the Beloved of the Father before time began ?

The Undated Love of the Father

The context (John v. 17-21) of the Lord's utterance, "The Father loveth the Son," contains most weighty testimony to the personal glory of the Son. The Lord does not deny, but confesses the charge of the Jews that He "said that God was His own Father," for "the Son can do nothing of Himself save whatever He sees the Father doing : for whatever things He does, these things also the Son does in like manner." The Son does the same things as the Father and in the same manner. There was, therefore, absolute equality without independence.

"He had deigned to take the place of man, without forfeiting for a moment His divine nature and rights ; and as such He disclaims the least shade of self-exaltation, or independence of His Father " (W.K.). There was perfect communion with the Father, for He does nothing apart from the Father, but does what He sees the Father is doing. Moreover, in exercising the divine function of giving life, the Son, equally with the Father, " quickens whom He will," acting in His own right.

Now these Godhead claims of union and communion with the Father (ver. 19) and also of quickening whom He will (ver. 21) are associated with the claim that the Father dearly loves (*philei*) the Son, and shows Him all things which He Himself does (ver. 20). How fully this threefold claim explains the co-operation of the Father and the Son : " My Father worketh hitherto, and I work " (ver. 17). As love is the essence of the Divine Being, so love is the mainspring or motive of conjoint divine working by the Father and the Son.

Love being essential to the Godhead, because " God is love," love has neither beginning nor ending. Because God is eternal (Deut. xxxiii. 27 ; Rom. xvi. 26), love is eternal. Before there was a creature to be

loved, "God is love." But that love in the past eternity required an object. A love that is inert, dormant, a mere abstraction, has no affinity with the love of God (1 John iii. 17; iv. 20, 21). Love must love, and love another.

Where, then, before the foundation of the world, did love find its necessary and worthy object? The Uncreated Son Himself supplies the answer: "Thou lovedst Me before the foundation of the world" (John xvii. 24). Within the circle of the Godhead love was always all-pervading. The love of the Father ever rested upon the Son Who, becoming incarnate, testified what He had seen, and spoke what He knew: "Thou lovedst Me before the foundation of the world." Thou, the Father, didst love Me, Thy Son, before the foundation of the world: in the light of this solemn declaration, who dare doubt that the Speaker is the Eternal Son?

IV.—LOVED AND IN THE GLORY OF SONSHIP BEFORE THE WORLD'S FOUNDATION

“THOU lovedst Me before the foundation of the world” (John xvii. 24) are the recorded words of the Incarnate Son, uttered in intimate and solemn intercourse with His Father. We would not seek to make ourselves “over-wise” in matters relating to the Deity, nor would we pry into matters unrevealed; but a question in connection with this passage has recently been forced upon us. Was the Son speaking of the love which rested upon Him as **the Son** before the foundation of the world? or was He speaking of the love which rested upon Him then, but was altogether apart from and prior to His being the Son? More briefly, did He speak of being loved before the world's foundation as the Son, or as an Unnamed, Unknown Person in Absolute Deity?

Our reluctant hearts are driven to this abstruse inquiry because it is stated by some that the Son was only such “in manhood,” and, therefore, could not have been loved by the Father before the foundation of the world as the Son.

We believe, however, that this scripture itself and its context answer the question conclusively for all simple minds. They teach us that the Lord claimed the love of the Father as a love which was peculiarly and exclusively His own from all eternity, He being then and always the Beloved Son of the Father. For Who is it that is represented here, pouring out His heart in intercession with the Father for His own who are in the world? “**Thou lovedst Me.**” Who is speaking? Is it One unknown to the Father as Son before the days of His flesh? Let this scripture itself answer.

Who is the Speaker in John xvii?

Examining the scripture, we see (1) that the evangelist describes the Speaker as Jesus (ver. 1); (2) that the Speaker describes Himself to the Father as "Thy Son" and as "Jesus Christ" (vers. 1-4); and (3) that the Speaker (ver. 5) claims to have had glory with the Father before the world was, and to have been then with the Father, not as His Servant, but as His Son.

The Speaker, therefore, is the Eternal Son, the Son "from everlasting," the Son "before the world was," and now He seeks that He may be glorified as the Incarnate Son in heaven. Let us tarry to contemplate these great truths a little further.

Jesus Christ, the Son of God

(1) In John's historical narrative, the Holy Spirit records that Jesus was speaking: "These things Jesus spoke, and lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said . . ." (John xvii. 1). The name, Jesus, without any addition of title, is a characteristic feature of the Fourth Gospel, where it is found much oftener than in any of the others. It occurs about 250 times in John, and only about 350 times in Matthew, Mark, and Luke taken together. Here then we read, "Jesus spoke;" it was Jehovah the Saviour, as that name means; it was "Jesus Christ, the Son of God." How marvellous that we should be permitted to hear the words of Jesus addressed to the Father!

Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father

(2) In the first part of His intercession, we find that the Lord Jesus speaks, using the third person, to the Father about Himself as the Son and as Jesus Christ. He said, "Father, the hour is come; glorify Thy Son that Thy Son may also glorify Thee. . . . And this is the eternal life, that they should know Thee, the only

true God, and Jesus Christ Whom Thou hast sent." He designates Himself "Thy Son" and "Jesus Christ."

This passage is most instructive to us. The words in the third personal form convey to us in a marked and emphatic manner the special character in which the Lord presents His intercession. He does not plead as Son of David or as the Son of man for Israel or the Gentiles, but as Son of God for those given Him in the hour of His denial by His earthly people.

Before the Father, with eyes lifted to heaven, on the point of His departure unto the Father, the Lord Jesus in His intercession takes the place of the Son of the Father ("Thy Son"). He is not interceding as the Son of man, nor as the Messiah. He is addressing not Jehovah, but the Father. His pleadings are not for Israel that they may be blessed nationally, nor for created things that they may be purged from the blight of sin. Old Testament promise and prophecy dealing with these spheres of reconciliation and with the world-wide display of divine righteousness and glory are placed in abeyance on account of His own rejection by the world. Nevertheless, as the Father's Son He has personal rights and privileges which are unaffected by this sinful unbelief of man, and in virtue of these rights, He is now interceding for His own company—for those who received Him (John i. 10-13).

Accordingly, the Lord Jesus presents as the basis of His intercession His own personal relationship of Son to the Father, a relationship anterior to the world's existence, and, therefore, independent of the divine plans for the world's complete regeneration, though, as Son, He will in due time be its sole channel of blessing, all things being placed in His hand.

The prophetic revelation of administrative righteousness in the world must wait its fulfilment; but the Father's love is not stemmed in its outflow by man's obduracy, for it is made known by the Son, Who ever dwelled in it, never more nor less so than He did in manhood. Moreover, this love was made known by

Him to a circle which had received no prophetic mention in the Old Testament programme of the world's history; but this circle of lowly believers is now linked up with the love enjoyed by the Son before the foundation of the world.

But the Son had on earth already revealed the Father's name and the Father's love to those whom the Father had given Him out of the world. For this company the Son prays, describing them as the Father's gift to Him (vers. 2, 6, 9, 11, 12, 24; also xviii. 9; vi. 37, 39). And He makes request on their account to the Father because, having glorified the Father on earth, He looks to be glorified by Him in heaven, while they would be still in the world.

But in His prayer to the Father the Son speaks in the full consciousness of His own equality with the Father, as One able to pronounce upon the completeness of His own work, and to estimate the glory that work had in the Father's eyes. What was that work? That "they might know Thee." And in order that His own might have this knowledge of the Father, the Son had given them eternal life.

It is not, therefore, as the Mediator between God and man, nor as the Servant of Jehovah that the Lord Jesus is speaking, but as the Son, in the essential glory of His own Person as the Son of the Father, Who had glorified the Father on earth in respect of His manifestation of that love which had no beginning, for "God is love."

Having then, in manhood, revealed that love on earth, He, the Incarnate Son, now seeks to be glorified in heaven. As another has said "He was Son before time began; He had, therefore, of course, glory with the Father before the world was. But He had taken the place of servant in manhood on earth, and now asks that the Father should glorify Him along with Himself with the glory which He had along with Him eternally. A man to everlasting, He would receive all from the Father, albeit Son from everlasting; and when glorified it is that He may glorify the Father. Such is perfect

love and devotedness ” to the Father—the unique love and devotedness of the Son.

The Glorification of the Incarnate Son

(3) From verse 4 the form of diction is changed to the first person, and the words used in speaking of Himself by the Lord Jesus from this point onward are “ I ” and “ Me.” In verse 1 He requested, “ Glorify Thy Son ” ; now it is, “ Glorify Me, Thou Father, along with Thyself, with the glory which I had along with Thee before the world was ” (ver. 5). There is, as we have noted, a didactic significance underlying the variation in the phraseology of the two utterances, but they were both uttered by the same Person. They show that the One about to be glorified would enter the glory He had along with the Father “ before the world was,” and that the Speaker was the Son in manhood.

With deepest reverence let us con over these words again that we may learn more of their true import, while we mark their intimate connection. First, the Lord Jesus says, “ Glorify Thy Son that Thy Son may glorify Thee ” (ver.1). Consumed with zeal for the Father’s house, the Son, Who had glorified the Father on earth, now sought to be glorified on high that He might from thence continue to glorify the Father.

Having introduced Himself as the Son (ver. 1), the Speaker with the same uplifted eyes, with the same gracious lips (ver. 5) said, “ Glorify Me.” There is not a syllable to suggest that there is a change of identity of the Speaker in these closely connected utterances, the second of which reaches back to the eternal ages. For the Speaker desired of the Father definitely, emphatically (“ Thou Father ”) that He Himself might be glorified “ along with [*para*] Thyself,” at Thine own side ; and, further, this glory was the very same glory the Speaker had “ along with [*para*] Thee,” at Thy side, “ before the world was.”

The language of this petition forbids us to think

that this glory of the Speaker was not eternal, since the glory is not one which He *began* to have at some past period, nor one which He would have for the first time when this prayer should be fulfilled, but it is the glory which He "had" before the world was.

Considering this glory yet further, we learn that the Speaker's glory was not one derived from creatorial activities, since it was possessed by Him "before the world was." It is the glory, external and anterior to the creation, which blazed in infinite excellence "before the world was." It is the self-contained, ineffable glory which the Speaker had when, distinct personally from the Father, He was along with the Father "before the world was." It is the transcendent glory which the Father abiding in the mutually complacent love of the Godhead beheld in the Uncreated Eternal Son, Who was in His bosom before the foundation of the world.

"Before the world was." What perfections shine in every word of the Son! The world is the arena where sin dishonoured God, and where, according to purpose, the glory of God will eventually be displayed with even greater brilliance than at the creation. But the advent of the Saviour of the world was attended with such an outbreak of man's hostility that the divine schemes for the redemption of the world from its bondage to sin and Satan were postponed.

The Son, therefore, "knowing all things that should come upon Him," turns to what was in the beginning before the world even existed—the things associated with His own glory by the side of the Father, and the love the Father had for Him. As the Incarnate Son, He sought that He might enter that glory at His ascension, and be displayed in it along with the Father.

But while the Son, leaving the circumstances of His humiliation, entered that glory at His ascension, it is from the wording of the petition clear that the Speaker "had" that same glory in the beginning. For if the Father Whom the Speaker addressed was Father before the world was, then the Speaker, Who was with Him

before the world was, was His Son before the world was.

Some who admit "the Person was there" in the beginning assert that it is going beyond scripture "to give Him a personal name or designation." But here scripture itself, that is, the Holy Spirit, gives Him the name of Son. The Speaker, or the Person speaking, in verse 5 discloses that He was with the Father before world was; and the same Person in verse 1 describes Himself to the Father as "Thy Son," that is, the Son of the Father; while in both verses the Speaker directly addresses the "Father" by name.

This scripture therefore presents to us, that it might become an element of our worship, a marvellously unbroken continuity in the ever-blessed Person of the Son. Before the foundation of the world the Son is at the Father's side in His own characteristic personal glory, beloved by the Father as such. In the incarnation of the Son, the union of the two natures of God and man is so absolute that the Personality of the Son remains intact, and He in manhood is as ever "over all, God blessed for ever" (Rom. ix. 5). Then at the ascension, the Incarnate Son assumes His own pre-incarnate glory, but the Person is the same. The Son is the "I AM," unchangeable and absolute, in the beginning, now, and evermore; and we fall on our faces before Him in adoring worship.

The Son's Glory before the World was

When the Son speaks of His eternal glory along with the Father, His personal dignity and worth in our eyes are not diminished, but enhanced beyond degree. We gladly worship the Son even as we worship the Father, knowing that the Incarnate Son is now glorified along with the Father with the glory He had in His Personal Being from everlasting.

It was not that the Lord asked "to be re-invested with" that glory, as if He had "left, as to outward form and position, the glory of Deity." Could there

be Deity without the glory of Deity? Nor can we properly speak of the "outward form and position" of Deity, save with reference only to what appeared to men's eyes. Glory may be present, though invisible to human sight. The glory of Jehovah passed by Moses, hidden in the cleft rock and covered with the divine hand. Jehovah in His glory was there, but Moses saw only the "back parts" (Exod. xxxiii). The glory of Deity may be veiled or concealed from men, but is never obliterated so as to require renewal or restoration. As the Essential Being of the Godhead is unchangeable, so is His Essential glory.

Scripture is silent as to the Son surrendering the glory proper and peculiar to His Person. Indeed, the very fact that He was the Eternal Son in manhood imparted its unique quality to His service. His obedience as far as death, the death of the cross, was magnified beyond all comparison because He was "in the form of God," retaining the full glory of Sonship.

The very words we are considering provide a vivid illustration of this spirit of obedience: "Now, O Father, glorify Thou Me." He Who humbled Himself waits the Father's pleasure for His exaltation. The Son, become a servant, Who glorified the Father on earth, yet abstains from glorifying Himself in heaven. Though possessing full personal rights to the glory He had with the Father before the world was, He submits, in accordance with the perfection of the Incarnate Son, to the good pleasure of the Father for His glorification on high.

There is, therefore, exquisite moral glory in the petition itself. Never could such a plea ascend to the Father from other lips than His. As Son, He asks that, **as Man**, He may be glorified in heaven with the personal glory which was His from everlasting. Moreover, this plea He grounds, not upon His own personal glory and eternal relationship as Son, but upon His glorification on earth of the Father, and the completion of the work given Him to do, concerning which He is Himself competent to express a true judgment before

the Father. "I have glorified Thee . . . I have finished the work."

Such language would be extravagant for anyone not in the glory of Sonship before the world was. But it was then that the Son was along with the Father, exhibiting in Himself the full excellence of that glory peculiar to Himself as the Son, while the Son in that glory was the ineffable delight of the Father. How inspiring to the hearts of those begotten of God to know that the eternal love in the bosom of the Father found perfect response in the heart of the Eternal Son! What glory the eyes of the Father saw in the Son throughout that past eternity when God was all! What profound complacency filled the Father's heart as He contemplated the glory of the Son before the world was! And not less so when He beheld that Son in manhood, His Only-begotten Son in Whom He was well pleased!

How sweet that we should be given this glimpse into the inscrutable past by One on earth Who alone knew it! For we now know that before all ages and generations the love of the Father rested in an unbroken and delighted tranquillity upon the Son Who was along with Him in His personal glory. That personal love and personal glory, the Son possessed and enjoyed "from everlasting," before all worlds. Now, having glorified the Father on earth, as the obedient Son in manhood He desires to be glorified with that glory which was ever His as the Eternal Son of the Father.

V.—THE ONLY-BEGOTTEN SON OF GOD

THE revelation in the world of the love of God was made by the Only-begotten Son of God. The revelation was personal, and was not a communication made to Him. No creature was competent to undertake this revelation. An angel could have conveyed to man a message of what was due from him to God, but the highest celestial intelligence could not manifest what was in the heart of the God of love towards man. Since "God is love," only omniscience can fully know that infinite love, and only omnipotence can adequately declare it. These all-comprehending attributes, which no creature could possess, are fully possessed by the Son of God in His essential Being. Moreover, this knowledge and competency to be the Revealer of divine love are expressed simply in scripture by the designation of the Son of His love—"the Only-begotten Son of God."

The Gift of the Only-Begotten Son of God

The term "only-begotten" (*monogenees*) is applied to the Son of God five times in the New Testament, occurring only in the writings of John (John i. 14, 18 ; iii. 16, 18 ; 1 John iv. 9). In most of these passages, the special association of this term with the manifestation of God's love determines its significance. The Only-begotten Son of God is the One peculiarly competent to be the Revealer of the eternal love of God ; accordingly, He is presented as such in the Holy Spirit's record of this revelation.

Thus, when the Lord, after His instruction of Nicodemus in the earthly things of the kingdom of God, passed to heavenly themes, He introduced

Himself as the Only-begotten Son of God (John iii. 16, 18). As the "Son of man Who is in heaven," He, the Omnipresent One, then spoke of love for the world of which He had been eternally conscious in the dwelling-place of God. What could be more peculiarly appropriate as a heavenly theme than the love of God? What heavenly gift to the world could be more transcendent than the Only-begotten Son? And these—the gift and its motive—He unfolded and enfolded in the precious combination—"Son" and "love."

Our Lord announced this love of God in words happily familiar: "God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son." There are many marvels in this profound utterance. It is marvellous in our eyes that **God** should love, and it is marvellous, too, that He should love the **world**, fallen into sin and ruled by Satan, as it is. And these marvels are among the "heavenly things" presented to our faith in this sentence.

Moreover, the intensity of this love is also declared: "God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son." The measure of God's love of the world is to be seen in His giving One Who was peculiarly and exclusively the object of His affection—His Only-begotten Son. The stupendous wonder to our faith is that One was along with God in this unique relationship of Son, and God gave that One. This is surely the teaching of the text, not that God's gift was One Who became His Only-begotten Son in manhood, that is, in the process and at the time of giving. If Sonship began in incarnation, why do we not read that God gave the Son of man? But, no, the Only-begotten Son of God was given.

Let us remember Who is speaking: "He that came down from heaven, even the Son of man Who is in heaven." He speaks as a competent witness of a heavenly relationship—of Himself, God's Only-begotten Son. "He that cometh from above is above all. And what He hath seen and heard, that He testifies" (John iii. 31, 32). The Son was witnessing on earth

of what was true in heaven, and therefore, Sonship in the Godhead was true before incarnation and before He came down from heaven as the Given Son. This is the Son's own witness concerning Himself.

Whom then did God spare (Rom. viii. 32), and deliver up for us all? The Holy Spirit answers, "His own Son." God did not withhold this unspeakable gift, but yielded up His own Son in the spontaneity of His love. To think otherwise of Him than as the Eternal Son is to detract from the personal glory of God's incomparable gift. When the Son of man ascended into heaven He entered **where He had been before**, as He asked His incredulous disciples, "What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where He was **before**?" (John vi. 62). He claimed the omnipresence of Jehovah, Who is "God in heaven above, and upon the earth beneath: there is none else" (Deut. iv. 39), being as the Son, both in heaven and on earth simultaneously (John iii. 13).

His Sonship before He became God's gift to the world

God gave His Son, not a servant. The force and point of this great text are only to be perceived by noting that God gave to the world the One Who was His Only-begotten Son. Consider it to mean that God gave the One Who would in manhood enter into the entirely new relationship of the Only-begotten Son, and the sublime utterance of the Lord is made comparable to God's employment of various servants in His governmental dealings with Israel and the world.

We read, for instance, that God gave the people of Israel judges (Acts xiii. 20), that is, certain men who became leaders and rulers of the people. But there was nothing in Gideon, Samson, or any of them to magnify the love of God. These servants in themselves possessed little moral worth. They did not magnify their office by reason of their personal excellence; it was rather that their office magnified them. God gave these servants to carry out definite tasks; they were

not only subordinate to Him in office, but inferior to Him in nature.

But the gift of John iii. 16 is of a different order entirely. Nothing is said here about the work committed to the Son. The value of the gift is measured by the unique personality of the One given—God's Only-begotten Son. Let us for illustration consider an Old Testament instance. What was it that so enhanced the value of Abraham's surrender to God? The patriarch gave up his only-begotten son (Heb. xi. 17). Isaac was the son **before** they ascended Mount Moriah together, and **before** he was laid upon the altar. In the eyes of Jehovah, the ethical value of Abraham's act of faith was measured by the one whom he gave at His bidding—not Ishmael, but his son, his "only son," Isaac, whom he loved, in whom Jehovah's promises to him were centred. Abraham surrendered the darling of his heart, and God appraised his obedience of faith in terms of his affection for Isaac (Gen. xxii. 12, 16).

In like manner, God's gift is measured by the Person given. The degree of God's love—the "so"—is commensurate only with the worth of His Only-begotten Son. He was the Only-begotten Son **before** He was given; and **before** He was sent into the world. Sonship is inseparable from His Person, and does not describe an official or mediatorial relationship assumed by Him or bestowed upon Him for service. God gave **His Son**, not a servant, yet, blessed be His holy name, though He was the Son, He became the Servant to serve both God and man.

Believing on His Name

In verse 16, we read of believing "on Him," and in verse 18 of believing "on His name." "He that believes not has been already judged, because he has not believed on the name of the Only-begotten Son of God." It is noteworthy that "**name**" is the word used here, not "**title**."

A name denotes the identity of a person, being the term distinguishing that person from others. A title is the term indicating office or service, and the same title may apply to a number of different persons. King is a title, denoting regal dignity, and belonged to David, Solomon, Josiah, Nebuchadnezzar, and to all holding that office. David, however, was the name of the anointed son of Jesse. There were many entitled kings in Israel, but only one named David.

The name then is personal to him who bears it, and when it was divinely given it exactly suited him : thus, the Lord said to one of the apostles, " Thou art Peter." **The name expresses what a person is ; the title describes what a person does.** " Saviour " is a title of the Lord : " unto you is born . . . a Saviour " (Luke ii. 11). But His personal name is " Jesus," meaning Jehovah the Saviour (Matt. i. 21). The idea of salvation underlies both the name and the title, but the title, " Saviour," describes the work of Him Who came that the world through Him might be saved, while " Jesus " expresses Who that incarnate Person is—Jehovah the Saviour. So, in celebrating the salvation of Israel, Moses sang, " Jehovah is a man of war ; Jehovah, His name " (Exod. xv. 3).

Now in scriptural usage it appears that the term, " Son of God," is recorded as a name, and not as a title. The " Son " expresses Who that Blessed Person is essentially, the One on Whom the Father's love was outpoured before the world was. If it only designated a mediatorial office assumed at some particular time in the economy of the ages, then the " Son of God " would be a title. But scripture does not support such a thought, though it tells us frequently and emphatically that the One Who undertook the high mediatorial functions between God and man is the Son of God, e.g., it shows that the One Who is now made High Priest in heaven is the Son of God (Heb. v. 5).

Turning again to John iii. 18, and remembering that the " name of the Only-begotten Son of God " denotes all that He is as the Declarer of God's love, being the

Son of His love, we see more clearly what terrible guilt is involved in man's refusal to believe. The refusal of the Son decides the unbeliever's position. "He that believeth not is judged already." He has rejected "God in Christ." "He has not believed on the name of the Only-begotten Son of God."

The decisive criterion of man's destiny revealed in this passage was a new feature in the ways of God, and arose from the presence of the Incarnate Son on earth as the gift of God's love for the world. This the Holy Spirit now testifies (John xvi. 9). Never before had the Son appeared among men for such a purpose, and men accordingly incurred a responsibility never before imposed. A prophet was to be received because he spoke in the name of Jehovah Who sent him (Deut. xviii. 18, 19), but now men were required to believe in the name of the Speaker Himself—the Only-begotten Son. Israel had to believe the message of the prophet, but not on his name. But now the people were called to believe on the Son, for Jehovah's "name is in Him" (Exod. xxiii. 21). God had now sent His Son to the unbelieving nation, not a servant as He had formerly done (Matt. xxi. 33-39).

The Manifestation of the Love of God

While the love of God has been manifested generally to the world, it has been manifested particularly to the family of God. The apostle John wrote, "Herein as to us [or, in our case] has been manifested the love of God, that God has sent His only-begotten Son into the world that we might live through Him" (1 John iv. 9).

Thus, the language of inspired scripture in the Gospel and the Epistle is precise that the Only-begotten Son of God was both given and sent into the world. The eternal Sonship of the Sent One imparted unparalleled glory to His mission, while it aggravated the guilt of those in the world who disbelieved on His name. To the family of faith who live through Him, the Only-

begotten Son is the abiding manifestation of the love of God in respect of themselves. The adoring contemplation of the infinite love of God displayed in the Only-begotten Son will be the everlasting occupation of the children of God in the Father's Home on high.

VI.—THE WORD WITH GOD: THE ONLY-BEGOTTEN WITH THE FATHER

IN John's Gospel the Lord Jesus is portrayed according to His essential names rather than His relative titles. He is to be seen there as the Word and as the Son more than as the Messiah, or as the High Priest, or as the Head of His body, the church.

Consequently, the **personal glories** of God and His Son form the predominating theme of this evangelist rather than the salvation of man. The "Son" sets forth the ineffable love of the Father and manifests the glory of His name. Moreover, while the forgiveness of sins is not mentioned in this Gospel even once, God's gift to the believer of life eternal recurs so frequently that this is an outstanding feature of the Fourth Gospel, easily recognizable by every reader.

The Introductory Verses of John's Gospel

The exceptionally exalted object of the Fourth Gospel is indicated by its opening verses, and the loftiness of the theme is specially noticeable when they are compared with those of its fellow-Gospels. Matthew, Mark, and Luke, each in accordance with his own specific purpose, display the Lord in His earthly and temporal relations to men as they were foretold in the Old Testament, but John writes of Him in His heavenly and eternal relationship, which was perfectly exhibited among men, yet was not foretold in psalm, prophecy, or type.

Accordingly, the first three Gospels begin by showing that the Lord appeared in fulfilment of the prophecies of old and in the line of genealogical descent therein prescribed. But in John's Gospel there is a marked

absence of these preliminaries; no Old Testament scripture is quoted, nor any pedigree prefixed. The reason for this striking contrast is at once apparent when we recall that John's pen was inspired to record that "**Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God.**" No human succession, no citation from the law, the prophets or the psalms would have been appropriate in introducing Him, Who was God, and Who was in the beginning with God. The abrupt simplicity of the opening words indicate the inexpressible majesty of the theme.

These introductory verses in John set forth three fundamental truths relating to the Person of the Lord, viz. :—

- (1) The Word was God and in the beginning with God.
- (2) The Word became flesh and dwelt among men.
- (3) The Word was the Only-begotten Son.

The Word in the beginning

We have then, in verses 1-18, the Holy Spirit's prologue to John's Gospel history, verse 15 being a parenthesis, containing the Baptist's witness to his own personal inferiority. This preface opens by indicating the supernal elevation of the theme of this Gospel. The veil of past time is at once rent for us in a striking sentence by the Holy Spirit, and a glimpse into the eternity beyond is afforded us: "**In the beginning was the Word.**"

There, effulgent in His essential personal glories, we behold, by the illumination of the Spirit, the Word, the Only-begotten Son of God. Led by the text to look backward, our enraptured gaze travels beyond the confines of all created things and beyond every cycle of measurable time to adore the Eternal Word Who was "in the beginning."*

* See Appendix B (page 187).

It is manifest that this declaration of the Word's existence in the beginning conducts us to a point prior to the very earliest creative act comprehended in Genesis i. 1. That is, we are ushered into eternity. Indeed, this absolute precedence of existence is even more definitely declared in the context, where we learn that the Word created every single thing that ever was created or that received being: "All things received being through Him, and without Him not one [thing] received being which has received being" (ver. 3).

The Word becoming Flesh

It is instructive to observe the sequence shown in these verses as they relate to the Word. Having first shown the original glories of the Word in the eternal past, the apostle later in his preface records His incarnation. We read, "And **the Word became flesh**, and dwelt among us . . . full of grace and truth . . . for of His fulness we all have received, and grace upon grace" (vers. 14-16). We are by these combined statements taught most plainly and definitely that the Word Who became flesh was the Word Who was "in the beginning," long before He became flesh.

The Word of verse 1 is, therefore, the Word of verse 14. The Word, Who, becoming incarnate, tabernacled among us, Whose glory we contemplated, Who was full of grace and truth, was the Word Who was in the beginning, full of wisdom and eternal majesty.

Further Unfoldings concerning the Word

In the light of this scripture, it is no difficulty to faith, but an indescribable joy, to receive these unfoldings of the transcendent glories of the Word. Not only was the Word in the beginning, but "**the Word was with God**"—One Person with Another—as truly "with God" (ver. 1) as in manhood the Word was "among us" (ver. 14). Moreover, the

Person abides continuous and unchanging, for “**the Word was God**” (ver. 1).

Then, in verse 2, His distinctive personality with God in the beginning is affirmed, the emphatic pronoun being used in the original to identify Him beyond dispute with the Word: “**He** [this very One, just named as the Word] **was in the beginning with God.**” We learn, therefore, our hearts meanwhile being charged with adoration, that the Word Who became flesh was not in the beginning an abstract quality or attribute, nor a special emanation of the Deity, but a Person existing with God; and moreover, that this Word was God Himself. Thus, the Word was not a personal distinction of God, but a distinct Person with God, as well as and as truly as He was God Himself. We do not read God was the Word, but the Word was God; let us carefully store in our hearts this distinctiveness of expression.

Four protecting Walls, strong and high

Surely, every reverent heart must consider this language of the Holy Spirit most precise and emphatic in establishing the Eternal Personality of the Word Himself. It will be noted that the “Word” is made the conspicuous subject of each of the four short sentences in verses 1 and 2, as if to guard against attack from any point of the compass upon the glory of that Name.

- (a) In the beginning was the **Word**,
- (b) and the **Word** was with God,
- (c) and the **Word** was God.
- (d) **The Same** was in the beginning with God.

In the first three sentences, the noun, “Word,” is repeated, and in the fourth, the Greek pronoun used has a definite and undeniable reference to the same noun. So that, at the opening of the Gospel of Jesus Christ,

the Son of God, a fourfold guardianship of the Person of the Eternal Word is provided by these concise and clear statements of inspiration.

It would appear as if these protective phrases were specially designed of God to preserve the saints from the strange doctrine that He was the Word only in incarnation. Such a doctrine can only claim support in these verses by an outrageous garbling of the text. Instead of taking the passage as it stands, a gloss, such as follows within the brackets, must be added to suit the false interpretation :

- (a) In the beginning was (**He Who became**) the Word,
- (b) and (**He Who became**) the Word was with God.
- (c) and (**He Who became**) the Word was God.
- (d) The Same (**He Who became the Word**) was in the beginning with God.

But we never find it stated anywhere in scripture that " God **became** (*egeneto*) the Word," nor that " He **became** the Word," but we do read here that " the Word **was** (*een*) God." The Word was God originally, but subsequently, " the Word was made [**became**, *egeneto*] flesh " (John i. 14). Historically, the " becoming " in this connection relates to the incarnation. Analogously, we read that the Son of God **became** " of the seed of David " (Rom. i. 3), " of a woman," and " under the law " (Gal. iv. 4), the same Greek verb being employed in each of these passages.

In John i. 1, 2, however, the Holy Spirit declares what the Word " **was** " in the beginning, not what the Word " **became** " afterwards in manhood. Observe carefully the verb, " was." It is remarkable that in these sentences the past (Greek imperfect, implying continuity) tense is used, and not the present, which is of more frequent occurrence.

Thus, the present tense occurs in the clause, Who

“is in the bosom of the Father,” referring to the Incarnate Son (John i. 18), and also in another clause, “Who is over all, God blessed for ever,” referring to the Incarnate Christ (Rom. ix. 5). Is it not significant that the scripture reads, not “The Word is God,” which is blessedly true, but, “The Word was God”? By this grammatical means, stress is laid upon the fact that in the beginning, antecedent to the whole creation which is His own handiwork, the Word existed in absolute Deity.

The Personal Word (Logos) in the beginning

Keeping our feet unshod, let us for a little still linger near this “great sight” of revelation. “The Word (Logos) was God,” and “the Word (Logos) became flesh” form the Holy Spirit’s dual description of what the Word was essentially and what the Word assumed mediatorially. What special significance, then, has this term, “Word”? It is, if we may define it briefly, that which expresses or communicates what is hidden in the mind or thought. Accordingly, the scripture itself is designated the word (logos) of God, in Heb. iv. 12 and elsewhere, being an exact expression in writing of divine truth.

But, while in both cases the mind of God is expressed, there is evidently a wide and weighty distinction between the Word of John i. 1 and the written word of scripture. The former is the Person Who was God and Who was in the beginning with God; the latter, which is described as “the word of God,” is impersonal; moreover, it only began to come into existence when “holy men of God spake under the power of the Holy Ghost” (2 Pet. i. 21).

Contrariwise, the Personal Word, being God, had no beginning, but was ever inherently possessed of an absolute competency to express the mind and thought of God. For in the beginning the Word was the Word, the Potential Declarer of the love of God, of the wisdom of God, of the purpose of God, yea, of God Himself

Whom no one has seen nor can see. When the Word became flesh, this declaration of God was made known to men in and by Him (John i. 14-18).

The Denial that the Word was Eternal

In view of these transcendent glories which ever kindle afresh our smouldering adoration, we cannot regard as a slight matter any denial that the Lord Jesus was the Word eternally. It surely cannot but be a serious infringement of the revealed truth to teach that the Lord was not the Word until He was in manhood. And yet, strangely and sadly enough, this doctrine is implied by the following question in a recent publication: "Is anything taken from Him by saying that the intelligible expression in Him of every divine thought was in Manhood, and that it awaited His incarnation to be expressed?" What is in this instance stated interrogatively is stated positively elsewhere, for error is progressive in boldness.

We reply that this doctrine takes away altogether the Personal and eternal glory of the Word, which the Holy Spirit gives Him in John i. 1, 2. It denies that from all eternity the Word was God in a manner that the Father was not, and that the Holy Spirit was not. It also denies that the Word was the Word in the beginning, limiting the nature of the Holy One by this bold assertion of His incompetency to be the Word until incarnate.

For, as already said, the question quoted implies what is elsewhere plainly affirmed, that only in manhood could there be the intelligible expression of divine thought; "it awaited" the incarnation of the Holy One to be expressed. But with God all things are always possible; and the Word was God. If He was **capable of such expression before incarnation**, He was the Word, as scripture reveals. If He was **incapable** until incarnation (may the good Lord pardon the very thought!) He was not the Word until then, as some daringly allege.

The Personal Logos before Incarnation

It is unquestionably true that in manhood the Word did perfectly express God to men, but what the Word did when He became flesh He Who was God was in **Himself** able to do before incarnation. In the Godhead, He was the Personal Word, the Logos, "in the beginning." Was He not, therefore, "in the beginning" the "intelligible expression" of "divine thought"? We are in Genesis i. told of a secret conclave of the Deity, relating to the creation of man, at which there was an expression of "divine thought"; for **Elohim said**, "Let us make man in **Our** image, after **Our** likeness" (ver. 26). Was there no expression of the thought and purpose and will of God when, as we read, "**Elohim said**"? Was not the Word, prior to man's creation, uttering in holy converse within the circle of the Deity the divine counsel respecting man's beginning? In the Word this decision of the Godhead found its expression then, and, translated into human language, was embodied in the inspired record for the ultimate enlightenment of man.

Since "in the beginning was the Word," the Person Who was the Word was there "in the beginning"; and since "the Word was God," this Personal "expression" was there "in the beginning." To whom that "expression" appeared is a circumstance not affecting its existence; our ignorance of this in no way modifies **the fact of revelation** that "in the beginning was the Word." Whatever communication there was in the past eternity within the Godhead, or subsequently to creatures either celestial or terrestrial, all is comprehended in the activities of the Word. Before and after incarnation, God spoke in and by the Eternal Word, thus expressing His mind and will in the utmost perfection.

The Incarnate Word full of Grace and Truth

The Word existed before His incarnation. The word of man is in his inward thought before it is uttered by his

lips for audible reception by others. The Spirit of God reveals that the Word was in the beginning before He became flesh and dwelt among us. The tabernacle made on earth was after the pattern in the heavens shown to Moses. The One seen among men was the One till then unseen by all, dwelling in unapproachable light.

“And the Word became flesh, and dwelt (tabernacled) among us . . . full of grace and truth.” The Incarnate Word was the expression of the mind of God in respect of grace and truth. So far as their exhibition in the world is concerned, grace and truth were first seen when the Word was made flesh. And how admirably qualified for this display was the Word, since He was God and in the beginning with God! **So far as grace and truth were comprised in the purpose of God before the foundation of the world, so far were they embodied in the Personal Word.** Accordingly, the Word when He had become flesh was seen to be “full of grace and truth.” These divine qualities were in His Person. There in Him was grace, which is more than love, being love triumphant over evil; and there was truth also, the intrinsic nature of both God and man being faithfully revealed by the very presence of the Incarnate Word on earth.

The Only-Begotten

In scriptural usage, the “Word” is correlated with God, while “Son” is generally correlated with the Father, though it is used with God also, as, for example, “the Son of God.” The Word specially reveals God, to Whom man is responsible as his Creator and Governor, and the name, Logos, suggests the fullness and faithfulness of His revelation. The Son reveals God the Father in His love, and the name, Son, suggests depth, exuberance, tenderness, and intimacy in the revelation He makes. Both these revelations are combined in the same Blessed Person, in Whom we see His God and our God, His Father and our Father.

The Revealer is both **the Word, and the Only-begotten Son.**

The "Only-begotten" first (1) occurs in the parenthesis (ver. 14), which speaks of the Word become flesh: "and we have contemplated His glory, a glory as of an only-begotten with [or, from beside] a father." Here is recorded what was seen by faith through human eyes enlightened by the Spirit. This sight was not a transient glimpse of a divine appearance, as was occasionally granted in Old Testament times, but the glory of the Incarnate Word was contemplated with admiring, adoring delight, in which worship devout men loved to linger, as they do still.

Moreover, the glory of the Word become flesh was a revelation of altogether a new character, and it differed entirely from everything known in Old Testament times. It was not the overwhelming, repelling, Shekinah-glory of Jehovah that dwelt between the cherubim, but the glory of an only-begotten from beside a father: The figure describes the predominating character of the Personal revelation in the Word. The glory of the Word when contemplated in "flesh" was the glory (the manifested excellence) of a unique Paternal and Filial love at home in the heaven of heavens but sojourning on earth in Him.

The glory of the Word Who dwelt "among us," full of grace and truth, had the nature of **an Only-begotten's glory with a father.** His glory was so perfect and symmetrical in His Personal representation of the Father that it took the character of an only-begotten with a father; hence the Lord said, "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father." There was absolute community of nature between the Father and the Son.

In Him, the Word dwelling among men, was the repository of Paternal graciousness and confidential delight such as is known by none but an only-begotten with the father. This was the character of the communion of the Father and the Son in Their eternal Essence before the foundation of the world, and was

disclosed to men by the Word in incarnation. The effulgence of the Incarnate Word was the effulgence of the Father's love. "In Thee, most perfectly expressed, The Father's self doth shine."

In the Bosom of the Father

Having first spoken of the Incarnate Word, contemplated "among us," as the Only-begotten (ver. 14), the Holy Spirit then (2) sets forth the Only-begotten Son as the Declarer of the Father's secrets: "No one has seen God at any time; the only-begotten Son, Who is in the bosom of the Father, He (*meaning*, He and no one else) hath declared [Him]."

There is but one Son of the Father—the Only-begotten. The Son, being designated the Only-begotten Son, any rash thought that the Father has Another Son is precluded. All that subsists essentially in God the Son subsists exclusively in the Only-begotten Son. No one ever yet or at any time has seen God, Whose Being is enveloped in impenetrable mystery to all creatures. But now the blank wall reaching from earth to heaven has been demolished, like the veil of the temple rent in twain from the top to the bottom. The eternal secrets in God Who is light and love have now been revealed, the Only-begotten Son Himself being their exponent.

In the bosom! It is in connection with this personal revelation that we find this choice phraseology of the Spirit, describing the relationship of the Son with the Father, which entwines itself about our deepest affections and awakens our loftiest worship—"the Only-begotten Son, Who is in the bosom of the Father." **The Father's bosom!** Time was when Jehovah spoke to Israel from "the secret place of thunder" (Ps. lxxxi. 7). Now God the Father has spoken from the secret place of eternal love, and by the Son Who ever abode and abides there.

The bosom is the place of love expressed and enjoyed; the Only-begotten Son dwells there to receive and to

reciprocate that love, which shares every secret purpose and delight with the One so embosomed (*cf.* Mic. vii. 5) : “ the Father loveth the Son, and showeth Him all things that Himself doeth ” (John v. 20). And in Him are now displayed “ all those deep affections, Which fill the Father’s heart.” We learn them now, but shall learn them more fully in the Father’s house, from

“ The Son Who knows—
He only—all His love ;
And brings us as His well-beloved
To that bright rest above ;
Dwells in His bosom ; knoweth all
That in that bosom lies ;
And came to earth to make it known,
That we might share His joys.”

VII.—JEHOVAH SALUTING HIS SON

“ I will declare the decree: the LORD (Jehovah) hath said unto Me, Thou art My Son ; this day have I begotten Thee ” (Ps. ii. 7)

IN the New Testament we read of the Son of the Father, and in the Old Testament of the Son of Jehovah. The Father is the divine Name associated with God's love displayed in His family, and Jehovah is the Name associated with God's government of the world through the nation of Israel. Let us dwell a little on this difference in the presentation of the Son with special reference to Psalm ii.

The earlier communications of God to man did not disclose that “ God is love.” Old Testament days were a probationary period, particularly under the law, during which God was made known as the Governor of His people, Israel. The “ fullness of the time ” had not then arrived for God to send forth His Son, by Whom alone the Father's name could be manifested upon the earth.

But in those early days, the prophets cheered the hearts of the pious with visions of “ good things to come.” They declared what were the future purposes of God with regard to the blessing of the earth where sin and its fruits were then dominant, foretelling the introduction of a world-wide kingdom of righteousness and peace. Moreover, these prophets predicted that the Messiah or Anointed One, Who would establish this reign of terrestrial bliss, would first of all endure, as a prelude to His entrance into the appointed glories of His administration, unexampled sufferings (1 Pet. i. 11 ; Luke xxiv. 25-27).

There are many titles descriptive of the various

kingdom-glories of Messiah the Prince used in the ancient prophecies, but they are all attached to Him Whose Name is the Son. God's eternal purpose which He purposed in Himself was to concentrate in the Christ the efficient administration of things in heaven and things on earth (Eph. i. 9, 10). This vast governmental plan, fully made known in the New Testament, was but dimly revealed to the holy men of old.

Nevertheless, though a veil hung over many of the Messianic prophecies until Christ Himself should remove it, Jehovah made His settled purpose concerning His Son clear and definite. In the face of man's opposition, Jehovah's solemn decree was that He would set His own King in Zion to subdue the rebellious princes of the earth, and this Anointed Ruler is His Son. Such is the declaration in the second Psalm.

The Spirit's Testimony in the Second Psalm

The second Psalm supplies a remarkable witness to the Sonship of Jehovah's King Who is appointed to reign in Zion and to exercise His dominion to the ends of the earth. Again, as we have seen in John iii. and v. and xvii., the Son is the Speaker concerning Himself. To none would we listen with greater delight and confidence! None more competent than He to speak of Himself and things appertaining to the Godhead. As He said to the Pharisees, "Though I bear record of Myself, yet My record is true; for I know whence I came, and whither I go" (John viii. 14).

Going back to the earlier record before the Incarnation, we find the Spirit of Christ in the Psalmist saying, "I will declare the decree: Jehovah hath said unto Me, Thou art My Son; I this day have begotten Thee." The "decree," which relates to the government of the world, is declared by the Speaker in the two verses that follow (8, 9); but in the words quoted the Speaker declares (1) that Jehovah addressed Him as "My Son;" and (2) that Jehovah had "begotten" Him "this day."

Setting aside for the moment many other corroborative testimonies from Holy Writ, we learn from this precious record alone that when the world rises up in revolt against Jehovah, He, in foreknowledge or in prophecy or in fact, looks with undisturbed complacency upon His Son, saying, "Thou art My Son." In Him was Jehovah's resource for the glory of His name in the righteous government of His enemies. Accordingly, Jehovah decreed that in the appointed "day" the Son should be "begotten" for the execution of this purpose of breaking down the power of the rebellious nations with a rod of iron.*

The importance of the doctrine of this prophetic passage may be gauged by the fact that it is quoted no less than three times in the New Testament as a witness to the Sonship of God's Sent One (Acts xiii. 33; Heb. i. 5; v. 5). It is desirable, therefore, to consider its meaning with the utmost care, seeking first of all to ascertain what is the subject of the Psalm in which it is found, and what light the context affords.

The Theme of the Second Psalm

We realize at once that the atmosphere of the second Psalm is altogether different from that of the Fourth Gospel. In John, we breathe the love and glory of God displayed by the Son in a world of death and darkness; but in David the wrath of God and His unsparing judgment of the rebellious potentates of

* It is claimed by some that this verse supports the theory that the Sonship of Christ began at His incarnation, as if the words, "Thou art My Son," had no retrospective application. But an instance of a similar statement used with a retrospective scope occurs in Gen. xlix. 3. Dying Jacob, foretelling his family history, said to Reuben, "Thou art my firstborn." But Reuben had stood in this relationship to Jacob for many years. In the nature of this case, the father's words could not signify that he was bestowing primogeniture upon him at the moment of speech. If this is plainly not the case in Gen. xlix. 3, why should it be said that it *must be* the case in Ps. ii. 7?

the earth are committed to the Son. In John, we have grace and truth, in David anger and woe.

In both scriptures, God is seen acting by means of the Son, and in each of them the Son is presented in the character suited to the theme of the passage. The New Testament Gospel displays the Son given to reveal God's love to the world, and also the Father's love to those who receive His Son. But in the Old Testament Psalm, the Son is shown as the Executor of divine judgment upon the world which is in open revolt against Jehovah and His Anointed.

In both the earlier and the later revelations the Son enters the sphere of man's sin, but while in the later, man's darkness and evil are met by the brazen serpent of grace (John iii.), in the earlier, man's enmity against God is subdued by the iron rod of righteousness (Ps. ii.).

The theme, then, of the second Psalm is the subjugation of man's hostility to Jehovah and His Anointed by the crushing judgments of divine power. In connection with this scheme of government, it is revealed that the One Whom Jehovah salutes as His Son will possess the whole earth, and that the foes of the Lord will by Him be broken to shivers. The Son is here seen on the throne of Jehovah rather than in the bosom of the Father, as He is seen in the fourth Gospel.

The Structure of the Second Psalm

This Psalm is readily divisible, according to its subject, into four stanzas of three verses each, as follows:—

- (1) The world's counsels against Jehovah (1-3) ;
- (2) Adonai's derision of man's plotting (4-6) ;
- (3) Jehovah's decree of universal rule for His Son (7-9) ;
- (4) Warning to kiss the Son before judgment comes (10-12).

The World Alliance

(1) The first stanza (vers. 1-3) predicts the coalition of Israel* and the nations in defiant resistance to the claims of Jehovah and His Anointed. The united counsel of the earthly powers is to break Their bands and cast away Their cords. This prediction had its fulfilment in the union of Jews and Gentiles to crucify the Messiah, Jehovah's Anointed, and was so quoted in the apostles' prayer to the Lord (Acts iv. 24-28). The evil alliance against Jehovah and His Christ foretold in this Psalm will have a further fulfilment in the future agreement between the apostate Jews and the head of the resuscitated fourth Gentile empire (Rev. xiii.).

The King on Zion's Hill

(2) This confederation of worldly powers to renounce all allegiance to Jehovah and His Christ is regarded with contempt (vers. 4-6) by Adonai (Jehovah's title as "Lord of all the earth"). He will speak unto them in His wrath from heaven (*see* Heb. xii. 25, 26), and in face of their organized hostility to Jehovah and His Anointed He will establish His King upon Zion, His mountain of holiness. Thus the "counsel" of man's might and wisdom comes to naught, and "the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God" (Acts ii. 22) in the face of man's concerted insurrection against Him and His Christ has its fulfilment.

Sonship and Begetting

(3) In the third stanza (vers. 7-9), the Holy Spirit makes us privy to the deliberations of the divine council-

* It is to be noted that in this Psalm, Israel is viewed as submerged among the other nations, and not in the separateness Jehovah had given her. The conditions are those of utter moral disorder. The nation is regarded as "Lo-ammi" (Hos. i. 9). Jehovah no longer says, "Israel is My son" (Exod. iv. 22; Hos. xi. 1; Matt. ii. 15). The Eternal Son takes Israel's place in the earth both as Son and as Servant (Isa. xlii.).

chamber in respect of world-wide human evil. The Son declares the decree made for quelling the insurgents. No date is affixed to this solemn edict. Nor need we inquire When? and Where? The finite factors of time and locality do not apply to the decrees of God, which are formulated in eternity, whenever He may be pleased to reveal them to men: "known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world." Does any scripture **deny** that this utterance **came to the Son** "before the foundation of the world"? Did it not come to the Son before it came to David by the prophetic Spirit?

But whenever this decree was enunciated, the Son sets forth its terms in the words of Jehovah addressed to Himself. **First**, the dignity and competency of the Person to Whom the decree is committed are expressed in His Name; "**Thou art My Son.**" The Son is the Name of Him appointed to execute judgment in the earth. It is ever the primary concern of the Holy Spirit that His essential glory should not seem to be diminished by the service He voluntarily undertakes.

In like manner, when the Lord Jesus is seen in New Testament vision about to "judge and make war," it is recorded amid the recital of His many governmental glories that "His Name is called The Word of God" (Rev. xix. 13). What He becomes mediatorially is not allowed to conceal what He is essentially; unexpectedly, as it were, the Holy Spirit recalls our hearts to remember the personal glory of the Son, when He shall tread the winepress of the fury and wrath of God Almighty.

At the forefront of the decree, then, is the solemn affirmation of Sonship made by Jehovah to the Son Himself—the recognition of the Son as the absolute Interpreter of Jehovah's counsel and the consummate Doer of His will in government.

Secondly. We pass in the next sentence from eternity to time, for "day" is a measure of time, not of eternity: "**this day have I begotten Thee.**" Now we undoubtedly have the incarnation of the Son. It is the Old Testament description corresponding with

the New Testament ones : “ The Word became flesh ” ; the “ Son made of a woman ” ; “ that Holy Thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.”

Taking the two sentences in their sequence (“ Thou art My Son ; this day have I begotten Thee ”), their joint import seems to be that He Whom Jehovah, in timeless eternity, called His Son abode in that Filial relationship when begotten of Him in time : the Son then became incarnate, but maintained all that He had ever been as Son in the Godhead. If the truth had been otherwise, would not the order of the sentence have been inverted ? Would not the act of begetting have **preceded** the salutation as Son, if He had become the Son by His incarnation ? The order, as it stands is highly significant.

Indeed the full truth and beauty of the Son’s own communication of this celestial purpose for the tumultuous earth will be entirely missed unless we mark its ordered steps.

(i) First, we must note the sublime satisfaction of Jehovah beholding the Son in His changeless fullness : “ Thou art My Son ” : He was His ineffable delight, His efficient resource, His eternal Fellow (Zec. xiii. 7). This expression of complacent regard by Jehovah for His Son is the **basis** of what follows in the next stanza concerning the government of the world.

The construction in verse 7 seems to be analogous to many other verses in the Psalms, though usually the speaker in those parallel cases is a pious saint. For example, the psalmist exclaims, “ Thou art my God ” ; by faith he recognizes the power and goodness of God. Encouraged by the sight, he then resolves, “ early will I seek Thee ” (Ps. lxiii. 1). His purpose to seek God was formed on the **basis** of what God was to him already.

(ii) Here, too, in verse 7, the order of thought is that the second clause (His begetting) arises out of, or on the **basis** of the first (His Sonship). Because He was the Son, He was able to subdue the evil of man to the glory

of Jehovah; therefore, to this end, He was, in the appointed day or season, "begotten" among men: "this day have I begotten Thee." Moreover, when become flesh, the Blessed One was still the Son, as the voice from heaven declared, not once only but twice (Matt. iii. 17; xvii. 5). This voice at Jordan and on the Mount was witness of His **Sonship after incarnation**, as the Psalm gives the divine testimony **before it**. Jehovah speaks to His Son in Psalm ii., as He also does to His Servant in Isa. xlix.

The denial of the pre-incarnate Sonship of our beloved Lord is an effort to place shutters upon the windows of revelation, which look on His glory in the eternal past. But "no prophecy of scripture is of its own interpretation" (2 Pet. i. 20, W.K.), and having in mind the revelation of the Absolute Deity of the Son made in other parts of scripture, we believe that the concurrent truth conveyed in this stanza of the Psalm is that the Speaker did not **begin** to be the Son at His incarnation, but that **His Sonship was unimpaired by His humiliation**. The Eternal Sonship, blessed be God, was true in the beginning, is now, and ever will be. The Son is the revealed Name expressive of His essential nature in the Deity and not only of His mediatorial office.

Begetting or generation is associated in scripture with incarnation of the Son, but is never attributed to the Holy Spirit, Who did not "become flesh." The much-used term, "*eternal* generation," applied to the Son is without scriptural warrant, for how could the Deity of the Son be **derived** from Another? or, how could the Eternal Sonship be **bestowed** by generation? But being the Son from all eternity, when born of the Virgin Mary, He could be called the Son of the Highest (Luke i. 32).

Begetting in this Psalm is descriptive of the manner of the introduction into this world of Jehovah's Son Who came as the legitimate King in Zion to possess the ends of the earth. Jehovah's Anointed One would be David's Son and David's Lord. Yet when Jesus asked

the Pharisees, "What think ye of Christ? whose Son is He?" (Matt. xxii. 42) not one of them had faith to refer back to Jehovah's words to Him, "Thou art My Son," recorded in this Psalm. His Sonship and His lowliness awakened their hatred, not their homage, and, in consequence, their eyes were blinded.

The Request

(3) Jehovah invites His Son to ask for the heirship of the world: "Ask of Me, and I will give Thee nations for an inheritance, and for Thy possession the ends of the earth" (ver. 8).

This invitation contains a description of the decreed office of universal supremacy assigned to Him as Jehovah's Anointed in answer to the tumultuous raging of mankind against His claims when He comes into the world (vers. 1-3).

A comparison of this verse with the Lord's words to the Father (in John xvii. 9) shows the difference already noted between the two dispensations of love and righteousness in connection with the Son. In the Psalm the world is in view; in the Gospel, those whom the Father has given to the Son "out of the world"; and the ways of God in government with the world were to be set aside for a while, and after the crucifixion of Christ and His ascension, the heavenly calling was to begin.

Consequently, at that point the Son does not prefer the request of Psalm ii. His heart is now set upon those to whom He will make known the Father's love. He says, "I request for them: not for the world do I request, but for those whom Thou hast given Me, for they are Thine (and all My things are Thine, and Thy things Mine), and I am glorified in them" (John xvii. 9, 10, W.K.).

We cannot forbear quoting the following remarks on this instructive petition. "It is concerning the disciples He [the Son] makes request, not for Israel nor the nations, not for the land nor the earth at large. It

is no question of taking up the world for government or blessing now: He is occupied with the joint-heirs, not with the inheritance as yet. By and by, as Psalm ii. lets us know, Jehovah will say, Ask of Me, and I will give [Thee] the heathen for Thine inheritance and the uttermost parts of the earth for Thy possession.

“ But then the Son will reign on His holy hill of Zion, instead of being rejected on earth and received up on high. Then, instead of sustaining the suffering family of God who bear His reproach here below and wait for heavenly glory with Him, He will break the nations with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel. It will be, not the interval of the gospel as now, but the day of the kingdom in power and glory.

“ Here the Lord is praying for His own as the precious gift of the Father to Himself, while cut off and having nothing that was promised Him here below; and He asks the more, because they were the Father’s.

“ But it may be well to say that this gives occasion for a parenthetic statement which lets out much of the light of His personal glory: ‘and all My things are Thine, and Thy things Mine.’ As the Son of David, the Messiah, could this reciprocity have been so expressed? Is it not evidently and only **in virtue of His being the Eternal Son, one with the Father, that They have rights and interests no less boundless than common?**” (*Exposition of the Gospel of John*, by W. Kelly).

The Warning, “ Kiss the Son ”

(4) There is given in the concluding stanza (vers. 10-12) a general warning to kings and judges of the earth in respect to Jehovah and His Anointed, Whose authority they have despised (vers. 1-3). They are admonished to “serve Jehovah with fear,” and to “kiss the Son, lest He be angry.” To “kiss” is to do homage to the Son as the King of kings and Lord of lords; so Samuel kissed Saul when he was anointed king of Israel (1 Sam. x. 1); though himself a prophet

he acknowledged the sovereignty conferred upon the son of Kish.

It is remarkable that in this phrase an unusual word is used in the original for "Son." In verse 7, the more frequent Hebrew word, **ben**, occurs, but in verse 12 it is **bar**. The latter is a Chaldaic or Aramaic form, found untranslated in some New Testament proper names, such as Bar-jona, Bar-tholomew, and others. In the Old Testament, **bar** is translated "son" in Ezra v. 1, 2; vi. 14; Dan. v. 22.

But in view of the infallible precision of scripture in its jots and tittles, the question arises why this exceptional term, **bar**, is employed in the address to the nations (ver. 12), while the more regular term, **ben**, is used by Jehovah in addressing His Son (ver. 7). The inspired variation must be due to an important distinction. And the explanation seems to be that the latter, **ben**, correctly expresses the Son in the glory of His essential Being in the eyes of Jehovah, as the former, **bar**, expresses with equal correctness His Sonship as seen by the world when He, the Son of man, is manifested in the glory of His kingdom.

If elsewhere we find **bar** applied to the Lord as the Governor of the nations, this interpretation of it will be corroborated. And we do find it so applied in Daniel's vision of the Messianic kingdom which will eventually supersede the four great Gentile kingdoms. The prophet sees the Son of man come to the Ancient of days to receive an everlasting kingdom over all peoples, and **bar** is the word for Son in the passage describing what he saw (Dan. vii. 13, 14). As the subject of the prophecy agrees with that of the Psalm, the occurrence of **bar** in both scriptures is highly significant.

Once again we find the word in Daniel. The One walking in the fiery furnace with the three Hebrews is described as "like the Son of God" (Dan. iii. 25). Here also **bar** is the word rendered "Son."* In all

* The use of *bar* for Son in these places is the more striking, because in other passages where the title, "Son of man," occurs, as in Ps. viii. 4; cxliv. 3, *bar* is not used, but *ben*.

three cases, the special word is connected with the times of Gentile supremacy. How gracious the admonition to the nations, " Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and ye perish from the way " ! For when the Son of man shall come in His glory, all nations shall be gathered before the throne of His glory for judgment ; and who shall escape " when His wrath is kindled but a little " ? (Matt. xxv. 31-46).

We find then in this Psalm a testimony by Jehovah to the Absolute Sonship of Him Who was begotten in time that He might as the Son of man inherit the earth, ruling the riotous peoples with a rod of iron and blessing all those that put their trust in Him.

" Hosanna to the King of kings,
The great Incarnate Word,
Ten thousand songs and glories wait
The coming of our Lord.

" Thy victories and Thine endless fame
Through the wide world shall run ;
And everlasting ages sing
The triumphs Thou hast won."

VIII.—NEW TESTAMENT USE OF THE SECOND PSALM

WE have already considered the Psalmist's remarkable testimony to the Sonship of Jehovah's Anointed One, recorded in the words of the Son Himself: "I will declare the decree: Jehovah hath said unto Me, Thou art My Son; this day have I begotten Thee." First, Jehovah makes the unqualified acknowledgment ("Thou art My Son") of a relationship in the Deity before the foundation of the world. Then, Jehovah says next, "This day have I begotten Thee." In this clause He specifies an epoch or point of time, "this day," in which the Son's birth takes place.

Jehovah's King, therefore, was Jehovah's Son before He was begotten in time, and appeared among men to establish Zion's long-promised kingdom of righteousness and peace. This Anointed One came into the house and lineage of David by no ordinary procedure. And while He was truly the Son of David because Mary, of David's royal line, was "found with child of the Holy Ghost," He was with equal truth David's Lord (Adonai) because He was Jehovah's Son from all eternity. As born into the world, He was that Son; while before that birth He was the Son, a fact which could be true of no creature, and of none beside Himself.

The truth of the eternal Sonship bestows an exalted and incomparable character upon the Messiahship of the Lord Jesus, and the fact of His personal glory as Son of Jehovah aggravated Israel's sin of rejecting Him beyond description. The Messiah sent to them was not only **Jehovah's Servant**, Whose exceptional dignity and excellence Isaiah depicts, but **Jehovah's Son**, as David by the Spirit testified in this Second

Psalm. Jehovah sent Him as Servant to collect the fruit of the vineyard, but as His Son to receive the reverence of the husbandmen, saying, "They will reverence My Son" (Matt. xxi. 37). But in wicked unbelief, the nation despised the Sent One as Servant and crucified Him as Son.

Parabolically, was not the Sent One the Son of the Lord of the vineyard before He was despatched on His errand? Was He not in the parable presented as the Son abiding in reserve till other lesser means had been tried with the husbandmen, and had failed? Most truly so; He came to them, not as a Son newly become such and provided for the occasion, but in His own inherent personal right. This the husbandmen knew, for they said, "This is the heir; come, let us kill Him." And their crime against the Son, not the murder of the Lord's servants from Abel to Zacharias, was the specific cause of the wrath of God, that fell upon them to the uttermost (Matt. xxi. 33-41; xxiii. 34-36).

We will now look at the citations of Psalm ii. 7, found in the New Testament, and, by marking the connection in which they are quoted, seek to discover the special significance of the prophetic words as they are there brought forward. The passage is once quoted by Paul in a spoken discourse to Jews in the synagogue at Antioch (Acts xiii. 33) and twice in his Epistle to Hebrew confessors of Christ (Heb. i. 5; v. 5). In all three cases we shall find that the purpose of the quotation is to establish the Sonship of the Messiah on the basis and authority of the divine utterance recorded in the Second Psalm. The One Whom God sent, not only came to exercise His mediatorial functions as the Begotten-One of Jehovah, but was Son in His own personal right before that day of His incarnation. Oh, how great the sin to refuse such a One as He!

(I) *GOD'S PROMISES ARE FULFILLED IN THE SON*

Paul announced to the congregation of Jews in the synagogue at Antioch that God had brought to Israel, of the seed of David, a Saviour Jesus (Acts xiii. 23). He showed that though the nation rejected and slew Him, God had raised Him from the dead, and that now there was forgiveness, and also justification for all those who believe.

But a brief examination of the structure of his discourse shows that the apostle's appeal to the audience rested upon the fact that **Jesus is the Son of God**, which truth was from the first the special feature of Paul's ministry (Acts ix. 20), in distinction from Peter's preaching, setting forth the crucified Nazarene glorified in heaven.

The Structure of Paul's Address

After alluding to the Jewish national history from the land of Egypt to the reign of David, the apostle declared that the raising up of Jesus was the actual fulfilment of God's promise of a Saviour for them. He referred to three main historical facts concerning Christ:—

- (1) His forerunner (vers. 24, 25) ;
- (2) His advent and His crucifixion at Jerusalem (vers. 27-29) ;
- (3) His resurrection (vers. 30, 31).

In connection with their rejection of the "Saviour Jesus," Paul mentioned two of its moral features. By denying and slaying Him, they (a) were guilty of the sin of ignorance (ver. 27) and (b) had fulfilled the scripture in condemning Him (vers. 27, 29). The same two features are found in Peter's charge against the Jews in Jerusalem (Acts iii. 17, 18).

The Quotation of Old Testament Scripture

Having thus briefly stated what was true historically, the apostle in verses 32-37 applied to two out of these three facts the light of the Spirit's witness in the Old Testament. Passing over (1) the prophecies of old, relating to the Baptist as the forerunner of the Saviour, he adduced the written witness of the divine oracles to the personal glory of Jesus Whom God had raised up. (2) In Him, said the apostle, was the fulfilment of the promise: "as it is also written in the second psalm, **Thou art My Son ; this day have I begotten Thee** " (ver. 33).

Then the apostle applied further scripture to the third historical point also (3)—to His resurrection (vers. 34-37). The raising of Jesus from the dead no more to return to corruption was foreshadowed in Isa. lv. 3 ; Ps. lxxxix. 1, 19 ; xvi. 10. This prophecy, Paul said, could not refer to David, and is therefore fulfilled in his Seed.

Mark now, in the light of this preceding context, the force of Paul's exhortation which follows: "Be it known unto you, therefore, men and brethren, that **through this Man** is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins . . ." (ver. 38).

The index-finger of the inspired speaker was pointing to "**this Man.**" Paul was setting forth One to Whom, as he showed, both recent history and ancient prophecy had witnessed. It was recent history that Jesus was born in the city of David, was hanged on a tree outside Jerusalem, and was laid in the sepulchre of Joseph of Arimathea. This was the apostle's brief description of the "raising up" of the One in Whom the promises of God were Yea and Amen, and of His reception by those to whom He came.

But what had the Psalmist said concerning the Messianic King? David recorded an echo of His personal glory out of the timeless past. Before all worlds Jehovah had saluted the Coming One. Jehovah did not say to Him, "Thou art My King," or "Thou

art My Anointed," and thus, because of the majesty of the Giver, magnify the mediatorial office given Him, but Jehovah said to Him, "**Thou art My Son,**" **dwelling only upon His personal relation in the Deity.**

We learn from the doctrine of the Incarnation as it is foreshadowed in this verse of the Psalm that the Person gives unique dignity to the office. When the Son becomes the Servant, how that service is magnified! Let us consider this word of prophecy a little further.

The Application of the Second Psalm

The apostle, by this quotation, established the identity of "this Man," Whom he was announcing, with Jehovah's Son, foretold by the Spirit. The One Whom God "raised up" to fulfil His promise had been personally indicated in this prophecy. The Jesus of the Gospels is the Son of the Second Psalm. Jesus, "of the seed of David according to the flesh," was **the Son of Jehovah in His own proper, personal, and underived nature**, to Whom Jehovah said, "Thou art My Son."

It will be observed that the second member of Psalm ii. 7, "this day have I begotten Thee," also bears with illuminating effect upon the fulfilment of the promise made to the people of Israel. As the first part intimated Who would fulfil the promise (the "Son"), so the second shows the manner of its fulfilment (His incarnation). The fulfilment of the promise is plainly declared to be in His "raising up." The apostle's words are, God has "raised unto Israel a Saviour, Jesus" (ver. 23), and "God hath fulfilled the same . . . in that He raised up Jesus" (ver. 33, R.V.; the adverb "again," is to be omitted). This "**raising up,**" or bringing into the world, **satisfied the prediction, "This day have I begotten Thee."** By His incarnation, He Who was the Eternal Son was in due time "born King of the Jews" (Matt. ii. 2).

The context of Acts xiii., then, in which this quotation

appears, when duly weighed, makes it clear at what time the predicted "begetting" of the Psalm took place. Paul's audience were instructed that it took place at that point of time when Jehovah's Son appeared in the line of promise. From David onwards, the Messianic seed was preserved and continued in unbroken succession until Jesus was born in Bethlehem, as the genealogies in Matt. i. and Luke iii. show. **By that birth, Jehovah introduced His Son into the royal line of promise,** and the written word, which had long been awaiting fulfilment, became true in fact: "This day have I begotten Thee."

"Raising up" and Resurrection

Some confusion in the interpretation of this verse (33) and of the one following has arisen through the unwarranted assumption that "raising up" signifies resurrection, when it is a rendering of the Greek verb, *anisteemi*. On this ground, it is argued that because this verb occurs in the two verses (33, 34), the resurrection of the Lord must be referred to in each case.

But this inference will not bear examination. In the latter verse (34), it is so, because its meaning is restricted by the qualifying phrase, "from the dead." When we read, "*He raised Him from the dead,*" the resurrection of Christ is certainly stated. But the general meaning of the Greek verb is that of setting a person, or causing him to stand, in a certain position or office. And the verb is employed in this general sense in verse 33: the Lord Jesus was set in the position of the Fulfiller of the promise: "*God . . . hath raised up Jesus*" (the R.V. omits "again").

The same verb is used in this general sense in Acts iii. 22 also, "A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you;" and again in iii. 26, "To you first God, having raised up His Servant, has sent Him . . ." These two passages do not refer to the resurrection of Christ, neither is there anything in their contextual

subject to restrict its meaning to that event, as there is in Acts ii. 24, 30, 32, where undoubtedly Peter's subject is the resurrection of the Lord.

But in verse 34 of this chapter, the phrase, "from the dead," confines the application of "raising up" to the particular act of resurrection. In like manner, it may be observed that a different verb, *egeiro*, is used with and without a qualifying clause in verses 22 and 30. In the former case, the significance is the general one, "He raised up unto them David." But in the latter the reference is to the resurrection of Christ which is shown by adding the modifying clause, "God raised Him from the dead."

The resurrection, then, was God's answering act to the guilt of the Jews, who slew the Fulfiller of His promise. He by the resurrection of the Lord Jesus secured to them "the sure mercies of David," so that it is to the raised One, Who is "no more to return to corruption," that the apostle applies the further scriptures quoted from Isaiah and Psalm xvi. In the Holy One raised up from the dead the confirmation of the promises was made objectively. And "through this Man" was preached the good news of the forgiveness of sins, and of justification from all things for all that believe.

What a mighty demonstration the apostle gave! **The truth of the Sonship of Jehovah's Anointed is the sure foundation on which the whole fabric of God's grace and God's government is reared.** And it was to this One that Paul's testimony was rendered at Antioch of Pisidia in the deafened ears of unconverted Jews. Moreover, seeing his hearers still refused to believe on the Son of God, the apostle turned the gospel invitation to the Gentiles (xiii. 46), according to the saying of Jehovah to His Servant, Who is His Son (Isa. xlii. 6; Acts xiii. 47).

(2) *THE MORE EXCELLENT NAME OF SON*

In the beginning of the Epistle to the Hebrews, the quotation from Psalm ii. is introduced by **the Holy Spirit to establish the personal glory of God's Spokesman** Who has appeared in these days. The Epistle presents to the believing Hebrews a goodly array of witnesses from their scriptures concerning Christ and His work. Standing at the head of that noble line of unimpeachable testimony is Jehovah's own utterance to Him: "Thou art My Son; this day have I begotten Thee" (i. 5).

By these words quoted from the holy oracles in the opening statement of the Epistle, it is proved that God has last of all, "spoken to us [in the person of the] Son" (vers. 1, 2). One had now appeared Who inherits the "more excellent name" of Son. Others among His predecessors had borne the title of prophet or priest or king. Angels, too, had been intermediaries of divine communications, and that One, more distinguished than them all, "the Angel of Jehovah," had at times spoken to men in the past. But now, God has spoken to us in the Son.

Angels Superior to Man but Inferior to the Son

We know that in the various grades of created beings the angels have a status superior to that of man (Ps. viii. 5). Is Jesus Christ to be ranked in the angelic order? Nay, the Holy Spirit will not permit such a debasing thought even to arise in our hearts through lack of instruction. He witnesses of the Lord Jesus that, having made purification of sins, He sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high, **become "so much better than the angels, as He hath inherited a name more excellent than they"** (W.K.). He has become "much better" now, as in the past His name

was "more excellent," than the dignitaries of the heavenly host.

This testimony, like that of Stephen's, is concerning Jesus Who is now in the glory of God. He Who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death is now exalted, "angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto Him." But along with this glorious investiture on high, displaying how He is lifted far above angels, the Holy Spirit couples His intrinsic worth founded upon the truth of His Person and Name. The Name exists before all titles, and is the basis on which the titles rest for comparative dignity.

The Son has "become so much better than the angels," not merely by reason of the acquired glories attendant upon the eternal redemption He has obtained for us, but by reason of what He is essentially in contrast with all the angels. He has "inherited a more excellent name than they." **He possesses in His own personal right the name of Son**, which angels do not. No doubt, the "more excellent name," besides "Son," includes "God" and "Jehovah," as shown later in the chapter (vers. 8, 10), but we are just now concerned with the first only of these names.

The "Excellence" of non-creation

What then is the peculiar "excellence" or superiority of the name, "Son," as belonging to God's Spokesman? Taken in the sense of derivation by creation, "son" is elsewhere applied to the angels (Job ii. 1; xxxviii. 7). They, in virtue of their origin as intelligent beings and "ministering spirits," appointed to the service of heaven (Ps. ciii. 20), are as a class described as the sons of God, Who "is a Spirit." The One presented in Heb. i. is Son also, but we are warned by the Holy Spirit that **in His case it has a significance of pre-eminence that theirs has not**. He is the Son in His own eternal right, while the angels are sons by reason of the status and functions assigned to them as created spirits in the scheme of creation. They, as sons to a

father, owe their intelligent existence to God, as creatures to the Creator.

The corroborative quotation made from the Second Psalm establishes the immeasurable superiority of the Eternal Son above all the angels, though they be called "sons of God." "For unto which of the angels said He at any time, Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten Thee?" Jehovah saluted the Son as Son in the eternal immutable relations of the Deity. No angel, not even one of this most exalted order of created beings, was ever addressed by God in such a manner.

To Adam who was a son of God by divine inbreathing or to an angel who was a son of God as a created spirit, God might say, **after** he was brought into being, "Thou art My son"; but it seems incredible that God should say this to either of them **before** he came into the sphere of creation. But Jehovah could and did address His own Son in this manner. And the entire force of the quotation from the Psalm depends upon its unique application to the Son, **Who was the Eternal Son without begetting, and of Whom it was, therefore, true before His begetting in time as the Incarnate Son.**

By this conclusive witness, the personal glory of the One in Whom God has spoken is maintained. The Son does not differ from the angels merely in degree, as an archangel might differ from the hosts of angels he governs; the **immeasurable difference is that between the Eternal Uncreated Son and those who became the sons of God by their creation.** And when He is "begotten" in time, and is made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, His eternal relationship of Son in the Deity remains unimpaired. He does not acquire the name of Son by reason of the mediatorial functions assigned to Him, but inherits and retains it in His own personal right.

(3) *THE ETERNAL SONSHIP AND THE
PRIESTHOOD*

Psalm ii. 7 is a powerful witness to the Eternal Personality of the Son and of His incarnation as the Christ. In Heb. i. the passage is cited in connection with the One in Whom God has come down to us ; it is again cited in Heb. v. 5, but here in connection with our approach to God, for which we need the priesthood of Christ. **“Jesus, the Son of God,” is the Apostle and High Priest of our confession :** as Apostle He has come from God to us, and fully declared Him : as High Priest, we come unto God by Him. He is God and man in one Person, and He is therefore unique in His competency to represent both God to man and man to God. This twofold truth in its divine fullness is the special topic presented variously in this Epistle.

In Heb. v. the subject is the induction of Christ into the office of priesthood, considered in relation with Aaron's. God made the appointments to the Levitical office, choosing Aaron as the head of the priestly line. No one took the honour of priesthood to himself, as Korah sought to do. Neither did our Lord usurp this office. In His subjection to God's authority, Christ Jesus was perfect. “Though He were a Son, yet learned He obedience ” in all things.

In the matter of assuming the office of priesthood, His submissiveness was manifest also. “Thus the Christ also glorified not Himself to be made high priest, but He that spake unto Him, Thou art My Son ; I to-day have begotten Thee ; even as He saith also in another [place], Thou art a priest for ever according to the order of Melchizedek ” (W.K.) Christ did not glorify Himself to the priesthood, but was glorified to that office by Another, and to a priestly office superior in its “order ” to that of Aaron.

Why are there two Quotations from the Psalms ?

Who, then, glorified Him ? The two passages cited from the Psalms (ii. and cx.) show that Jehovah made this appointment. It was Jehovah Who said to Him, "**Thou art My Son,**" and also, "**Thou art a Priest.**" In the case of Aaron, Jehovah said to Moses, "Take thou unto thee Aaron thy brother . . . that he may minister unto Me in the priest's office" (Exod. xxviii. 1). But in glorifying Christ there was no mediator, for Jehovah spoke direct to His Son, saying, "Thou art a Priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek."

This verse from Psalm cx. appears to be quoted with express reference to the preceding statement that "Christ glorified not Himself to be made an high priest." Why, then, is the quotation from Psalm ii. interposed ? **Is not the Holy Spirit citing His own witness to those personal glories of the Son which were antecedent to His priesthood ?** Before saluting Him as High Priest, Jehovah had in eternity addressed Him as "My Son." And before He was made High Priest, He was "begotten" in the fullness of time, becoming the Incarnate Son. In His incarnation He is named Jesus ; in His own proper Person, His Eternal Name, He is the Son of God ; and, blending these glories, it is as "Jesus, the Son of God," that we see our Great High Priest (Heb. iv. 14).

Brief Summary

We have endeavoured, in the light of the context in which each of the four occurrences is found, to ascertain the special significance of this marvellous passage. As the pure gold woven into the ephod of the high priest gave unity, strength, value, and permanence to the whole texture, so the Eternal Sonship is in these four-fold testimonies closely and inextricably woven together with Jehovah's Begotten One. Like His seamless coat, His divine and human glories may be said to be "**woven from the top.**"

(1) **In the Second Psalm**, Jehovah commits the righteous government of the insurgent world-kingdoms to His Anointed King, Who is His Son in absolute personal relationship, and in due season Jehovah begets Him that He may sit on His holy hill of Zion in governmental power and glory.

(2) **In Acts xiii.**, the theme is the fulfilment of the Davidic promises in "Jesus" Whom God raised up, sending Him to His own people, who rebelliously crucified Him. The Person Who came is He of Whom the Psalmist wrote. "Jesus," Whom they had crucified, was Jehovah's Son and Jehovah's Begotten One, in accordance with that witness from their own oracles.

(3) **In Heb. i.**, the personal glories of the One in Whom God now speaks are unfolded in view of the disappearance of the temporary Mosaic system, "ordained by angels." The Son is in exalted contrast with angels, inasmuch as He is addressed as "My Son" by the One Who alone knew the personal relations subsisting in the Deity.

(4) **In Heb. v.**, it is shown that Christ is called or saluted of God a High Priest after the order of Melchizedek, an order not successional like the Aaronic. To this order Christ is glorified in virtue of His Eternal Sonship, which is verified by Psalm ii. 7, where both His pre-incarnate glory and His advent in flesh are presented for the faith and adoration of those who confess His Name.

IX.—IMAGE AND FIRSTBORN ONE

THE Firstborn is a title of exalted pre-eminence which the Holy Spirit gives to the Son in order to enhance the majesty of His Person in our eyes, and thereby to awaken and sustain our adoration and worship of Him Who deigned to humble Himself to manhood and death for the Father's glory and the creature's redemption.

The highest orders of created beings worship the Son at the divine behest. "When He bringeth in the **Firstborn** into the inhabited earth, He saith, And let all God's angels worship Him" (Heb. i. 6, W.K.). If God in His jealousy for the honour of the Son commands the angels to own and respect the personal rights of the Firstborn, we may be sure that the redeemed must and will gladly yield to Him their unbounded adoration, not only as the **Firstborn of all creation**, but as the **Firstborn from among the dead** (Col. i. 15, 18).

Who will question the Firstborn rights of the Son? Among men the rights of the firstborn are acquired by priority of birth, but the Son possesses those rights on other and superior grounds. Unlike the sons of men, His rights are independent of date of birth. In Himself, He is "without beginning," though at an appointed moment of time He became manifest among men, the Mediator between God and men. It is His **eternal worth and dignity as the Uncreated Son of the Father's love** which ensures to Him in **humiliation and glorification alike the pre-eminent rank of Firstborn**—a rank infinitely superior to the loftiest of created beings, in which rank all created beings must in due time acknowledge Him.

What sacred and soul-elevating truth is this concerning Him, the Creator of all, Who, nevertheless, would “like wretched man be made in everything but sin!” May we guard our souls, lest being “vainly puffed up” in our “fleshly minds,” we should omit to bow our hearts in adoring homage before these eternal glories of our Redeemer. Can we do other than worship the Son, Who is **the Firstborn of all creation, the Firstborn from among the dead, the Firstborn among many brethren ?**

Let us now see how the glories and rights of the Image of the invisible God and the Firstborn One have their origin in and rest upon His Eternal Sonship.

The Teaching in Colossians

It is noteworthy that in scripture, the glories of Christ Jesus are frequently revealed in close connection with the privileges of grace conferred upon those who believe in Him. Accordingly, in Colossians these glories are disclosed along with references to our inheritance, our deliverance, our translation, our redemption. Here this Blessed One is set before us as the Son of the Father’s love, the Image of the invisible God, the Firstborn of all creation (Col. i. 12-17)—to mention no more at the moment.

Indeed, the glories of the Son form a marvellous galaxy in this chapter. Look where we will—in the **past**, in the **present**, in the **future**—the Son in His sublime and unapproachable dignity is before us. If, **looking back**, we ask, Who created all things? It is the Son (ver. 16). If, **looking upwards**, we ask, Who is the Head of the body, the church? It is the Son (ver. 18). If, **looking onward**, we ask, Who is the Reconciler of all things? It is the Son (ver. 20). So that, from the foundation of the world we see an unbroken continuance of the almighty and all-gracious activities of the Son of the Father’s love, in Whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*

* See Appendix C (page 189).

It is no small benefit to our souls thus to be conducted by the Holy Spirit through the dim corridors of past ages to the utmost boundary of time itself—to that point when created things were about to be brought into being. There and then, existing in His omnipotence “before all things,” we see the One by Whom were created all things, the Son of the Father’s love. Before creation’s work begins, love is present and active; for the Father is loving the Son, before Love’s hands formed all existing things. This is the faith of God’s elect, and in this “thought beyond all thought” we humbly adore the **Son, Who is “before all” things, and in Whom all things “subsist together”** (ver. 17).

The Lord’s Glory gives us Power to Walk Worthily

These unfoldings of the personal glories of the Son flow out of the apostle’s prayer for the Colossian saints that in hostile circumstances they might walk worthily of the Lord unto all well-pleasing (ver. 10). Much suffering was inevitable for those who would be faithful to His name, and they needed a support greater than anything nature could provide. His desire for them, therefore, was that they might be “**strengthened with all power according to the might of His glory** unto all endurance and long-suffering with joy” (ver. 11). As we learn the glory of Him Who suffered pre-eminently, our loins will be girded to suffer with Him. Beholding the glory of the Son of the Father’s love, we are impelled to exclaim like Peter, “Lord, I am ready to go **with Thee** both into prison, and to death.”

Accordingly, the apostle proceeds to instruct them concerning (1) the positive blessings the Father had already bestowed upon them, and (2) the personal dignities of the Son, by Whom those blessings are secured. In the midst of their Christian hardships, they were exhorted to maintain a spirit of thanksgiving to the Father by contemplating these things of the Spirit’s revealing.

What had the Father already done for them? They were even then made fit to share the portion of the saints in light, the dwelling-place of God (ver. 12). Even then, the measure of the holiness imparted to them qualified them to occupy a place in the Father's house. Let them and us give thanks to the Father for this act of grace.

Consistently with this present meetness for the home of light, they were delivered from the authority of darkness. Further, as they had been set free from the power of darkness, so they had also been transferred to another dominion altogether. He has already translated us into the kingdom of the Son of His love (ver. 13). For all this divine activity let us indeed give thanks to the Father, being strengthened "unto all patience and long-suffering with joyfulness" as we behold the glory of the Son.

The Kingdom of the Son of His Love

This kingdom into which we have been translated is not that foretold by the prophets, in which divine power suppresses evil and rewards good, because the saints at Colosse were suffering through the presence and power of evil, and were called to exhibit patience, long-suffering and joy. John, the prisoner of the Lord, in Patmos was also in that same kingdom (Rev. i. 9). This is the kingdom wherein the Father places His children that they may learn how to exhibit the patience and meekness of Christ. It is the kingdom whose atmosphere is love, not yet glory and governmental power.

Here, the Father's love is revealed to us in and by the Son; and here, too, in this kingdom the Father reveals the personal glories of the Son, which flesh and blood can never know nor reveal (Matt. xvi. 17). To all who have been translated into this happy kingdom of light, the Son of the Father's love is the food of their faith, the stay of their hope, and the satisfying portion of their love.

Moreover, this privileged position which the Father has given us is due to the Son ; we are reminded that it is in Him " we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins " (ver. 14). What the Father has given to us is the result of the Son's atoning work for us. Let us therefore give thanks to both the Father and the Son.

The Image of the Invisible God

Further, the apostle writes that the Son of the Father's love " is the Image of the invisible God." As John says, " No one has seen God at any time ; the only-begotten Son, Who is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him " (John i. 18).

An " image " denotes a visible representation of the invisible or absent.* The Son, in the eternal light of His Person in the Godhead, is the Image of the invisible God. **He did not acquire this competency of representation by creation, as Adam did, who " out of the dust of the ground " was created in the image and glory of God (Gen. i. 27 ; 1 Cor. xi. 7).** Man, though made a little lower than the angels, was the appointed representative of his Maker in the world. But the Son is the Creator, and being God, He, as the Image of God, sets Him forth with an infinite fullness inseparable from His personal glory as the Son, which was His before He became flesh.

Divinity and Deity

Something was to be known of God in the world before Christ came into it. The existence of an unseen

* The root-idea of representation in the word " image " is well illustrated in the incident of our Lord and the Roman penny or denarius (Matt. xxii. 20). Pointing to the effigy of the emperor upon the coin, He asked the Pharisees, " Whose is this image ? " The effigy or bust was the official representation of the Imperial authority in Rome, governing in Palestine. The presence of this piece of money in the hands of the Jews, as current coin, unanswerably proved their subjection to the world-ruler in the distant metropolis, who was represented upon its face.

God, the Maker of all, may be inferred by man from the phenomena of created things (Rom. i. 19, 20). The works of creation give a powerful and indisputable witness to His eternal power and divinity (*theiotees*), though not to His Godhead or Deity (*theotees*). But **all the fullness of the Godhead (*theotees*) dwelt in Christ** (Col. ii. 9). The Son is the Image of the invisible God, is love and light. The Son is the effulgence of God's glory and the very impress of His substance or being (Heb. i. 3). He is "God, blessed for ever" (Rom. ix. 5).*

As the Son knew and enjoyed in fullest measure the love of the Father before the foundation of the world (John xvii. 24), He displays the Father's love in the kingdom of His saints; moreover, being the Image of the invisible God, He displays God's love to a world of sinners (2 Cor. iv. 4). Being Son, He is the Image or Representative, not merely by reason of His official appointment as Mediator, but by reason of His own Personal and eternal nature as the Son.

Sonship and Image

This title of "Image" is in scripture applied to the Son exclusively and is never applied to the Father, nor to the Spirit. The Son is that One in Deity Who represents and manifests God to His creatures. Coming into the world, He revealed the only true God to human sight and human knowledge, as none else could do (*cp.* John xvii. 3). And in accordance with the prophecy spoken by the Lord through the prophet Isaiah, the virgin's Son was called Immanuel, that is, "God with us" (Matt. i. 22, 23). In the Holy Babe, Whose name was called Jesus, God was manifest in flesh; He is the Image of the invisible God.

* All that God is in substance and supremacy, scripture attributes equally to the Son as to the Father and to the Spirit. Much help is afforded by a valuable comment on Rom. ix. 5, by W. Kelly in his *Notes on Romans*, pp. 165-171.

It should be remarked that in the language of the Holy Spirit the Son is not said to **become** or to **be made** the Image, as He is said to **become** of David's seed (Rom. i. 3), or High Priest (Heb. vi. 20), nor as the Word **was made** or **became** flesh (John i. 14). The present tense is used in Col. i. 15, as in John i. 18, which reveals His bosom-relationship to the Father; He **is** the invisible Image of the invisible God. This mode of statement is the more striking, seeing that it was when manifest in flesh that He was seen of men and angels as the Image of the unseen God.

Surely there is "dust of gold" lying in this grammatical distinction, and the personal glory of the Son is revealed in this choice of words by the Spirit. God's Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, became of David's seed according to flesh when born in time (Rom. i. 3), stepping into this relationship at His incarnation, as Matt. i. shows. But, because of His divine relationship in the Godhead, the Son was *potentially* the Image of the invisible God from all eternity; and the use of the present tense—"is"—supports this interpretation, and magnifies His glory to that extent.

Do not "the eyes of our hearts" (Eph. i. 18) discern an infinite difference between Adam who was created in the image of God and the uncreated Son of the Father's love being the Image of the invisible God? And does not this difference lie in the Person Who was pleased to represent and to manifest God in the creation groaning under the effects of sin? In "flesh" was the **manner** of this representation, but the Eternal Son was always and is ever personally competent to declare God, though it was when incarnate that the manifestation was made to man, and is now recorded in the scriptures.

So that the Son was the Image of the invisible God *de jure* in eternity, and *de facto* in time. And even now, the ascended Christ, "Who is the Image of God," shines upon men in the gospel of His glory (2 Cor. iv. 4).

“ Thou wast the Image in man’s lowly guise
Of the Invisible to mortal eyes ;
Son of His bosom, come from heaven above,
We see in Thee incarnate, ‘ God is Love.’
Thy lips the Father’s name to us reveal ;
What burning power in all Thy words we feel,
As with enraptured hearts we hear Thee tell
The heavenly glories which Thou know’st so well ! ”

X.—THE FIRSTBORN

IN Colossians i., the Son's title, "Firstborn of all creation," is closely associated with that of "Image of the invisible God." The Son of the Father's love is, in a single sentence, declared to be both the one and the other: "Son of His love . . . Who is Image of the invisible God, Firstborn of all creation." **In relation to the Godhead or Deity He is the Image, and in relation to all created things He is the Firstborn ;** moreover, both these relations are combined in His blessed Person, from which they each take their incomparable character. It is the Son Who is Image and Who is Firstborn.

Representation and dignity underlie these two relations of the Son respectively. In sending His Son into the world, the love of God in respect of us has been manifested (1 John iv. 9) ; for the Son of the Father's love is the Image of the invisible God, **representing** and displaying Him Who is love.

Also, when that Son is "found in fashion as a man," He is ranked as "Firstborn," for the whole creation pales into insignificance in comparison with the all-surpassing glory of His Person ; even as, in the essential nature of things, He Who builds the house has much more honour than the house itself (Heb. iii. 3). The Creator-Son possesses the **dignity** of "Firstborn" when by incarnation He enters the sphere of His own creation. This **dignity** is His inherent right as the Son.

What does "Firstborn" mean?

It is to be noted at the outset that, when applied to the Lord Jesus, "Firstborn" or "First-begotten" is not

followed by "Son"; so that we do not read in scripture of "Firstborn Son" as we do of the "Only-begotten Son." We learn, therefore, that the Eternal One Whom we worship is the **Firstborn because He is the Son**: "His Son . . . Who is . . . Firstborn." The Son takes the title of "Firstborn" in His own inherent right of Sonship, eternally possessed, and not as a title acquired by priority of birth or beginning of existence. **He is not the Firstborn, because He was the first to be born.**

In scriptural usage, the term "firstborn" signifies pre-eminent rights with regard to paternal authority, status, property, and the like. It means, therefore, first of rank in the family, and this foremost rank may or may not arise from order of birth or primogeniture (*see* 1 Chron. xxvi. 10).

For example, Jacob used the term "firstborn" in this general sense of dignified excellence when blessing his unworthy eldest son, Reuben: "Thou art my firstborn, my might, and the beginning of my strength, the excellency of dignity, and the excellency of power" (Gen. xlix. 3). Such was the precedence in rank that the title of "firstborn" gave Reuben over the other sons of Jacob, though in his case its value to him and his descendants was to a great extent lost through his own sinful failure.

Now, it will be seen from the context of Col. i. 15 that **supremacy and excellence are inseparably associated with the use of the title of "Firstborn"** in this passage. The reason why the Son of the Father's love is "Firstborn of all creation" is plainly stated: it is "because by Him were created all things." The Son's degree of superiority is that elevation which the Creator possesses above His own creation. Because the Son made the earth and the heavens, He necessarily, when He appears for our redemption, takes the dignity of "**Firstborn**" in relation to the earth and the heavens and to all contained in them.

The Firstborn not always the one Born first

Amongst men, priority of birth usually bestows the firstborn rights, but not always. According to the natural order of birth, Esau possessed the birthright, yet it was transferred to Jacob the younger. Although David had many sons of earlier birth than Solomon (1 Chron. iii.), yet the regal successional rights to the throne of David were granted to the latter. This is a striking instance, for on that account Solomon appears in the Messianic pedigree, traced through Abraham and David (Matt. i. 6), though he was not the eldest son of David (*cf.* 1 Kin. ii. 22). It was God's sovereign grace that conferred this high distinction of "firstborn" upon the son of David and Bathsheba (Ps. lxxxix. 27), showing that primogeniture was not always followed for firstborn rights. Solomon was **not the first to be born** of the sons of David, yet he became **the firstborn** in the royal family, and inherited the crown of Israel.

Again, we find this distinction holds good when the term is applied **nationally**. Here, too, "firstborn" implies, not priority in the date of becoming a nation, but an exalted precedence over other nations. For instance, Egypt had a place of eminence among the nations before the call of Abram. Yet, centuries after, before the posterity of Abram were redeemed from bondage, Jehovah's message to Pharaoh was "Israel is My son, even **My firstborn** . . . Let My son go" (Exod. iv. 22, 23).

Later in their history, this same beautiful metaphor was used by Jeremiah in connection with the predicted restoration of the nations of Israel from their scattering among the Gentiles. In the outgoings of Jehovah's "everlasting love," even to the apostate ten tribes, He says, "I will bring them" back, "for I am a Father to Israel, and Ephraim is **My firstborn**" (Jer. xxxi. 1-9).

Clearly, then, "firstborn" Israel was not the first nation to be formed, for Egypt and many other nations preceded it (Gen. x.); nor was "firstborn" Ephraim

the "eldest" of the tribes of Jacob. In each case, "firstborn" indicated a relative position compared with others, and this privilege was not based upon priority of existence, but upon the favour and election of God.

We conclude, therefore, that "firstborn" in scriptural usage does not always mean "the first one to be born of those that are born," but that it does sometimes mean "the first in rank of those that are born." The latter sense is the one in which the term "Firstborn" is applied to our Lord in Colossians i. and elsewhere, He being the Creator, and not a created being.

The Son styled "Firstborn of all Creation"

In the scriptures, the Holy Spirit sets manifold guards to the sacred Person of the Son Who became flesh. When Jehovah came down upon Mount Sinai in sight of all the people of Israel, He commanded Moses to "set bounds," lest any of them should profanely intrude into the mystery of the divine Presence on the mount (Exod. xix.).

And, in Colossians, the Spirit "sets bounds" to guard the glory of the Son. When He mentions that the Son of the Father's love came into the world to secure for us "redemption [through His blood], the forgiveness of sins" (i. 14), He at once affirms His supreme dignity as "**Firstborn of all creation**" (i. 15), together with His vast and all-comprehending creatorial work which establishes that dignity beyond all question (i. 16, 17). Thus, in the Son of the Father's love, the Holy Spirit has united before our eyes the Creator and the cross, that we may everlastingly adore and worship, love and serve Him, confessing His eternal Sonship-glory, which was undiminished even in the lowest depths of His humiliation, to which He was pleased to descend.

Our Lord is "the second Man," not the first (1 Cor. xv. 47), and yet is called "the Firstborn of all creation."

The Son is, therefore, accorded the title of "**First-born,**" not by reason of the date of the incarnation, which, indeed, was comparatively late in the history of creation and of man.* No, His unequalled and incomparable excellence arises from His own intrinsic glory as Son, displayed by Him in creation and its works.

It is in this terse account of creation (vers. 16, 17) that the Spirit both testifies to the Son's personal glory, and "sets bounds" to the inquisitive intrusions of the human intellect. In His detailed description of the Son's creative work, He leaves not a single loophole for unbelieving man to suggest an exception, which might seem to invalidate His claim that the Son of the Father's love is the **Creator of the whole creation.** He created all things both personally in His own right, and instrumentally to the purpose and glory of God. Therefore, according to the Spirit's teaching, nothing can pass the fixed barrier between the Son, the Creator, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the created, produced by Him. The whole creation sprang into being at His voice and by His hand. **The Son, therefore, is before and above the whole creation.**

The range of the Son's handiwork described in these brief utterances in Colossians is so extensive that even the mightiest of celestial beings are included. "He is before all"; moreover, "all things" now subsist together by Him. Therefore, on these grounds of relative existence and maintenance, **the Son takes precedence of all His works.** Being Himself Un-created, Uncaused, He is "Firstborn of all creation."

* "' Begotten ' or ' born,' in relation to the Son in the Godhead, cannot be allowed to mean a point of time, or subsequence . . . but simply the nearest relationship, or community of nature, between the Son and the Father. Was He or was He not Son from all eternity, as the Father was Father from all eternity? or are we to reason from manhood, and infer that because a father precedes his son, so it is in the Godhead? This I believe to be Arianism, and as baseless in Scripture as in sound reasoning, if we reason from the revealed nature of Godhead." *Bible Witness and Review*, i. 374.

By this revelation, the Spirit has "set bounds" to isolate thereby the Son in His own proper majesty and transcendent glory, marking off the Creator from the creature by impassable barriers, lest the proud thoughts of man should violate the Son's essential glory by presuming upon His self-humiliation to abase Him still more, on the one hand, and set up some rival to His supremacy, on the other.

" Oh, love beyond all telling,
 Beyond all ken or thought,
 Which, Thou, O blessed Saviour,
 To us from heaven hast brought !
 In Thee we see united
 Both God and man in one ;
 Hence power and love unmeasured
 Combined in Thee are shown.

The power of the Creator
 Gives glory to Thy name ;
 The love of the Redeemer
 Enhances all Thy fame :
 Creator and Redeemer,
 Almighty Saviour Lord,
 The power and love that saved us
 For ever be adored."

The Use of the word, " Creature "

" The Firstborn of every creature " (A.V.) is a less faithful rendering of the original than " Firstborn of all creation," and the propriety of this change is acknowledged by scholars generally, the reason being that in this clause " created things " are viewed collectively rather than individually. It is, of course, true that the Creator of the whole creation or the universe is also the Creator of all its parts. And it is equally true that when the Son appears among men " in the likeness of men " He in His own inherent right is " Firstborn of every creature " as well as " Firstborn of all creation." Nevertheless, the correct phraseology adds the maximum beauty and value to the text, as it must always do in every inspired writing, and is always worth seeking on this account.

This particular correction from "creature" to "creation" should itself act as a warning. We must know and respect the "bounds" divinely set to guard the sanctity of the Person of the Son, and we must not allow either our imagination or our logic to trespass upon forbidden ground. We have no liberty to choose our own words in speaking of the Son. And to do so without warrant would be to fall into dangerous and presumptuous error. To this danger we are ever liable, and our only safeguard against our own irreverent fancies and those of others is to cleave implicitly to the precise utterances of the Spirit concerning the Son, "Whom no man knoweth."

"Man" but not "Creature"

In point of fact, while the ever-blessed Son is in Colossians i. described as "Firstborn of all creation" (*ktisis*), we do not discover in this title nor in any part of scripture that the Son became part of His own creation (*ktisis*), nor that He is anywhere in the Holy Spirit's language called a creature (*ktisma*).

But, as with holy caution we seek to trace the "bounds set" by the Spirit in the names and titles of the Incarnate Son, we read elsewhere that He was made a little lower than the angels. We also find in several places that inspired tongues and pens call Him "Man" in a way which shows us that He became "Man" most truly and definitely. Paul speaks of Him as "the man (*anthropos*) Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. ii. 5), and Peter of Him as "a man (*aneer*) approved of God among you" (Acts ii. 22). Indeed, the Lord speaks of Himself as "a man (*anthropos*)" (John viii. 40). But in vain do we search the scriptures for any reference to that Blessed One as "a creature," and therefore, we feel bound to respect the reserve of the Spirit in this matter, and to restrict ourselves to the language of revelation in regard to the incarnation.

In this connection, we do not forget that words are sometimes used in a poetical or metaphorical sense,

but in such instances no one would contend seriously for their literal meaning. The Spirit of Christ in the psalmist, speaking of the Holy Sufferer, said, "I am a worm, and no man" (Ps. xxii. 6). The expression is a figurative one, and refers to His abandonment upon the cross. And no one sees any contradiction between the "no man" of the Psalm and the Lord's own words of Himself to the Jews, "a Man that hath told you the truth" (John viii. 40). The language of David is poetical, while that in John is historical and literal, but both are expressive of the truth contained in the two passages respectively.*

But the very suggestion to apply the word, "creature," to the Son **in its literal sense** is repulsive to our spiritual instincts. Yet some have ventured with more boldness than reverence to do so, and to infer that because the **Son is truly God and truly Man**, which scripture plainly teaches, they may say with equal accuracy and meetness that He is "**God and Creature.**"

But this inference goes beyond revealed truth. And in view of the significant silence of scripture and the lack of divine permission, it would have been wiser to have said like Job, "I will lay mine hand upon my mouth. . . . I will proceed no further" (Job xl. 4, 5). "**Man**" is authorized by the usage of the Spirit, but "**creature**" is not.

Let us cultivate a becoming reticence of language in speaking of these Holy Mysteries, and remember that the glories on the Mount of Transfiguration vanished altogether when Peter's depreciatory words concerning the Father's Beloved Son were uttered, though they were spoken sincerely enough. That striking rebuke of the apostle's unruly tongue coming from the cloud

* It is by way of poetical emphasis of Christ's humiliation that "creature" is used in the lines, "Who hast a creature's form assumed That creatures God might know." The licence of the hymn-writer took him beyond the wording of Scripture—"the form of a servant." The precision of expository prose is not always found along with the ardour and exuberance of verse.

of glory is surely recorded for our warning (Mark ix. 1-8).

Why is the term, " Creature," avoided in Scripture ?

It must always be difficult to assign reasons for the absence of a given word from scripture, but sometimes the positive truths revealed there enable us to discern the propriety of the omission. And the truths revealed concerning the Son certainly indicate that to Him " creature " is an inapplicable word, and derogatory to His glory. We **know** " the Spirit of truth, and the spirit of error " (1 John iv. 6)—finding the former throughout the scriptures, and the latter throughout man's commentaries thereon.

" Creature " (*ktisma*) is a general designation of animated nature, covering in its wide scope every variety of being produced at the will of the Creator. Few words, if any, have a broader significance than " creature," embracing, as it does, everyone and everything except the Creator Himself, God. All, however great their diversity, are included in its range. Gabriel and Satan are both creatures. So were Pharaoh and Moses, Herod and John the Baptist, Nero and Paul. The lion and the lamb, the eagle that flies and the worm that crawls are alike creatures. Creaturehood is their nature, and they can have no other. But we will never use the confusing and dishonouring, because ambiguous, word, " creature," of the Blessed Lord Jesus, but rather, like one of old, confess to Him with adoring fervour, " Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."

We believe that it is in the wisdom of God, guarding thereby the glory of the Son, that " creature " is withheld from every scriptural designation of Him. The Holy Spirit avoided every ambiguous word that might lead us to think less worthily of the Son than we ought to think. It is true that we may safely affirm that **every man is a creature**, but obviously we **cannot** even in human speech say that **every**

creature is a man. And if we were to say of a certain man that he is but "a poor creature," it would be understood that we spoke of that man with some disparagement and contempt. And there lies the danger that a similar element of disparagement and contempt would be conveyed by us when this word is applied to our Lord, and that in consequence His name would be blasphemed among His enemies by us, and His glory dimmed in our own eyes to some extent.

Let us, therefore, moved by reverence and godly fear, refrain from using this unauthorized word when speaking of the Lord. Neither let us ignore these particular boundaries of revealed truth concerning the Son set up by the Spirit of God to safeguard His glory. We are not entitled to call Him "creature," because He is Man, any more than we are entitled to call Him "Brother" because He calls us His "brethren" (Heb. ii. 11, 12).

The Son in Manhood

It is a revealed truth that the Son at His incarnation became "Man." The words of scripture are distinct and definite that the Lord from heaven was the Second Man (*anthropos*), 1 Cor. xv. 47. Being Man, He was, therefore, of that class in the diversified orders of earthly creaturehood, to which God assigned the rank of highest eminence and the office of earthly government. The first man received this place of superiority by the express appointment of Jehovah, Who breathed into Adam's nostrils the breath of life. Hence, man by the exceptional manner of his creation is distinguished from other created beings on the earth, all of which were from the beginning placed under his dominion (Gen. i. 28 ; ii. 7). The Lord Jesus during His earthly ministry frequently spoke of Himself as "the Son of man."

But, while man (*anthropos*) by his special creation is the noblest class of God's creatures on the earth, we must not forget what degradation sin has brought upon

that class. Adam was the earthly creature who sinned, introducing death and judgment to his whole race (Rom. v. 12), and also as a consequence of his sin, subjecting the whole creation to vanity (Rom. viii. 20). But now the grace of God which carries with it salvation for all men (*anthropos*) has appeared (Tit. ii. 11). And as "by man (*anthropos*) came death, by man (*anthropos*) came also the resurrection of the dead" (1 Cor. xv. 21).

Accordingly, the Lord Jesus was in due time made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death (Heb. ii. 9). In becoming man, He became a little lower than the angels for man's redemption. Scripture teaches us this measure of His descent for our meditation and praise; but it **does not teach us that He was made "lower" than man, as well as angels**; nor does it introduce the vague term, "creature," in speaking of His humiliation. The gospel is that even as by **one man** sin entered into the world, so God's free gift in grace is by the **One Man**, Jesus Christ (Rom. v. 12, 19). In describing the Incarnate Son and His work, "man" is specified, but "creature" is avoided.

The Mediator, the Man Christ Jesus

Therefore, when the Son of the Father's love came in flesh into His own creation, He appeared as Man, truly and in all respects as a Man, sin excepted. The Son Incarnate is the Mediator, for "God is one, and the Mediator of God and men one, [the] man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. ii. 5). In this great mystery, **the Holy Spirit speaks of manhood, never of creaturehood.** Godhead and manhood are, in the text just quoted, declared to be the comprehending limits of this mediatorship. To extend or to modify these limits by the introduction of "creaturehood" is a foolish disregard of the precision of scriptural language. Our Mediator is the Man Christ Jesus. The Son stooped "down to **man's estate and dust**"; "For **man**—oh, miracle of grace! For **man**, the Saviour bled."

This truth of the Son in manhood touches us very deeply, ourselves by nature being of this sinful race. We would fain break out in exulting and adoring praise for God's great love wherewith He loved us, sending His Son into the world that we might know His love. We marvel more and more at the grace and glory of the Eternal Son, Who deigned to become Man for the accomplishment of His redeeming work, Firstborn of all creation, though taking upon Himself the bondman's form, and also the Mediator of God and men.

When we read of the Son on earth, moving visibly among His own dependent creation, we find the unerring pen of the Holy Spirit describes Him as "Man." We are amazed at the "mind which was in Christ Jesus," when we behold the Incarnate Son ranked in the highest order of terrestrial beings, but pre-eminent in humility—the "Man approved of God." It is an eternal wonder that He became a Man at all, and still more that, being so, He should humble Himself yet further—so far as the death of the cross. There and then did He descend into "the lowest deeps" of shame, suffering and abandonment for the glory of God.

But up to and throughout that awful cataclysm of judicial woe upon the cross the Incarnate Son passed with unvaried nature. Neither His suffering for sins nor the suffering of death made him "lower" than man. Indeed, it was needful that as Man He should be there for men. It was as Son of man that He gave His life a ransom for many; it was as Son of God He "loved me, and gave Himself for me;" so we read, and so we believe.

We are encouraged to continue our meditations upon this sublime theme because we learn from the apostle's prayer in Colossians i. that the character of our walk will be improved in proportion to our knowledge of the essential glories of the Son. A progressive walk is shown to be dependent upon our progress in the "full knowledge" of the will of God in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, and upon our progress too in

the "full knowledge" of God Himself (vers. 9, 10). And this "full knowledge" involves, as is clear from the revelations in the subsequent verses, the "spiritual understanding" of **the essential glories of the Son**, unto Whose fellowship we have been called. May they be to our edification and our growth in the knowledge of Him as a result of these meditations.

These revelations were originally communicated to counteract the mischievous teachings that were then spreading among the Colossian saints. Man's imagination was engaged in the unhallowed and unlicensed occupation of defining the personal nature of our Lord. This gave occasion for the **rich and precious unfoldings of His personal glories** revealed by the Holy Spirit in this Epistle. And these unfoldings are now the special portion of all those who have been translated by the Father into the kingdom of the Son of His love (ver. 13). Let us seek to receive them as such in all "lowliness of mind."

Worshipping the Creator and Redeemer

In this kingdom of light and love, as we surely are, we shall not tire of sitting at the feet of the Firstborn to ponder again and again His unique and incomparable excellences as they are set out in these verses. Here we see the vast panorama of the whole creation, visible and invisible, unrolled before us in its staggering immensities; and here we learn that the One "in Whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins," is the Creator and Sustainer of it all!

As we see this **creatorial glory of the Son of the Father's love** reaching back in its potentiality ere time began, is not a chord of deepest adoration struck immediately within our souls? Can we not anticipate the song of praise by restored Israel to their Creator God, and say to one another, "Oh, come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord our Maker" (Ps. xcv. 6)? If we do sit unmoved now as we read verses 15-17, we shall not when we see Him "as He is."

Then we shall fall down before Him that sits upon the throne, and worship Him that lives to the ages of ages. Then shall we cast our crowns before the throne, and say, "Thou art worthy, O our Lord and [our] God, to receive glory and honour and power; for Thou hast created all things, and for Thy will they were, and they have been created" (Rev. iv. 11).

We unfeignedly bless God for these precious unveilings (vers. 15-18) of the eternal past of the Son of His love. For we note that all the fifteen pronouns in verses 15 to 20 inclusive are in apposition with the noun, Son (ver. 13). Each dependent sentence, therefore, declares some fresh glory of the Son, to Whom they all relate, and in Whom they all combine with a transcendent harmony. The sight of His glories moves us to exclaim, like the bride of old, "My beloved is unto me a cluster of henna-flowers in the vineyards of Engedi" (Cant. i. 14).

The Son Before All Things

Moreover, the pre-existence of the Son is affirmed in the passage with remarkable definiteness. We read, "He is before all things" (ver. 17). The important stress laid on the subject in this simple sentence must not be overlooked. The special force of the pronoun is perhaps lost to the English reader, but in the original Greek the emphatic pronoun, *autos*, is employed, which means, *very self*. So that it is declared that "He Himself," or "His very self" is "before all things." It is He (that is, the Son) and no other. The Person of the Son preceded the universe, and He is also the universal Cause.

Again, while the pronoun establishes the Son's external **personality** "before all things," the verb establishes His existence prior to all created things: "He is," not was, "before all things" and beings. It is the scriptural phrase signifying **absolute, timeless existence**. The Holy Spirit uses it here of the Son, as Jesus did of Himself, when He said to the Jews,

“ Before Abraham was, **I am** ” (John viii. 58), and as God said of Himself to Moses, when sending him to the children of Israel, “ **I am** hath sent me unto you ” (Exod. iii. 14).

With what simple force and what ravishing beauty this brief sentence in verse 17 immediately follows the recital of the creatorial glory of the Son, Who is the Image of the Invisible God, the Firstborn of all creation! **He! this Very One**, ever-existing, ever-living—the **Firstborn—is before all things!** This short statement makes the Son’s pre-existence very clear to the simplest of us; and indeed the Father’s revelations concerning the Son are written for His “ babes ” (Matt. xi. 25). May we be preserved from the wisdom and prudence of this age, which blind the heart to the eternal beauties in the Son, often using as a veil the words of good men.

The “ all things ” which the Son precedes in existence are His creation. Is it not a joy to our souls to meditate upon this greatness and majesty of our Lord? Are not our very hearts thrilled as we remember that the heavens and the earth are “ the work of His fingers ”? **All things!** whether we consider the universe and its contents in terms of **space**—the heavens, the earth, the sea—; or in terms of **time**—the past reaching back to the beginning of all, the present filling our life’s little day, the future with endless ages beyond—we know that the Son, in Whom we now behold the Father’s love, is before all, for “ by (*en*, in virtue of) Him all things were created.”

Thus, we have seen in our meditation upon this phrase, “ He is before all things,” that the **Son’s eternal existence** as the **Son of the Father’s love** is thereby affirmed. The term, “ Firstborn,” as we have seen, is expressive of the pre-eminent dignity and worth creationwards belonging to the Son because He is the Creator of all. In fact, the whole context forbids us to think that “ first ” is used as an adverb of time, or that “ born ” implies that the Son was “ born before all creation ”; but confirms the thought that “ Firstborn ”

expresses, not His origin, but His relation to the universe.

The Son Supreme in Creation, but not Independent

It may be convenient for purposes of reference to place together the statements in verses 16, 17 concerning the Son's relations to the universe as Creator and Sustainer.

- (1) **By** (**en**, in virtue of) Him all things were created ;
- (2) **By** (**dia**, by means of) Him all things were created ;
- (3) **For** (**eis**, the end and object) Him [all were created] ;
- (4) **By** (**en**, in virtue of) Him all things consist (ver. 17).

From these revelations we learn that the Son of the Father's love has a fourfold relationship to the whole creation or universe, each differing but all harmonizing.

- (1) The Son acted in virtue of His own power in creation.
- (2) The Son acted as the direct instrument in creation.
- (3) The Son's honour and glory are the end of creation.
- (4) The Son's power upholds the whole creation.

These Colossian truths are revealed to us in sequence that we may see their marvellous correlation, which exists only because of the Deity of the Son. First (1), we behold His absolute supremacy, for He created all things in virtue of His own inherent power and right. Then (2), by changing the preposition from *en* to *dia* (not observable in the A.V.), the Spirit unfolds that in the work of creation the Son "acted instrumentally for God the Father's glory."

While, therefore, the Son in His own personal right is the Active Cause of all creation, He also in that same work acted, **not independently, but mediately**. What was done by Him was the act of the full Godhead, even as we read in Genesis, that Elohim said, " Let **US** make man in **OUR** image " (Gen. i. 26). So in Eph. iii. 9 (where " by Jesus Christ " is omitted in revised versions) **God** is said to be the Creator of all.

Thus, from these revelations recorded by the Holy Spirit, faith discerns the communion of the Son with the Father even in pre-creation days ; for in the work of creation the Son according to the inscrutable relations in the Godhead acted both in His own right and on behalf of Another ; there ever existed absolute community of nature and purpose between the Father and the Son.

This truth of the eternal unity of the Father and the Son becomes very sweet to us as well as marvellous when we recollect that it is illustrated in the preservation of Christ's sheep as well as in the making of the worlds. None can pluck them out of My hand ; none can pluck them out of My Father's hand ; I and My Father are One ; said the Good Shepherd (John x. 29, 30). **The unity of the Father and the Son is displayed both in the circle of creation and in the circle of redemption.**

Created for Him and Upheld by Him

Further, we again see how the intrinsic glory of the Son is protected by " a wall, great and high." The Spirit, having spoken (2) of the Son as the Agent in creation, jealous to maintain the pre-eminence and purity of the Son's glory untarnished before our eyes, lest our minds should even for a moment entertain the thought that this agency in creation involves anything derogatory to His Immutable Being, adds the clause, " and for (*eis*) Him " (3). As the Son is the First, so He is the Last. While all things were created through Him, it is at the same time true that **all things were**

created for His glory. The purpose of creation is focussed in the Son. The universe exists for the glory of the Son, even as it does for the glory of the Lord God Almighty, Who was, and Who is, and Who is to come (Rev. iv. 8-11).

Hence, as we by the enabling of the Holy Spirit look behind the whole scheme of creation, we see that the Son fills no secondary or subordinate place. He alone is the Supreme Architect and Builder, and He is also the end and object of its existence. But even more is revealed. To enhance His glory yet further, the Spirit gives the additional revelation that "**all things subsist together** by (in virtue of) Him," (4). The Son's omnipotence continues in unceasing activity towards the universe. The Son of the Father's love maintains the existence and energy and functioning of all created things, ever and always.

This knowledge of the Son is truly wonderful in our eyes, beloved. But having this knowledge of the Son, Whom no one knows save the Father (Matt. xi. 27), communicated to us by the Father, let us not fail to honour the Son of His love, both in His creative and in His judicial and redemptive glory, even as we honour the Father (John v. 22, 23).

The early Entrance of Leavening Doctrine

No doubt these truths concerning the Son have a prophylactic value, to use a medicinal term. They not only promote spiritual health, but they prevent doctrinal disease. They were unfolded to the saints at Colosse to destroy the germs of poisonous theories regarding the Person of the Lord, even then existing among them. It is well-known that these germs afterwards developed rapidly, notwithstanding this testimony of the Holy Spirit against them; and by the fourth century they had become widespread heterodoxies, corrupting the churches in all directions.

The evil doctrines rampant at that time were of many

varieties, but the notorious Arius taught that the Son was a secondary God, created by the Father before all worlds, that He was the very highest of all creatures, and that by Him as a subordinate all things were created. This subtle but deadly blow at the full Deity of our Lord was virtually anticipated and condemned in the Colossian Epistle as well as in other parts of scripture. The truths of its first chapter that have been before us in these pages give the direct lie to this damnable doctrine.

It may perhaps be inquired why any mention should be made in these meditations of such false and wicked thoughts of a bygone age. But alas, when evil and perverse things are once spread among the saints, their pernicious influence persists among the people of God both at the time and in succeeding generations. Arius died in A.D. 336, but Arianism and kindred errors, though formally condemned, have never been thoroughly eradicated. During the past sixteen centuries, the hateful teaching has revived over and over again in varying forms under various names.

And, in our day, as might be expected when Christendom is fast filling to the full its cup of apostasy, the **doctrine of the full Deity of the Son is assailed** with as great, if not greater, vehemence than ever. At any rate, the outbreaks occur with alarming frequency, and in the least expected quarters, sometimes violently, sometimes speciously, but in effect always denying in some way the revealed glories of the Son of God, and bringing pain to every faithful heart.

Warning against Infection

The reply, therefore, to the suggested inquiry is that, on account of the present perilous times, the matter is mentioned by way of warning against the present danger that is threatening the saints. And it is noteworthy that in this very context (Col. i. 28), the apostle, as a preacher of Christ, **links "warning" with**

“teaching” as a Christian duty; “warning every man, and teaching every man.” It was because of the menace to the faith in its very groundwork that the apostle’s letter had the double character of admonition and exposition. In an epidemic, precautionary measures are broadcast for the public safety, while in normal times these protective measures are not required. Dangerous departure from the truth at Colosse called forth the apostolic ministry suitable to correct such departure. The knowledge of the truth is the appointed safeguard against every lie (1 John ii. 21), and the only effective one.

The erroneous notion that the Ever-blessed Son was inferior to God, because, as it was alleged, He was created to act as God’s deputy in the work of creation, is completely exploded by these concise utterances of the Spirit, simple, yet sublime in their simplicity. The perverse and evil allegations of the heretic were anticipated by the Spirit of truth, Who revealed that in creation the Son exercised the incommunicable powers of the Deity, and is therefore “over all, God blessed for ever. Amen” (Rom. ix. 5).

Was it said in the fourth century by these traducers that the Son was subordinate in Deity when He created all things? The apostle speaking by the Spirit had in the first century shown that **not only was the universe created by (*dia*) the Son as the active Instrument, but the universe was created by (*en*) Him, that is, in virtue of His own personal, intrinsic (not derived) power (ver. 16).** There was no subordination in the Deity, but in the work of creation the Son was Principal as well as Agent, acting in His own proper personal right, while acting also in absolute co-operation with the Father. As the Son said, “My Father worketh hitherto, and I work” (John v. 17), intimating, as the Jews to whom He was speaking understood, that He was equal with, not subordinate to God.

We rejoice to know that the Blessed Son of the Father was obedient in a glory of perfection throughout His

pathway of service. We remember that He said Himself, "The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He seeth the Father do." His whole life was a complete conformation to the Father's own activities. And this glory we beheld, writes the apostle.

But, as if to guard against any carnal conclusion that this obedience of the Son implies His subordination in the Godhead, the Son added, "What things soever He (the Father) doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise" (John v. 19). There is, therefore, in essential Being and essential Doing, perfect equality between the Father and the Son. Moreover, this "doing" of the Son of the Father's love includes the creation of all things, as we are taught in the Epistle to the Colossians.

The Son No Creature either Before or After Incarnation

While all thought of the Son's subordination in Deity is contrary to Colossians i., so also is the blasphemous assertion that He is a creature, first and highest of all creatures, but yet a creature. This scripture declares that He is the **Creator of "all things,"** using this comprehensive phrase four times in the two verses (16, 17). The Creator is not a creature; He creates, but is not created. The Son created all, but He did not create Himself.

Yet some, who would not apply the unbecoming term, creature, to the Son in His eternal essence, do not hesitate to apply it to Him in His incarnation. They declare that the holy humanity of our Blessed Lord was a special creation, and on this unfounded assumption they claim that it is permissible to speak of Him as a "creature."

But there is not a word of scripture to justify this use of the ugly, unsavoury expression. The Holy Spirit does not write of the Lord as a creature, nor as One created either before the worlds were made, or at His incarnation. We read of His **birth**, not of His creation. Why not let holy sobriety and godly prudence govern our language in matters like this,

wherein the utmost scrupulousness is demanded? We should beware of adding any words of our own choosing to the scriptural vocabulary concerning the Son.

Woman-born, Not Created

In the word of God, the **incarnation of the Son is recorded, not as a creation, but as a birth**: we read that "the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise . . ." (Matt. i. 18; ii. 1). God created Adam the first man, but Eve gave birth to Cain and Abel (Gen. i. 27; iv. 1, 2). In the case of Adam, **life in maturity** was directly bestowed by Jehovah upon the inanimate dust of the ground, of which man was formed by his Creator; but in the case of Cain and Abel, their **infant life** was received by transmission from their living parents. And the whole of Adam's race began their being in a similar manner.

Now the manner of our Lord's entrance into the world was by birth, not by special creation as Adam's. His imminent birth with its miraculous character was specially announced to Mary by the angel, who said to her in her virginity, "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that Holy Thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God" (Luke i. 35). In these words, the personal agency of the Holy Spirit acting in unspeakable power upon Mary is plainly promised, and also the consequent birth of the "Holy Thing" to be called Son of God.

It is, however, a mere gloss upon this text to claim that according to its teaching the Lord's "holy humanity was created"—that it was "brought into existence by the creative act of the Holy Spirit of God." Nothing is stated here or elsewhere in scripture which implies that the birth of Jesus Christ was "a creative act," that is, in the sense that the birth was a production of something from nothing. Such a theory rests upon the imagination of man, not upon revealed fact in scripture.

Son of God Before and When Born

The manner in which the overshadowing power of the Highest wrought upon Mary is not described. She herself declared, "He that is Mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is His name" (Luke i. 49). But, **whatever the secret and inscrutable operation of the Holy Spirit, divine power ensured that He Who was born of Mary was called the Son of God.** The fullness of time had come, and God "sent forth His Son, come of woman" (Gal. iv. 4). It was His own Son Whom God so sent, "in likeness of flesh of sin" for the condemnation of sin in the flesh (Rom. viii. 3).

Sonship is plainly predicted of Him Who was born of the virgin Mary. He was Son of God **before** His birth, for God sent His own Son; and He was Son of God **after** His birth, for this was His name according to Gabriel's instructions to the mother (Luke i. 35), while Isaiah's prophecy (vii. 14) was fulfilled also, according to which His name was Immanuel, that is, God with us (Matt. i. 22, 23). As then He was God both before and after His birth, so **He was Son of God both before and after His birth.**

The Seed of the Woman

Here, in Bethlehem, was the Seed of **the woman**, as dimly foretold in Eden (Gen. iii. 15); and therefore the birth is unparalleled in human history. But its marvel of marvels is that the **Holy One of God was born without taint of sin of a woman who herself was born in sin** and shapen in iniquity (Ps. li. 5), a state true of every member of the whole race. The explanation of the unique miracle was given to Joseph by the angel of the Lord; "that which is conceived (or begotten) in her is of the Holy Ghost" (Matt. i. 20). By His sacred and pervasive influence, every trace of evil was excluded and every risk of contamination was avoided. Speaking in typical language, the fine flour

was kneaded with oil. And He Who was born of Mary was the thrice-holy Son of God.

With the profoundest gratitude and praise it is recognized that this event was of God in a manner that no like event has ever been, or ever will be. The virgin birth of Jesus was unique, marvellous, miraculous, as a birth. At that point of time "the Word became flesh." This is scriptural language, but we do not read that this "flesh" was created, as is sometimes stated without adequate authority.*

Indeed, it is inaccurate and misleading, seeing it is a plain **departure from scripture, to assert that the human nature of Christ was created (that is, formed out of nothing) in the virgin's womb.** Mary undoubtedly had her part in the sacred mystery, as the angel said to her, "**Thou** shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son" (Luke i. 31). But to assert that the Lord's "holy humanity was created by a creative act of the Holy Spirit" is in effect to deny the angel's words to Mary herself concerning her conception.

Scripture does not divide between the Deity and the humanity of the Incarnate Son, even in the womb of

* If it be said, by way of palliation, that "creating" is employed, not in the absolute sense of calling out of nothingness into being, but in the secondary sense of fashioning by divine power out of something already created, it may very properly be inquired why "creating" should be used at all in this solemn connection? If "creation" has this ambiguous sense, why not avoid the term altogether, as scripture does?

The attempt made to justify this unwholesome phrasing by a quotation from J.N.D. (Coll. Writings, vol x., p. 521) stultifies itself. It should have been seen from the passage itself that J.N.D. deliberately **refrains** from applying the word, "creature," to the Lord. He is speaking of the "personal connection, in incarnation, between God and the creature—God and man in one person."

Now, in these words, J.N.D. first refers to "God and the creature"; and by the latter term, he plainly alludes to Rom.viii. 20-22—to the creature in bondage to corruption, whose deliverance will come about through the Incarnate Son. But J.N.D. does not write "God and **creature** in one person," but "God and **man** in one person." It was in becoming man, that

the virgin. Believing that the Person of the Eternal Son abode unchanged and unchangeable when He became the woman's Seed, we are content to be ignorant because we are confident that the method of the Incarnation is inexplicable to the human mind, though scripture describes it so simply as "the birth of Jesus Christ" (Matt. i. 18).

The Body Prepared

In the Epistle to the Hebrews, the Holy Spirit applies to the coming of the Lord into the world a quotation from Psalm xl., in which the Son, the Messiah, describes His own incarnation: "a body hast Thou **prepared** (or, framed) Me" (Heb. x. 5). There is no hint of "creation" here, but in this important passage, where the mind of the Spirit is to teach us the unique nature of that body, so that "the body of Jesus Christ" was suited to become the sacrificial offering to God "once for all" (ver. 10), the word "**created**" is **avoided**, and "**prepared**" is **used**. On account of its peculiar origination this "body" had its own special feature, which was its intrinsic and unequalled

the Son was the "personal connection" "between God and the creature." The two commas enclosing the words, "in incarnation," which appear in the Coll. Wr., but which are omitted in two reprints of the words, make the meaning of the author clear and unmistakable. His reference is to the mediatorial, not the creatorial, connection between God and the creature.

W.K.'s words have also been forced out of their contextual meaning with a like object. W.K. does not speak of the Lord becoming a creature, but of His being in the place or sphere where the creatures of His hand were. His words, which occur in a condensed report of his lectures, cannot be so construed without violence. He says, "He never took the creature place until He became a man, and then must needs be the first-born. Even if He had been the last-born literally, He must still be the first-born." And again, "He was firstborn, because He Who entered the sphere of human creaturehood was the Creator, and therefore must necessarily be the firstborn" (Lectures on the Colossians, pp. 19, 20). The phrases, "the creature place," and "the sphere of human creaturehood," clearly refer to His environment, and not to His person, as some have assumed.

holiness, secured by the agency of the Holy Spirit, in order that the Son's obedience "unto death, even the death of the cross" might be displayed therein.

The Son was pleased to assume this body in His incarnation. Becoming flesh was His mode of entrance into the place of a Servant that He might reveal the Father in a world of spiritual darkness and moral squalor. Consequently, by His incomparable life and ministry in that precious body, we are made privy to divine relations between the Father and the Son, which are recorded in John and elsewhere.

Moreover, in the Son's disclosures on earth of these inscrutable heavenly intimacies, the Father's glory suffered no tarnish. Nay, such was the exquisite perfection and fullness of the Son's service that this glory was even enhanced in consequence. Hence, viewing His path from the point of its completion, the Son said to the Father, "I have glorified Thee on the earth." On the **earth!** In this wilderness world, shrouded, as it is, in uncomprehending darkness (John i. 5), God, Who is Light and Love, has been fully manifested by the Son in His humiliation and obedience; and His lowly labours were crowned with the Father's glory. What a body was needful for such high displays! "A body hast **Thou** prepared Me." Precious body! Priceless, sinless, humanity was there! Yet in "likeness of sinful flesh" to become a sacrifice for sin (Rom. viii. 3)! It was He Who "bare our sins in His own body on the tree" (1 Pet. ii. 24).

"Lo, I come" was the joyous utterance of the Son in the eternal past, no less than in the due time when He assumed the prepared body in the time and manner appointed for His coming into the world (Heb. x. 5). "He was to come by the woman, more fully man thus than Adam, but conceived of the Holy Spirit, as was neither Adam nor any other: **so truly did God fit a body** for the Son that even in human nature He alone should be the Holy One of God.

"Not otherwise would it have suited the Son, either as the constant object of the Father's delight all through

the days of His flesh, as the adequate vessel of the Holy Spirit's power in service, or as the sin-offering at last. How different from us, who even when born of God are anointed only as under the efficacy of His blood! **His body was the temple of God without blood**" (W.K., *Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 181).

The Created "New Thing" of Jeremiah

An attempt has been made by some to justify the application of the term, "creature," to our Lord by a reference to one of the prophecies of Jeremiah, as if it foretold the birth of Jesus Christ from a virgin, and spoke of the birth as a creation of Jehovah. The actual words of the prophet alluded to are, "The Lord (Jehovah) hath created a **new thing** in the earth, A woman shall compass a man" (Jer. xxxi. 22).

It is assumed by these expositions that, seeing the Lord's birth in time was absolutely unique in character, His birth was the "new thing" which Jehovah promised to create in the earth; and on this supposition the conclusion is based that it is scriptural to speak of the Lord as a "creature."

But, on examination, their bold interpretation of Jeremiah's prophecy seems far-fetched, and to lack the support of the context. There is possibly some confusion, too, with Isaiah's prophecy (chap. vii.), which clearly predicts that, through the conception of a virgin, God (Immanuel) will be with His people for their ultimate deliverance from their enemies, though the land of Judah will previously be desolated by the overwhelming power of the king of Assyria.

But Jeremiah's theme is distinct from that of the earlier prophet. He does not set forth, like Isaiah, a coming Deliverer of the house and lineage of David, but the heartfelt repentance, especially of Ephraim, the idolatrous house of Israel, which will be the moral preparation for the restoration to blessing of the whole nation. It is not, as in Isaiah, the Saviour God

appearing among the people by a marvellous birth, but the cleansing of their inward parts to receive the new covenant that Jehovah will make with the house of Israel and the house of Judah (vers. 31-34). Jeremiah therefore foretells that the **restored people themselves will be a "new thing"** created in the earth.

Truly, the later prophet, like Isaiah, speaks of a "virgin" (ver. 21), but not in connection with the miraculous advent of their Messiah and Deliverer. Jeremiah's reference is definitely to "the virgin of Israel," whom he also addresses as "Thou backsliding daughter." In the "new thing" the prophet has in view **those who will be blessed, not the One Who will bless** them. He sees that in the day of restoration the virgin remnant of Israel will keep herself morally pure, and free from all defilement with the idolatry of Babylon (*see* Rev. xiv. 3-5). Jeremiah's promise is that Israel shall in that day turn again to the cities of the land (ver. 21) from which she had been driven. It may be added that he uses this same figure, "virgin," in connection with the nation in other parts of his prophecies (Jer. xiv. 17 ; xviii. 13 ; xxxi. 4).

In the next verse, the prophet refers to the end of Israel's scattering among the nations, of their wandering on the earth for their sins as vagabonds, like branded Cain : "How long wilt thou wander about (or, hither and thither), thou backsliding daughter ?" The answer to this question is, until the day of their national repentance. And then immediately the prophet goes on by a striking metaphor to show how this restoration will be caused : "For Jehovah hath created a new thing in the earth, a woman shall encompass a man."

The "new thing" is the real, Spirit-wrought, penitence of both Judah and Ephraim, and their joint establishment in their own land in the days of the new covenant. This repentance of both the houses of Israel will be an unprecedented event in the long history of the stiff-necked and obdurate generation. Then the people shall confess their guilt (Isa. liii.), and lament

for their sins; and there shall be the "great mourning in Jerusalem" (Zech. xii. 10-14).

This unanimous repentance Jehovah Himself will "create," for He will pour out upon them the spirit of grace and supplications (Zech. xii. 10). The change of the nation's heart by the removal of the veil upon it (2 Cor. iii. 16) is the work of the God of their fathers, Who raised up Jesus, and exalted Him "for to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins" (Acts v. 30, 31). Jehovah will "create" in them a clean heart, as David, a type of the remnant in his blood-guiltiness, prayed for himself (Ps. li. 10). He will make a new heart and a new spirit in His people, taking away their stony heart, as Ezekiel prophesied (xi. 19; xxxvi. 26).

The Woman of Weakness and the Man of Strength

Truly, a strikingly "**new thing**" on the earth will be seen in the millennial day when the people of Israel who during so many, many centuries had disobeyed Jehovah both under law and under grace, and who had rejected their Messiah both in His humiliation and in His exaltation, turn at long last to the Lord, owning their presumptuous sins and proving His abundant mercy. The whole world's wonder in that day will be that the unclean nation has then become holy to the Lord, that **the little has become great, and the weak strong.**

For how few and feeble will the Jewish remnant be that shall be saved! Only the "third part" will be brought through the consuming fires of the great tribulation, but to that "little flock," Jehovah will say, "It is My people" (Zech. xiii. 9), and He will hear their prayers and give them the kingdom. But it will be when they are in their weak and broken state nationally, that they will look unto God, Who will be their strength; then, as the prophet expressively said, "**a woman shall encompass a man.**"

We take it, then, that in this bold and vigorous

metaphor, “**woman**” is used as a symbol of the nation of Israel in her state of confessed weakness and fear immediately before her restoration. The use of this particular metaphor by Jeremiah is not an isolated instance in prophetic language. Isaiah also employs the same figure to convey **a condition of weakness and apprehension** in the nation of Egypt: “In that day shall Egypt be like women; and it shall be afraid and fear because of the shaking of the hand of the Lord of hosts” (Isa. xix. 16). “**Woman**” as a figure of **effeminacy** occurs also in Isa. iii. 12; Jer. li. 30; Nahum iii. 13.

As “**woman**” figuratively signifies feebleness, so “**man**” is the **symbol of strength**, stated in contrast. In this passage (Jer. xxxi. 22), great power is the sense emphatically, because the word used in the original (*gever*) means a mighty man. It is not the more frequent word for man (*enosh*), which means man in his frailty.

When, therefore, “a woman shall encompass a man,” the weak nation shall become possessed of strength. This forcible promise of Jehovah instils the hope that the utter weakness of the remnant of Israel will in a future day be the chosen occasion for the display, on their part in a way never before seen on the earth, of preternatural national strength, which He, the God of their strength, will supply.

The Order of Nature reversed

The ways of God in His sovereign mercy and grace seldom follow the laws He Himself has established for His human creatures. They strike us by contrast, not by comparison. Therefore, the ultimate outpouring of His mercy upon unbelieving Israel will in man’s judgment seem an anomaly in God’s righteous dealing with nations. And this arresting character of His restoring mercy to the Jews has been anticipated by the Holy Spirit in the metaphor we are considering.

That a woman should encompass a man is contrary

to the original order set up at the creation. At the beginning, the woman was created for the man, and not the man for the woman ; headship was bestowed upon Adam, not upon Eve (1 Cor. xi. 9). But, according to this prophetic figure, Jehovah will, in due course, create a "new thing" nationally involving the reversal of the natural order of earthly government. In the millennium, world empire will not be held by the nation possessing an irresistible might over all others, but supreme power and authority in the earth will be seen resting upon a nation long notorious among men for her womanly weakness.

What status at present have the wandering seed of Abraham among the peoples of the earth ! No king, no territory, no army, no navy, no temple, no priesthood ! But in her revival, of which Jeremiah speaks, the repentant nation will "encompass" or possess a marvellous strength, whereby all her mighty foes shall be utterly overthrown. Then the resuscitated nation will be like the forlorn and destitute Ruth, come to Bethlehem from the land of idolatry ; claiming kinship of the opulent Boaz (the man of strength, as his name implies), and in that imparted strength from him building the house of Israel in glory (Ruth iv. 9-12).

No Reference to the Virgin Birth

In this examination of this prophecy, we have been unable to discover any foundation for the claim of some interpreters that Jeremiah, in this somewhat obscure language, foretold the birth of our Lord. Also, it appears to be an unwise and unfounded assumption that this prophecy in any way supports the statement that the Incarnation was a special "creation" by Jehovah, or affords any licence to speak of our adorable Lord as a "creature."

It may be added for further confirmation that in this passage, the word "woman" (*negebah*) does not signify a virgin or unmarried maiden (*almah*), the latter term being the one used in Isaiah vii. 14, which has

direct prophetic reference to Mary, the virgin "mother of Jesus." There is, therefore, no identity between the two predictions, nor analogy even, except that both relate to a "new thing," and Scripture tells of many "new" things.

There have been many surmises as to the precise meaning of the passage, but the most satisfactory interpretation of Jeremiah's veiled language is that it is a prediction of the recovery of Israel in the hour of her extreme weakness and dire persecution. It will be remembered that in the Apocalypse, John sees the nation under the figure of a persecuted woman, fled into the wilderness, and the great red dragon making war with the remnant of her seed (Rev. xii.). Nevertheless, Israel will eventually receive invincible strength, and will be the conquering Deborah of that day; and the Lord will sell the future Sisera "into the hand of a woman" (Judg. iv. 9), as He did the Canaanite oppressor.

J.N.D., in his *Synopsis*, makes the following comment upon the passage: "In verse 22, I see only weakness. Israel, feeble as a woman, shall possess and overcome all strength—seeing that strength manifests itself in that which is very weakness."

An analogous instance of the use of imagery, arresting because of its allusion to what is unknown in natural experience, is found in Jeremiah xxx. 6, 7, where the future time of Jacob's trouble is compared with a man travailing with child. That tribulation will be unexampled in the world's history (Matt. xxiv. 21), and its unprecedented character is implied in the striking metaphor used by the prophet.

XI.—THE FULLNESS OF THE GODHEAD

“ For in Him all the fullness [of the Godhead] was pleased to dwell. . . . For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily ” (Col. i. 19 ; ii. 9, N.Tr.)

“ For in Him all the fullness was pleased to dwell. . . . For in Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily ” (W.K.)

THE Psalmist, looking abroad upon the world of nature around him, exclaimed, “ O Lord (Jehovah), how manifold are Thy works ! in wisdom hast Thou made them all : the earth is full of Thy riches ” (Ps. civ. 24). In Colossians i. the believer is invited to survey even greater works than these, and in a wider sphere. Reading these verses, he might well adapt the language of the Psalm, and exclaim, O Lord, Thou Son of the Father’s love, how manifold are the works of Thy power and Thy love ! The earth and the heavens are full of the riches of Thy glory and Thy grace !

In the apostle’s recital of these glories of the Son, we may observe their holy order—a harmony of heaven beyond the power of the human mind to invent. We see the evidences of His glory distributed under two great categories. There are (1) the works of His power and wisdom **before** His incarnation, and (2) the works of His grace and truth **after** His incarnation.

The first class (1) embraces the whole of the original creation in its vastness and variety : we behold the Son, in Whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins, as the Creator and Sustainer of the universe (vers. 15-17). The second (2) comprehends His operations in the sphere of the new creation : wherein we behold, as the final result, the removal of sin, and the

reconciliation in righteousness of all things on the earth and in the heavens (vers. 18-20).

This widespread panorama of the works of the Lord is marvellous in our eyes, and we delight to behold that **the Personal centre of it all is the Son of the Father's love, in Whom all the fullness of the Godhead is pleased to dwell.** In Him, we even now have redemption, the forgiveness of sins (ver. 14) ; and from this little platform in His kingdom where redeeming love has safely set us, we look out with the eyes of revelation into the ever-widening expanses of eternity, and discern with holy rapture the countless glories of the Eternal Son, Who Himself fills all things (Eph. iv. 10).

The Fullness Dwells in the Reconciler

It is to be remarked that in this passage **the revelation of the ever-abiding fullness in the Son is associated with His work of reconciliation** (vers. 18-20) rather than with His work of creation (vers. 15-17). How evident is the jealous care of the Spirit of God to preserve the honour of the Son ! Reconciliation involves the elimination of sin from the defiled heavens and the polluted earth. Side by side with the very mention of this work stands the declaration that in the Reconciler all the fullness is pleased to dwell (ver. 19) ; His full personal glory in the Deity is concerned in His accomplishment of redemption.

This work entailed bloodshedding, the cross, and death itself (vers. 20, 21) ; did it, therefore, in any degree whatsoever detract from the intrinsic personal glory of the Son of God ? Or, do any inquire whether the Son is of inferior rank in the Godhead, because God's enemies are reconciled to Him by the death of His Son (Rom. v. 10), and because death is attributed to the Son, but never to the Father, nor to the Holy Spirit ?

All such insinuating questions are anticipated and answered here ; for the Spirit writes, " In Him all the fullness was pleased to dwell " (ver. 19, W.K.). **The**

Son has no inferior or secondary position in Deity, since the whole fullness of the Godhead has a permanent abiding-place in Him. It was not an incomplete fullness, nor a portion only of the fullness, but the fullness in its perfect entirety, nothing of Deity lacking or diminished in any respect, or at any time. He is "the Son of the Blessed," and "God blessed for ever" (Mark xiv. 61, 62 ; Rom. ix. 5).

The Fullness is Personal

Moreover, the fullness found pleasure in dwelling in the Son. The fullness, therefore, is not an abstract quality or attribute. The emotion of good pleasure or delight can reside only in a person. It was God the Father Who expressed His good pleasure in His beloved Son on the holy mount (2 Pet. i. 17). But this passage in Colossians, correctly rendered, does not speak of the Father taking pleasure, but of "all the fullness," intimating that there is a latent reference in the phrase to a Person Who finds delight in dwelling in Him, the incarnate Son.

Further, "dwelling" and "reconciling" are both personal acts ; and it is expressly said that **all the fullness is pleased to dwell in Him, and also to reconcile all things by Him unto Himself.** It is a Person, therefore, Who is before the mind of the inspiring Spirit, and it can be no other than the Son in His Deity, Who is the theme of the passage throughout. Notice how the succession of pronouns in vers. 19, 20 mark the continuity of the personal reference to Him : "in Him ;" "His cross ;" "by Him ;" "unto Himself ;" "by Him." All the fullness is pleased to dwell . . . to reconcile . . . unto Himself—the Son.

The Spiritual Value to us of the Son's Personal Glory

The doctrines of redemption and reconciliation are thus tinctured with the personal glory of Christ not only for our instruction, but also to awaken our worship.

It is the sight and the knowledge of the Person Who suffered and died that touches our hearts. Beholding the hands and the side of the Risen Saviour, even dull Thomas exclaimed, " My Lord and my God ! "

It is the central feature, therefore, of our priestly instruction in Colossians i. that the Son has the first place or the pre-eminence in all things. Whether in the exercise of His mediatorial functions or otherwise, in Him the fullness of the Godhead has a permanent abode. Hence, God being in Christ, God was perfectly manifested in flesh among men. God Who is Light and God Who is Love shone in Him. Yet man's darkness did not comprehend nor yield to the Light, nor did man's enmity vanish before that display of Love. More must be done by God for man to remove the barriers against His light and His love.

Reconciliation was needed, to which truth the passage now brings us. Peace could be made only " by the blood of His cross." Through this, we who believe are now reconciled ; and upon the same basis, the whole universe of heavenly and earthly things will in the future be reconciled, and will become a scene of divine delight. For, as all the fullness finds His (or, Its) good pleasure in dwelling in Him, so all the fullness finds His delight in reconciling all things unto Him or unto Itself.*

Are we not glad to have such revelations as these ? How sweet to our souls to discover in this passage that **the whole universe, now defiled by sin and hostile to God, will be reconciled to Him in Whom all the fullness dwells—to the Son of the Father's love !** Truly, as we sing, " His joys our sweetest joys afford, They taste of love divine." . And we may add to the couplet that His glories " our sweetest joys afford," for they too " taste of love divine."

* See J.N.D.'s New Translation and his footnotes on the passages (Col. i. 19 ; ii. 9). It may be noticed that he uses the neuter pronoun three times in the context :—" to reconcile . . . to Itself " (ver. 20) ; " now has It reconciled " (ver. 21) ; " to present you holy . . . before It " (ver. 22). The neuter pronoun is used in these cases to mark their grammatical relation to " fullness," which is of the neuter gender in the Greek.

The Italics in verse 19

It will have been noticed that in the former part of this paper Col. i. 19 has been quoted differently from the A.V., which reads "It pleased *the Father* that in Him should all fullness dwell." The R.V. agrees with the A.V., except that "the" is added before "fullness." The literal rendering is, "In Him all the fullness was pleased to dwell."

The fact that the words, "*the Father*," are placed in italics in both versions proves that in both cases the translators had to admit that **no equivalent of these words is found in the original tongue**, and that the two words inserted express their own interpretation of the passage, namely, that it was the Father's good pleasure that all fullness should dwell in the Son.

As a general truth, this pleasure of the Father in the Son is without doubt true, but the question is whether it is the truth conveyed in this passage. And a little inquiry shows that the interpretation is without proper foundation, for it overlooks or ignores the true grammatical subject of the verb, "was pleased," which is "all the fullness," and it introduces the words, "*the Father*," into the passage without textual authority.

Moreover, the words in italics dislocate the whole grammatical sentence, which occupies verses 19 and 20. This sentence contains the principal verb, "was pleased," and two dependent infinitive verbs, "dwell," and "reconcile," both of which relate to the subject, "all the fullness." The text is faithfully rendered by W.K. : "In Him all the fullness was pleased to dwell ; and by Him to reconcile the universe unto Him."

The same scholar says, commenting on the R.V. of "verse 19 where the old fault of the A.V. reappears. . . The doctrine is as bad as the version, and derogatory to the Son as well as the Spirit in our Epistle, and (in) the very part where the prime object is to assert the glory of Christ in every way."

The best that can be said of the common rendering of the verse is that it contains a part of the truth ; but

of what a great deal it robs us. For in this Epistle, fullness or plenitude is used to denote the totality of the essential nature, powers, and attributes of Deity. This term implies that, not only the Father, but the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit were pleased to dwell in Him. It was **the** fullness ; and more, **all the** fullness, all that is comprehended in God.*

In chap. ii. 9, the same term is in an ampler phrase applied to the Son : " in Him (Christ) dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." All that is inherent in Deity has a permanent abode in Him. The added clause, " of the Godhead," does not appear in i. 19, where we have in the preceding context (vers. 15-17) the Godhead or Deity of the Son strongly emphasized, and this truth is therefore embodied in the words, " all the fullness." Accordingly, J.N.D. adds the clause, " of the Godhead," in brackets in Col. i. 19. See the N. Tr. and the instructive footnote relating to these words given in it.

The words " Godhead " and " Deity "

Christ is our all, and scripture often reveals the blessings grace has given us side by side with a revelation of the glories of Christ in Whom they are made ours. We are by this association reminded that

* The following remarks by W.K. on the insertion of the words, " the Father," may be of further help. " There is a peculiar phraseology in the passage, which may have led the English translators to put in ' Father ' in verse 19. If the conjecture be correct, they did it not so much because of this verse as of the following, the 20th—' to reconcile . . . unto Himself.' They could not make out how it could be unto Him unless it were to the Father ; but I think the context is purposely so framed, because it is intended to shew us, unless I am greatly mistaken, that all the fullness of the Godhead dwelt in Christ, not one Person of that divine fullness acting to the exclusion of the rest. They all had one counsel, not barely similar counsels, as so many creatures might, but one and the same. Hence the object is not to contrast one Person with another, but to state that all the fullness was pleased in Him to dwell. It is put in this general form purposely " (*Lectures on the Colossians*, p. 23).

He is the measure and the certitude of all we receive. Accordingly, we find here that the fullness of our blessedness is associated with the fullness of Christ's Person : " in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily ; and ye are complete (filled full) in Him " (Col. ii. 9).

This particular unfolding to us is a supremely elevating truth concerning our adorable Lord. **In Him all the fullness of the Godhead has come down to us—bodily ; also in Him we have that completeness needful for our acceptance before God !** The incarnate Son is thus our perfect Mediator between God and man ; in Him God is presented, and in Him man is accepted !

Godhead, the prominent word in this passage, is a word of our English tongue, adequately expressive of the original noun, *theotees*, and has been used during the past six centuries in the various successive English translations of this verse.

The suffix, *head*, indicates the presence and embodiment of all the essential qualities and attributes of God—indeed, God Himself. It is allied in origin to the suffix, *hood*, found with a similar significance in words like manhood, motherhood, priesthood, Godhood (occasionally), implying in each case all the status, ability, dignity, necessary to being so-and-so.

Thus, manhood comprehends everything that is proper or essential to a man, and that distinguishes a man from every other order of beings. And, in like manner, Godhead signifies God in the absolute nature of His Being, comprising all that He is in Himself, and in none beside Himself.

In view of this recognized usage, it is a misapprehension of the meaning of " the compound nature of the English word " to speak, as some have recently done, of the word " Godhead implying relation with the creation," as if *-head* meant Head of creation. Their definition is untrue, there being nothing " relative " in the word itself. Its meaning given in the English dictionaries is " divine personality " ; " divine nature or

essence” ; “ the character or quality of being God.” Therefore, “ Godhead ” may be “ properly used to convey The Absolute,” as well as “ Deity,” its Latin equivalent or synonym. Indeed some prefer the plain English word to its foreign relation.

There can be no doubt that God Who was manifest in flesh, Who was in Christ, was before the writer’s mind in the word, Godhead, when he wrote the simple but profound lines :

“ We see the Godhead-glory
Shine through that human veil ;
And, willing, hear the story
Of love come here to heal.”

The Use of the Word “ Divinity ”

It may not be inappropriate in this place to refer to the word, divinity, as distinguished from Godhead or Deity, with which, however, it is sometimes confounded. Both the latter are, as already noted, faithful translations of the Greek word, *theotes*, which occurs only in Col. ii. 9. This word means “ Godhead in the absolute sense ” (J.N.D.), and is distinct in meaning from *theiotes*, occurring in Rom. i. 20, which signifies the character of God, rather than God Himself.

The word in Romans is applied by the apostle to what may be observed of God in the works of nature—His creatorial majesty, might, and wisdom. These attributes are included in His *theiotes*, divinity, but are not His Essential Being. On the other hand, all the fullness of the *theotes* dwells in Christ bodily.

To mark this important distinction between the two words, “ Godhead ” in Rom. i. 20 is replaced by “ divinity ” in the R.V., the New Tr., in W.K.’s Notes on Romans, and in other translations. “ Godhead ” is reserved for the rendering of *theotes* in Col. ii. 9, where Deity in the fullest, most absolute sense is required both by the word and its context.

It is always well to note the inspired values of scriptural words, particularly of those relating to the

Person of our adorable Lord. And in view of the prevailing denials and detractions of the Ever-blessed Son, it is **specially important to mark this distinction between the terms, Deity and Godhead, on the one hand, and divinity on the other,** and to remember that the latter should never be regarded as a synonym or as the equivalent of the former two.

As evidence that this warning against ambiguity in this respect is not needless, it may be recalled that a well-known series of Lectures on the Deity of Christ was entitled, most inaptly in the interests of truth, "The Divinity of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." It is regrettable also that many speak of "our divine Lord," "the Christ divine," forgetting how they disparage that Blessed One by such "faint praise," through using a vague description of Him, in which Arius, Socinus, and those who bring not "the doctrine of the Christ" would readily join. Let us in this sacred subject, above all others, seek to use the sacred word, "not to be condemned, that he who is opposed may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say about us" (Tit. ii. 8).

" O Thou peerless One,
Great God revealed in flesh, the living link
' Twixt Godhead and my soul ! be Thine the praise,
The loving worship of a loving heart,
Rich in Thyself, for, oh, however filled,
Howe'er exalted, holy, undefiled,
Whatever wealth of blessedness is mine,
What am I, Lord ? an emptiness, a nothing.
Thou art My boast, in Whom, **all fullness dwells**
Of the great Godhead, Thou Whose name I bear,
Whose life is mine, Whose glory and Whose bliss,
All, all are mine."

XII.—THE FATHER'S AUDIBLE WITNESS TO THE SON

THE Lord Jesus said, " No one knows the Son but the Father, nor does any one know the Father but the Son, and he to whom the Son may be pleased to reveal [Him] " (Matt. xi. 27). There is a mutual and intimate knowledge between the Father and the Son in the Godhead, which is necessarily infinite in character and measure. In this full and personal acquaintance with Each Other, no creature can possibly share on the ground of either right or capacity. There could be no reciprocity between the Creator and the creature. Hence the eternal relations in the Godhead, by reason of their ineffable nature, must ever be above all human scrutiny and comprehension, apart from the disclosures granted in divine revelation.

" The higher mysteries of Thy fame
The creature's grasp transcend ;
The Father only Thy blest name
Of Son can comprehend ;
Worthy, O Lamb of God, art Thou
That every knee to Thee should bow."

Nevertheless, we do not, like the Athenians, worship an " unknown God." In rare and choice passages of scripture, the inner chambers of the eternal dwelling-place of God are, as it were, momentarily unveiled to us, and from them we are permitted to learn precious and invaluable secrets concerning the Father and the Son. The Father bears witness to the Son (John v. 37), and the Son manifests and declares the name of the Father (John xvii. 6, 26) ; and both testimonies are contained in the inspired record.

This revelation of what lies within the Godhead was

not vouchsafed in man's earlier days. It is true that glimpses of **the external glories** of the God of Israel were granted to the seventy elders, who saw under His feet "as it were a paved work of a sapphire stone" (Exod. xxiv. 10). And Moses, privileged as he was, saw not the face of Jehovah, and only "the back parts" of His glory (Exod. xxxiii. 23). But such appearances were occasional and momentary and only in connection with the glory of God in the **government** of the nation of Israel particularly and the world generally.

In the New Testament, where **Divine love** is the central theme of what is made known, revelations are given of the exercises of the heart of God itself. Here we are permitted to know a little of the activities of the Divine affections within the circle of Deity, between the Father and the Son. We learn that loving, delighting, and rejoicing, as well as omniscience and omnipotence, exist in the **internal mysteries** of the Godhead.

Do we sufficiently prize these august unfoldings in scripture? Sheba's queen was prostrated in spirit when she beheld the royal splendours and vast magnificence of Solomon; what is the glory of Solomon compared with the glory of God! What a chastened spirit, therefore, should be ours, beloved, when we listen to the revealed intercourse between the Father and the Son! Awed by the overwhelming wonder of such words, we shall surely adore the Father and the Son in a worship too profound to be expressed, too fervent to be restrained.

Remembering, therefore, with worshipping spirits Whose voice was heard, let us briefly consider the Father's utterances to the Son and concerning Him at the Jordan, and afterwards on the Mount of Transfiguration.

The Sonship declared at the Jordan

Our Lord was baptized of John in Jordan, in succession to a multitude of Jews who had believed

the preaching of the forerunner respecting the immediate coming of Jehovah, and who had publicly confessed their sins and were baptized. It was at this historical point of the public association of the Lord Jesus with the sin-burdened remnant of Israel that the unique distinction of the Blessed One from all others was proclaimed by the Father from the heavens.

As the Lord Jesus went up from the water of Jordan, both **visible** and **audible** testimony were rendered to Him from the opened heavens. The Spirit was **seen**, and a Voice out of the heavens was **heard**.

Jesus Himself saw the Holy Spirit of God "descending as a dove and coming upon Him" (Matt. iii. 16). The Son Whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, the Father sealed (John vi. 27 ; x. 36). The Lord Jesus confessed no sins, but, as the Antitype of the Levitical meal-offering (Lev. ii.), He was at once anointed with the Holy Spirit, needing no blood of atonement like the poor of His flock to whom He was bringing the kingdom.

But a further astonishing event followed ; and, for the first time in scriptural history, the Trinity stood revealed—Father and Son and Holy Spirit. To the Spirit's visible witness, the Father added His audible witness to the Son. How beautiful is this evidence of the interest and care displayed by the Father for the glory of the Son ! In this lowly place to which the obedient Son had descended, the Father in audible and articulate speech owned Him in the full unimpaired Sonship, which was His eternally.

The heavens, then, were opened, and the Paternal voice addressed the Beloved Son on earth. The voice was sweet and gracious, not like " the voice of words " at Sinai, which " shook the earth," and terrified the hearers (Heb. xii. 26). It was the voice of the Father, saying with infinite complacency,

" This is My beloved Son,
in Whom
I have found My delight " (Matt. iii. 17).

Greater Witness than John's

John the Baptist "came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light that all men through him might believe." But the Lord said, "I have greater witness than that of John . . . the works . . . that I do, bear witness of Me . . . And the Father Himself which hath sent Me hath borne witness of Me" (John i. 7; v. 36, 37).

At Jordan, then, at the commencement of His public ministry, the accrediting voice of the Father was given to the Son. In the very beginning of Matthew's Gospel it is shown that from birth Jesus was Jehovah, Immanuel (Matt. i. 21-23). And when, as Israel's Messiah, the Lord Jesus humbled Himself in baptism by John, the greatest born of women (Matt. xi. 11), the Father jealous of the honour of His Sent One proclaimed aloud the glory of His Sonship to those who had ears to hear the witness. Thus, the Father bore witness to Jesus that His personal Name of Son sustained His mediatorial office as Messiah, even as the Spirit bore similar witness in Hebrews i.

If none but the Lord Himself and John the Baptist heard the Father's Voice with understanding, the testimony then rendered was preserved for the faith of all. And what a testimony! How it lifts our thoughts from **man's need** to the **Father's delight!** "Unto you is born," the angel said, "a **Saviour** which is Christ the Lord." Unto Me, the Father said, "This is **My beloved Son.**" Taught by the Gospel record, we know what the Father beheld in the baptized Jesus: He was His Dearly-beloved, His Only-begotten! Pause here and meditate, my soul.

The Father Addressed the Son

From a comparison of the records of this incident in the first three Gospels, we find that the Father's words were spoken to the Son Himself ("Thou art . . ."), as well as to those to whom the Son was presented ("This

is . . ."). The three sets of words, as arranged below, are quoted from the New Translation. The variations are not due to any imperfection in the narrative or the narrator, but in each case the Holy Spirit preserves the meaning of the Father's utterance suitable to His purpose in the Gospel where it occurs. The records are not contradictory, but complementary.

Matt. iii. 17

Mark i. 11

Luke iii. 22

This is

My beloved Son,

in Whom

I have found

My delight

Thou art

My beloved Son,

in Thee

I have found

My delight

Thou art

My beloved Son,

in Thee

I have found

My delight

The account in Matthew gives the form of the revelation made by the Father concerning the Son, not for the "wise and prudent," but for "babes" (see Matt. xi. 25; also John v. 37). The latter are hereby instructed in the knowledge of the Christ: to the "little flock" the Father said, "This is My beloved Son."

In Mark and Luke, the declaration takes the form of an expression of communion by the Father to the Son. The utterance is an acknowledgment by the Father of His complacency and delight in His beloved Son, and it was addressed directly to the opened ear of the Son Himself: "Thou art My beloved Son, in Thee I have found My delight." Moreover, it is recorded in scripture for the deepening of our communion with the Father and the Son.

"It was the grace and perfection of Jesus which **caused** heaven to open" upon the dependent Man, and the Voice to come forth from the Father, expressing His good pleasure to the Son on earth. When God saw the first man, Adam, in his created freshness, He pronounced him "**very good**" (Gen. i.), but in the Second Man, the last Adam, the Father found His "**delight.**" And this delight in His Sent One is no surprise to us, because it is inconceivable that the Father could have the Only-begotten Son in His

bosom, and not be delighted with Him. How transcendent that delight !

Did the Divine Sonship begin at the Jordan ?

Because the Sonship was announced by the Father at the baptism of the Lord Jesus, we have no right to conclude that He began to be the "beloved Son" at that point of time. The truth is that, being already the Son, He had descended into this place of lowly obedience on earth (*see* Heb. v. 8). In His self-humiliation, He is the dearly-beloved Son of the Father because He was that **before** He became incarnate.

When Pilate wrote, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews" (Matt. xxvii. 37), that description was certainly true of the Lord long before it was affixed to the cross. So when the Father said, "This is My beloved Son, in Whom I have found My delight," the words were true of the Lord long before He came up out of the Jordan. How long before, the dearly-beloved Son Himself tells us, for He said to the Father, "Thou lovedst Me before the foundation of the world" (John xvii. 24). And it need not be said that **if the Son was beloved of the Father before the foundation of the world, the Son was there in eternity to be loved.** He, blessed be His holy Name, is the **eternal Son**, ever abiding in the eternal embraces of the Father's love.

Moreover, when the Father said He found His delight or good pleasure in Him, He spoke retrospectively, and not merely in view of the submissive act of baptism. The force of the verb in the original is not only "I am now well pleased," but also "I was well pleased." From everlasting, the Father found His delight in **His beloved Son**, as also, in another place, we read that Jehovah's soul delights in **His beloved Servant** (Isa. xlii. 1 ; Matt. xii. 18) ; the former in what He is **personally**, the latter in what He is **mediatorially**.

The record in Mark and Luke agrees in significance

with that in Matthew. The direct address to the Son, "Thou art My beloved Son," is consistent with His Sonship in the eternal past even as at the moment of the Father's utterance. Just as the Lord's "I am" spoken to the Jews ("Before Abraham was, I am," John viii. 58) reaches back into eternity, so also do the Father's words, "**Thou art . . .**", spoken to the Son.

The phrase, "Thou art," may have a retrospective meaning even when applied to the creature. Thus, the word of Jehovah to the chosen nation was "**Thou art My servant, O Israel**" (Isa. xlix. 3 ; xli. 8). This was their status from the beginning of their national existence. The children of Israel were brought out of Pharaoh's house of bondage eight hundred years before Isaiah appealed to them to serve Jehovah (Exod. xxiii. 25). "Thou art My servant" was true of the nation from Moses to Isaiah.

Similarly, David said in the wilderness of Judah, "O God, **Thou art my God**: early will I seek Thee" (Ps. lxxiii. 1). But God had been David's God from his youth. The relationship was as true when he was in the desert with the sheep and the lion and bear, or in the valley of Elah with Goliath of Gath, as when he was in the wilderness of Judah a fugitive from Saul, and the psalm was composed by him there.

In like manner, we believe that when Jehovah said to His Anointed King, "**Thou art My Son**" (Ps. ii. 7), and when the Father said to the baptized Jesus, "**Thou art My beloved Son**," the utterances were of the widest import and indeed comprehended the eternal relation of the Son in the Godhead.

Moreover, the Father then added the confidential communication to His well-beloved Son: "in Thee I have found My delight." As we listen to these words, we learn that the Father's love was resting then, as it ever had done, even before time was, in an immeasurable, invariable complacency upon the Son Who alone could apprehend the eternal fullness of that affection, and also adequately appreciate such a word. The Lord said to the Jews, "It is My Father Who glorifies

Me . . . ye know Him not . . . but I know Him ”
(John viii. 54, 55).

Further, how exquisitely sweet it is to observe in Luke's Gospel that the **Father's voice** came in immediate sequence to the **Son's prayer** (Lu. iii. 21 22) ! As the dependent and obedient Jesus was “being baptized, and **praying**,” the heaven opened, the Holy Spirit descended, the Voice came. What delicate perfections and spiritual beauties are here portrayed in these blended activities of heaven and earth ! The Son lifting up His eyes to heaven in prayerful intercourse with Him Who sent Him : the Spirit proceeding to fulfil His part in the lowly service of the Son : the Father out of heaven, in the inexpressible blessedness of His ineffable delight, saluting the Eternal Son, with may we say, the “kisses of His mouth ! ”

“ Loved with love which knows no measure
Save the Father's love to Thee,
Blessed Lord, our hearts would treasure
All the Father's thoughts of Thee.”

The Father's Witness on the Holy Mount

Once again in the days of His flesh did the Son by audible witness receive “ from God [the] Father honour and glory.” For on the Mount of Transfiguration His voice was again heard, not out of the heavens this time, but out of the overshadowing cloud, the pavilion of the divine Presence, saying, “ This is My beloved Son, in Whom I have found My delight : hear Him.” The record of this attestation is found in Matt. xvii. 5 ; Mark ix. 7 ; Lu. ix. 35 ; 2 Pet. i. 17, with slight variations, all in harmony with the truth and beauty displayed by their contextual setting.

Though the circumstances and the significance of this heavenly witness are so attractive to the contemplative spirit, we cannot now tarry before these passages. It will, however, bear upon the special subject of these papers to remark that by this personal testimony the Father's words turned the hearts of the awe-struck

apostles from the glory of the coming kingdom to consider the glory of the Son Himself. They must "hear Him."

The imminent dispensational change was now in view. The earthly kingdom and its glory was deferred by the cross, but the personal glory of the Son, due to His essential relationship to the Father, was revealed to them, and would remain as the portion and joy of those who took up their cross, and followed the Master in His rejection. Hence the word of command to them (added in the Gospels, but not included in the Epistle), "hear Him."

From this witness out of the cloud of glory the apostles would learn that the rejected Christ was the Beloved Son and the delight of the Father. "So it had been in eternity before creation; so it was when the world was made by Him, and in all the dealings of providence, in the secret working of grace with individuals, and in the public government of Israel under the law.

"So still more when the incarnate Word presented that object of His everlasting complacency as man on earth in unwavering dependence and obedience on His way to death for His glory, for man's salvation, for the church's blessedness, for His people's deliverance, and for the reconciliation of all things" (W.K.).

This revelation on the holy mount is, therefore, a heavenly truth concerning **the Person of the Son**, in its character infinitely above, and indeed independent of His mediatorial offices in the earthly kingdom. Being the eternal Son, He had become the Servant to take in due time the kingdom of universal rule and authority; and in that same proper personality He will at the end deliver up the kingdom to God the Father (I Cor. xv. 24-28).

XIII.—THE SON, HIMSELF GOD AND JEHOVAH, AS GOD'S SPOKESMAN

IN Scripture, the name of Son sets forth both personal relationship and special representation. For instance, in John's writings, the Sonship of Christ especially connotes His personal relationship to the Father, Whose love rested upon Him before the foundation of the world (John xvii. 24). In Hebrews, the Sonship of Christ is especially associated with His perfect revelation and representation of God to men, and also with His perfect administration of divine government.

The Son is the One in and by Whom God has now spoken, Whose sceptre is a sceptre of equity, and Whose throne is for ever and ever (Heb. i. 2, 8).

The Sonship of God's Spokesman is therefore the keynote of the Epistle to the Hebrews, and this relationship imparts an infinite value to His past sacrificial offering and His present priestly service. For this reason Christianity is shown to excel and supersede the Levitical system, ordained through angels as it was, in the hand of a mediator, Moses (Gal. iii. 19). Christ, **because of His inherent dignity as Son**, is the Mediator of a better covenant which is established on the footing of better promises (Heb. viii. 6).

First Son, then Spokesman

All the superstructure of Christ's mediatorial service, as expounded in the Epistle to the Hebrews, is founded upon the truth of His Sonship. Accordingly, the Deity of the Son is elaborately demonstrated in the forefront of the Epistle. However great had been the

former messengers of God, and whatever variety was in their communications, **they all are now surpassed by the advent of the Son.** "God having spoken in many parts and in many ways formerly to the fathers in the prophets, at the end of these days has spoken to us in [the person of the] Son" (Heb. i. 1, 2).*

Now we see that directly the Son is mentioned (vers. 1, 2) in company with the prophets of olden time, the Spirit proclaims the all-surpassing personal glories of the Son that there may be no confusion of rank in the minds of any of the saints. As on the Mount of Transfiguration, Moses and Elias, the law and the prophets, both vanish that Jesus may be seen alone in His unapproachable personal glory, of which the Father's voice out of the cloud witnesses, so in this first chapter the Spirit witnesses that **the Son is God and Jehovah**, and is infinitely superior to the angels of heaven and the prophets of Israel, the Creator being necessarily far above the most exalted of His creatures.

The Son Who now is God's Speaker is Himself declared to be the One Whom the Spirit of God in Psalm xlv. addressed as God (ver. 8): "Thy throne, **O God**, is for ever and ever." In like manner, the Spirit had, "as to the Son," said in Psalm cii., "Thou, **Lord (Jehovah)**, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of Thine hands" (ver. 10).

The names and functions of the Godhead are here attributed by the Holy Spirit to God's Spokesman. "Son" denotes His personal relationship to the One Who sent Him, while "Spokesman" denotes His relationship to those to whom He came and spokē. He was deputed of God to be Spokesman, but not to be Son, for He was the Son in His own Person and nature before all worlds. He was **first Son, then Spokesman.**

* See Appendix D (page 191).

Of old, in a subsidiary way, Aaron was deputed by Jehovah to be the "spokesman" of Moses to the people of Israel (Exod. iv. 14-16). He was to be to Moses "instead of a mouth," and Moses was to be to him "instead of God." Aaron was formally appointed to the office of an intermediary between Moses and the people, and was therefore Moses' spokesman. But his original personal relationship to Moses was that of brother, and Jehovah described him as "Aaron the Levite thy brother." Aaron was **first brother, then spokesman.**

This historical incident from Exodus may therefore be used to illustrate the truth of Hebrews i. Aaron was the voice of Moses to Pharaoh (Exod. vii. 1, 2). Moreover, the family relationship between the two men consolidated this special service of communicating the commands of Jehovah to the king of Egypt. Aaron was first the brother of Moses, and then his spokesman. Christ was **first Son, and then God's Spokesman.**

The Servants and the Son in Christ's Parable

In the main feature of the Holy Spirit's opening address (Heb. i.), there is a correspondence between one of the Lord's parables spoken to the Jewish leaders and the Epistle written to the Jewish believers. **In both the parable and the Epistle extreme emphasis is laid upon the coming of the Son.** The authority and glory of God's New Testament message takes its unique character from the personal glory of the Messenger. How, indeed, could it be otherwise than unparalleled when Jehovah Himself became His own Messenger?

The Lord when challenged by the high priest confessed Himself to be the Christ, the Son of the Blessed (Mark xiv. 61), but He had very shortly before that occasion, while teaching in the temple-courts, spoken to the Jews of His Sonship.

During the last week of His ministry in Jerusalem,

our Lord illustrated His own rejection and death by the parable of the wicked husbandmen and their ill-treatment first of the servants and then of the son sent to them by the owner of the vineyard (Matt. xxi. 33-46 ; Mk. xii. 1-12 ; Lu. xx. 9-19). This parable formed part of the Lord's final appealing testimony to the chief priests and elders of the people. It contained a solemn warning, too, for it showed that they (the builders) would refuse the Stone Jehovah laid in Zion, but that He, to their confusion and utter destruction, would make that despised Stone the exalted Cornerstone (Lu. xx. 16-19).

In this brief pictorial summary of God's dealings with Israel as a nation set apart, sheltered, and cultivated to bear fruit that should be a joy to Him (Isa. v.), the Lord so worded the parable that we may observe the marked **fundamental distinction**, as well as the general **resemblance**, between the servants and the son sent to receive the fruits of the vineyard.

There is **resemblance**, in that both servants and son were "sent," that is, they were both accredited messengers of the owner. In the manner of their reception there is a further resemblance, for both were shockingly handled and murdered by the husbandmen.

But the wide **distinction** between the servants and the son lay, not in the office, but in the person of the latter. While both were delegates as to office, **the one sent "last of all" was the son**, his "one son, his wellbeloved" (Mark). The son was one whom the husbandmen were to "reverence," a respect not due to servants (Rev. xxii. 8, 9). By reason of his filial dignity as the only son, he had an unequalled personal standing. He was the "heir," as the husbandmen recognized, and put him to death on that very account. They said, "This is the heir ; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on the inheritance."

How vividly our Lord portrayed in this parable the

awful sin of the Jews in crucifying the Son of God and putting Him to open shame (Heb. vi. 6) !

Crucifying the Son of God

This parable, therefore, was a testimony of the terrible sin of the Jews against the Son, rendered by Him in the ears of its responsible perpetrators on the very eve of its accomplishment. In the past the children of Israel had sinned against the many servants of God by whom He had spoken to them, but now they were about to lay violent hands upon the Son of God. That evil generation was guilty in respect of all the righteous blood shed upon the earth from Abel to Zacharias, the son of Barachias (Matt. xxiii. 34, 35) ; but now as a climax they were about to deny and slay Him Who was pre-eminently the Holy and Righteous One (Acts iii. 14, 15).

For those former outrages upon God's servants, the sword of His just retribution remained sheathed, but when the Jews should have committed the more determined and deadly sin against the Son, that sword would awake, and the rebellious husbandmen should not escape. Because they cast the Son and Heir out of the vineyard and slew Him, thus treading under foot the Son of God (*cph.* Heb. x. 29), Jerusalem is even now trodden under foot by the Gentiles (Lu. xxi. 24), while in the future the terrible unsparing vintage judgments, now held in abeyance, will fall upon the guilty people from the hand of God (Rev. xiv.).

Not only as their King, but as the Son, the Jews refused their Messiah. When Pilate was disposed to release Him, they insisted upon His crucifixion, saying, " We have a law, and by our law **He ought to die, because He made Himself the Son of God** " (John xix. 7). In thus denying before the Gentiles the Son, they denied the Father also, even as the Son Himself said of them, " Now have they both seen and hated both Me and My Father " (John xv. 24).

The Son is called Wellbeloved, not the Servants

According to the terms used in the parable, the son, though commissioned for service in the vineyard like the servants, was in an entirely different category from them. They were bondslaves (*douloi*), but a son is not a servant (*doulos*) in status ; he is heir and " lord of all " (Gal. iv. 1, 7). The son by his relationship belonged to the innermost and most dignified circle of the family, to which the servants could offer no title. Therefore, in coming into the vineyard **as son, he came with full proprietary rights**, not only to the fruits, but to the vineyard itself. His claims were just, and were presented in his own absolute right, as well as in that of the father. According to the truth conveyed by the parable, the Servant-Son of God appeared in the midst of the husbandmen as " the Just One," of Whom they became " the betrayers and murderers," as Stephen said (Acts vii. 52).

Further, love is an element revealed in this parable, as well as the Son's rightful authority. The father sent his " beloved " son (Lu. xx. 13). But the father's love for that son had no softening effect upon the husbandmen. They, however, discerned the identity of the son, saying, " This is the heir " ; and reasoning about the heirship (Lu. xx. 14), they conspired to slay him on that account. If they thought at all that he was the father's " wellbeloved " (Mk. xii. 6), that thought did but inflame their anger towards him (John v. 18).

Historically, we learn from the Gospels that it was no matter of interest or knowledge to the unbelieving Jews among whom the Lord ministered that the Father loved the Son Whom He had sent to them. But how ineffable was that love between Themselves ! By that **intimate bond of reciprocal love** ever existing in the Godhead, the Son when manifested on earth was everything to the Father, and the Father was all things to the Son.

Why then, we may ask, should Jehovah now made

known as the Father send His only Son, His well-beloved, to the vineyard, when in past days His bondslaves had gone there only at the expense of their honour and their lives? Ah, the sending of the Son of His love proved the patience of God the Father with the refractory husbandmen, and also His earnest desire that when they saw His Son they might "reverence" Him and behave themselves righteously in respect of the vineyard with which He had entrusted them. Alas, how it proved also the inveteracy of the evil in the hearts of the husbandmen!

First Son, then Servant

The love, then, of God the Father was in exercise towards the Son, though not towards the servants who preceded Him in coming to the vineyard. He was the wellbeloved Son, not they. But when did this love of the Father for the Son first arise? The thought is incredible that there ever was a moment when the love of God the Father did not flow out to the Son. "I am Jehovah, I change not" (Mal. iii. 6).

Did the One Who was sent "last of all" to the vineyard on a servant's errand **begin to be the Son of the Father** at the moment when He entered the vineyard as Servant to do the will of Him Who sent Him? Did the love of God the Father for the Son begin at His incarnation? Or rather, since "God is love," is not Their mutual love a necessary activity of Their nature and relationship in the Deity, and therefore without beginning or ending? Scripture teaches that this uncaused spontaneity is the distinguishing character of divine love, placing it in the utmost contrast with all human love.

Clearly, in His parable, our Lord spoke of love and filial relationship making this contrast between the Son and the servants. The fact of His Sonship, which previously existed, enhanced His embassy beyond all comparison. No greater ambassador than "God in Christ" could be sent to man.

For the execution of this mission, then, the Son was pleased to become a Servant. He was, therefore, **the Son before He took upon Himself "the form of a servant" (*doulos*). He was the Son from all eternity, but He became the Servant in the fullness of the time.** Because of this humiliation, there never could be such a Servant as He, blessed be His holy name for ever and ever.

Our Lord in this parable lays stress upon the fact that the Son was such before He was sent: "Then said the lord of the vineyard, What shall I do? I will send My beloved Son" (Lu. xx. 13). The words show that, looking on to the future, the Owner planned to send One Whom He could, before sending, describe as "My beloved Son."* So that the One Who was deputed to take up the "mediatorial office" so soon as "the fullness of the time was come" (Gal. iv. 4) was God's beloved Son. He was **first the Son, then the Servant.**

The Son and the Angels

We now turn again to Hebrews i. The Sonship of the Messiah, which truth, as we have seen, is taught parabolically in the Gospels, is also affirmed doctrinally at the outset of the Epistle to the Hebrews, and is

* There seems to be prophetic allusion to this love in the Godhead in the terms of affection, "My wellbeloved" and "My beloved," used at the beginning of Jehovah's song about His vineyard (Isa. v. 1-7): "Now will I sing to My wellbeloved a song of My beloved touching His vineyard. My wellbeloved hath a vineyard. . . ." Jehovah sings the song (ver. 1), and the vineyard, the house of Israel, belongs to Him (ver. 7), and to His beloved also (ver. 1). The title, "wellbeloved" (*y'deed*), points to the Messiah and is embodied in Jehovah's name for Solomon (Jedidiah), the "beloved of his God" (2 Sam. xii. 25: Neh. xiii. 26), type of Him Who was the true Heir of Jehovah's vineyard (Mark xii. 6,7).

The other term, "My beloved" (*dohd*), in Isa. v. 1 seems also to apply to the Messiah. The word occurs frequently (about thirty times) in the Song of Solomon, but nowhere else in the Old Testament, with the exalted meaning of divine love. There is, therefore, a close link between Jehovah's song of the vineyard in Isaiah and the Lord's parable of the vineyard in the Gospels.

there accompanied by a wealth of testimony selected by the Holy Spirit from His own written records in the Old Testament concerning the Saviour Who was to come. **In the parable, the Son is seen to be superior to God's servants on earth, and in the Epistle to God's angels in heaven.**

This pre-eminence in the heaven of heavens belongs to the Son in virtue of His own Person and Name, quite apart from what is due to Him in virtue of His mediatorial work. It is mentioned that He has made purification for sins (ver. 3), but it is not stated here that in consequence of that purgation God has exalted Him to His right hand, as announced elsewhere.

In this passage, the Son takes His exalted place of pre-eminence in virtue of His own right. In Eph. i. 17-23, God, the Father of glory, sets Him down at His right hand, but here **the Son in His own glory sets Himself down in the place of supreme Majesty**, far removed above all angelic beings. He, "having made [by Himself] the purification of sins, set Himself down on the right hand of the Greatness on high, taking a place by so much better than the angels, as He inherits a name more excellent than they" (vers. 3, 4). His "more excellent" name of Son entitles Him to this peerless rank, and this name is His by personal right—by inheritance.

Is it asked, How far is the Son above the angels? What is the degree of His pre-eminence? How much "better" than they? The answer is, By so much as the glory of the name of the Son exceeds that of angels. **So far in His nature as God is above the creatures of His hand, so far in His nature is the Son Who made the worlds above the angels.** And this exalted dignity is declared to be due to Him because of His "more excellent" name; and apart from His work of atonement, the worth of which is immeasurable too.

Moreover, the apostle proceeds to show from the scriptures that God said to the Son what He never said to angels. God witnessed to His Sonship both as a

never-changing fact from all eternity, and also as equally true in the amazing stoop of incarnation. Speaking to Him, Jehovah said, "Thou art My Son;" and, speaking of Him, Jehovah said, "He shall be to Me a Son" (ver. 5). The first quotation is expressed in the abstract, timeless present: "Thou art . . ." acknowledging the Son in the eternal Godhead. The second quotation relates to the Son incarnate, and the Gospel narratives show how amply this promise was fulfilled to Him during the days of His dependence: "I will be to Him for Father, and He shall be to Me for Son." No angel knew such relationship as this.

Further, angels themselves never are to be worshipped, but even they, whatever their high celestial dignity, must worship God's Spokesman. This homage the angels are commanded to render to the incarnate Son, the Firstborn, whenever He is brought into this habitable world (ver. 6). Angels will be sent to testify to man in the future (*see* Revelation, *passim*), as they were in past times (*see* O. Test., *passim*), and as indeed, even now, they are sent forth to minister to the heirs of salvation (Heb. i. 14). But, however great their heavenly rank, when the Son is made a little lower than they for the suffering of death (ii. 7, 9), they must still worship Him, the Son of man, as the Eternal Son, Whose Deity they know.

What Witness to the Eternal Sonship is given in Hebrews i.?

The chapter shows conclusively that the Nazarene despised and crucified by the Jews was the Son of God. In Him God had now spoken fully and finally, because, being Son, He was abundantly competent to represent God in authority and government. And this competency, which is essentially involved in Sonship, is shown to be His intrinsically. Being Son absolutely, He carried that relation of Son in power and grace with Him for His mediatorial work.

(1) **The eternity of the Sonship is shown by His creation of the worlds** (ver. 2). He made the worlds or *aiōns*, that is, all the time-phases and the space-phases of the universe (John i. 3; Col. i. 16), fulfilling God's will thereby. The work of creation was wrought through or by (*dia*) Him Who is called Son. In His pre-incarnate Deity, therefore, the Son acted as God's efficient co-operating Agent in making the worlds.

Since the Holy Spirit attributes creatorial activity to the Son, His existence must have preceded that of the universe which He called into being. The Son Who made purification for sins had previously made the worlds, and in both transactions He wrought mediately, in the former **before incarnation**, and in the latter **after incarnation**.

(2) **The eternity of the Sonship is involved in His inherent ability to reveal God** (ver. 3). This ability is associated with His "Being," that is, His eternal continuous existence: being the effulgence of God's glory and the very impress or expression of God's substance or essential nature, as well as upholding the universe by the word of His power.

These glories of the Son arise from His own proper nature, and are therefore associated with the eternity of His Being, and they cannot be restricted to His incarnate condition. In the Godhead the Son is the outshining of God's glory and the expression of His substance, as truly as in manhood. What stupendous import the apprehension of this truth adds to the words, "God . . . has spoken to us in [the person of the] Son"!

(3) **The eternity of the Sonship is taught by the fact that the Son is personally addressed as God and as Jehovah** (vers. 8-12). These names are applied prophetically to the Son in His kingdom (Ps. xlv.), and in His affliction and humiliation (Ps. cii.), but their application to Him in those circumstances

proves that these names are His by inherent right, and were not acquired at His incarnation. For if the Son was at all entitled to the name, God, and to the name, Jehovah, He was so entitled from all eternity. The divine Name is not transferable: "I am Jehovah, that is My Name; and My glory will I not give to another" (Isa. xlii. 8).

XIV.—BEFORE THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD AND BEFORE THE AGES OF TIME

NOTHING more effectually baffles the mind of man than the conception of eternity before the world began. Man can know nothing at all concerning it except what God has revealed. Scripture is comparatively silent about the eternal past. Even in the New Testament, where the clearest and fullest light of God's revelation shines, very few passages reach backward in their scope further than the foundation of the world and the beginning of the ages of time. But these few allusions are to be prized and studied as of choicest worth, seeing they unveil to us a little of God's secret purposes formed by Him before He launched the universe into being by His omnipotent word and furnished it by His omniscient wisdom.

The "**foundation of the world**" is frequently mentioned in scripture as the extreme border-line of the past "**from**" which human history is reckoned (Matt. xiii. 35 ; xxv. 34 ; Lu. xi. 50 ; Heb. iv. 3 ; ix. 26 ; Rev. xiii. 8 ; xvii. 8). For instance, the names found in the book of life were written "**from the foundation of the world,**" as the two passages in the Revelation (N. Tr.) declare. The divine record of these elect persons began at that point.

But what lies beyond that border-line of creation's beginning, when God was all? What was "**before the foundation of the world?**" What took place when the Deity was Absolute, and unrelated to the non-existent universe? An answer can be found only in the disclosures God has been pleased to make in His word. And from His revelations we learn of His love, of His foreknowledge, His election, and His promise of eternal life ; and we know, therefore, that

these plannings of infinite love were formulated **before** the foundation of the world. The counsels of grace existed in the Godhead from eternity, but the fact of their existence then was revealed to man in time.

The phrase, "before the foundation of the world," occurs three times in the New Testament (John xvii. 24; Eph. i. 4; 1 Pet. i. 20), and the kindred phrase, "before the ages of time," twice (2 Tim. i. 9; Tit. i. 2, N. Tr.). Let us with unaffected humility of mind look at these five passages, remembering the sacred and profound nature of their communications, proceeding, as they do, from "the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity" (Isa. lvii. 15). Let our hearts be as the "weaned child" that the Lord alone may be exalted in our eyes as we receive His word.

The Father was loving the Son before the World's Foundation

In John xvii. 24, the Son presents to the Father His desires for those whom the Father had given Him, basing His request upon the **love that existed between Them before the foundation of the world**. He said, "Father, [as to] those whom Thou hast given Me, I desire that where I am they also may be with Me that they may behold My glory which Thou hast given Me, for Thou lovedst Me before [the] foundation of [the] world." The Son knows that His Father's eternal love would give Him His heart's desire, and would not withhold the request of His lips.

The Son's desire for His own is that they may contemplate His given mediatorial glory in company with Himself—in that sphere which is proper and peculiar to Himself. For we must note that the Son said, "where I am," not "where I shall be." Moses had his Pisgah from whence he viewed the earthly inheritance promised to the fathers. The disciples too were led up into the "high mountain apart" where in company with "Jesus only" they beheld a transient display of the coming glories of Messiah's kingdom.

But the Lord here seeks a viewpoint more exalted for His own. He requests the Father that with Him ("where I am") they may view His conferred glory, in that day when all things in the heavens and on the earth shall be headed up in Him (Eph. i. 10).

But how divinely transcendent is the basis presented to the Father for this exceptional boon! The Son does not make request for His own, because "Thine they were; and Thou gavest them Me" (as in ver. 6); nor because Thou "hast loved them as Thou hast loved Me" (as in ver. 23); but because "Thou lovedst Me **before the foundation of the world.**" The Son knew that there was no plea weightier in the Father's estimation than the love which was co-eternal with the Father and Himself. In the secret intimacies of the Deity, the Father loved the Son "before the foundation of the world," and therefore the Father can deny His Beloved nothing in His incarnation.

In this passage, then, a single phrase of the Son of the Father conducts us to the regions of the timeless past. As a "door was opened in heaven" for John to behold visions of judgments and glories to come (Rev. iv. 1), so for us a door is opened in the eternal Home of love. Standing at the world's foundation, we by faith gaze from that threshold into that unapproachable dwelling-place of Light, and behold that then and there "God is love." Moreover, we hear, reverberating throughout the heights and depths of infinite inscrutability, these words of the Son, "Thou lovedst Me before the foundation of the world." "Thou"—the Father; "Me"—the Son! So that **before the worlds were, the Father was there, and the Son was there—living and loving Persons in that eternal past.**

This utterance to the Father, allowed by God's matchless grace to fall upon the creature's ear, is a marvellous unveiling of the seclusions of the remotest eternity. By it we are, if we may so speak, brought into the presence of the divine relations of the Father and the Son, in Absolute Deity. Truly these relations are "the depths of God," of which the apostle speaks,

and adds that "the things of God knows no one except the Spirit of God" (1 Cor. ii. 10, 11). But God's Spirit has revealed to us this eternal relationship of the Father and the Son through these words of the Son Himself.

Will it weary us to tarry a little in the light of these revealing words? They contain so much in such little compass. They surely unfold that in the eternal all-comprehending Godhead, love was ever being bestowed, and love was ever being received. **Before the existence of any creature or created thing, One was being loved by Another: "Thou lovedst Me."** The One Who was loved before the foundation of the world speaks to the One Who loved Him then, and addresses Him as Father: "Father, I will . . . for Thou lovedst Me"—the Son.

How exquisite is this confidence of eternal love! The Son discloses "the secrets of the Father's breast" to those whom He has chosen out of the world. He would have them, not the world, know that, in the essential nature of Deity, "before the world was," the Father's love dwelt in complacent affection upon "the Son of His love." **Before the foundation of the world, the Father in His essential Being was Father relatively to the Son, and the Son in His essential Being was Son relatively to the Father.**

How fervent the Father's love for the Son! How ardent the Son's love for the Father! The love of the Deity is no personified abstraction. We do not read that love is God, but that "God is love," and also that in its exercise the love of God is Paternal and Filial. The Son, speaking with the perfect knowledge of that love in all its fullness, desired of the Father that "His own" might be with Him and behold the glory given Him. The Son knew that the Father, Whose love for Him was eternal, found His good pleasure in the "will" of the Son even as He did in the obedience of the Son to the will of the Father. And on this immutable basis the Son, blessed be His holy name for

evermore, places the special character of our destiny in endless bliss.

Let us now pass from the words of the Son relating to His glory to the words of the Holy Spirit, which relate to matters decided by consultation in the Godhead "before the foundation of the world."

Chosen in Christ before the World's Foundation

In Ephesians i., we are again led back to the threshold of time, and again receive a revelation of what was enacted before the worlds began. Again, we learn that in that timeless state we were present before the mind of God. Even as we begin to read, the Holy Spirit puts into our lips the language of praise: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ; according as He has **chosen us in Him before the world's foundation**, that we should be holy and blameless before Him in love" (Eph. i. 3, 4).

Observe the divine names employed in the passage. The Spirit speaks not of "God" but of "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" in the exercise of this discriminating choice of those who were to be "in Christ," the Centre in Whom all things in the heavens and on the earth should be headed up in the fullness of times (i. 10). God the Father made His selections "in Christ" before the world's foundation.

There is love as well as government embodied in the new creation "in Christ"; accordingly, the appropriate name of relationship in love is added, "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." His eternal purpose is that we should be "holy and blameless before Him in love"; hence, it is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ Who has chosen us in Him Who is the Son of His love, "His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. i. 3).

Thus, we are taught in Paul's Epistle as in John's Gospel that the divine relations of Father and Son are associated with those counsels and purposes formulated

in Deity before the world's foundation. Then the Father was loving the Son and determining who should be His companions in that effulgent glory to God which will be the crowning outcome of His mediatorial work, when all things are headed up in the Christ, the Son of man.

That the Father should have loved the Son before the world's foundation is perhaps less wonderful in our eyes than that we should have been then chosen in Him ; but both truths are clearly revealed to us for the exaltation of our worship and the exuberance of our praise.

Foreknown before the World's Foundation

In Peter, this remarkable phrase occurs for the third time. We are here shown that God's redemptive plan for heavenly as well as for earthly blessing and glory was foreknown by Him "**before**" the world's foundation. While the redemption and salvation of God's earthly people were announced "by the mouth of His holy prophets, which have been **since** the world began" (Lu. i. 70), the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot, **was foreknown before the world began**. The apostle writes, "knowing that ye have been redeemed . . . by precious blood, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot, [the blood] of Christ, foreknown indeed before [the] foundation of [the] world" (1 Pet. i. 18-20). Peter speaks of what **preceded** the divine purposes for Jehovah's earthly people which are said to be "**from** the world's foundation."

Here, also, we are admitted into secrets "hid in God" before any creation or time relations were established. Then was foreknown "the blood of Christ Who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God." Then in the circle of Absolute Deity the divine will in respect to the sacrifice for sins and the sanctification of believers was enunciated. The "volume of the book" was written (Heb. x. 7-9). The order of the Son's

coming into the world was fixed, and recorded in "the roll of the book," known only to the Deity.

There were, therefore, foreknowledge and determination in the Godhead before the world's foundation with reference to the great sacrificial work, and to the One Who would undertake it "in these last days." It was God's Son Who said, "In the volume of the book it is written of Me;" "Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God" (Ps. xl. 7, 8; Heb. x. 7). That will of God involved not only the revelation of the Father, but the service of sacrifice and priesthood and the sanctification of believers (Heb. x. 10).

Purpose and Promise before the Ages of Time

But we read in scripture of priority to the ages of time as well as to the world's foundation. The "world" in Biblical usage may be said to be the scheme of material things designed for Adam and his race, into which sin entered (John i. 10; Acts xvii. 24; Rom. v. 12). The "ages of time" seem to be the successive phases and periods of God's dealings with His creatures, and the beginning of these ages coincides with the beginning of creation.

Anterior to both and to the whole sphere of space and time is the boundless, timeless state of eternity, where Godhead dwells.

But God has revealed certain matters which took place **before the ages of time** as well as before the world's foundation. These matters relate to counsels and purposes determined within the Deity. With regard to the creation of mankind, for example, we read that God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness" (Gen. i. 26). Man was created in accordance with that expression of purpose, whenever determined.

The phrase, "**the ages of time,**" rendered "**before the world began**" in the A.V., is found twice in the New Testament, once in Timothy and once in Titus. In Ephesians, Paul speaks of our being chosen in Christ

before the world's foundation ; and in **Timothy** he speaks of God's purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus **before the ages of time** (2 Tim. i. 9). He connects the Christian calling with the determining will of God exercised toward " us in Christ Jesus " before the successive ages of time with their varied characters began to run their course. This divine purpose and grace existed in the counsels of the Godhead before all ages and time-cycles, and are now revealed to the church, the chosen vehicle of their display.

In **Titus**, we read of the promise of eternal life before the world began : " in the hope of eternal life, which God, Who cannot lie, **promised before the ages of time** " (Tit. i. 2). Here again, we are shown that the promise which the Christian inherits goes back in origin before all human history into the eternity of the past. This is the " promise in Christ " of which Gentile as well as Jewish believers equally partake (Eph. iii. 6).

But who was there before the ages of time to receive a promise ? For " promise " implies a plurality of persons concerned. At least, there must be one to make a promise and another to receive it. This promise of eternal life was, therefore, made by God and received by the Son in the counsels of the Godhead before the world began. The following extract is from J. N. D.'s Synopsis on this passage in Titus :—

" ' Promised before the world began ' is a remarkable and important expression. One is admitted into the thoughts of God before the existence of this changing and mingled scene. . . . Eternal life is connected with the unchangeable nature of God ; with His counsels, which are as abiding as His nature ; with His promises, in which He cannot deceive us, and to which He cannot be unfaithful.

" Our portion in life **existed before the foundation of the world**, not only in the counsels of God, not only in the Person of the Son, but **in the promises made to the Son**, as our portion in Him. It was the subject of those communications from the Father to the Son,

of which we were the objects ; the Son being their depositary.

“ Marvellous knowledge which has been given us of the heavenly communications of which the Son was the object, in order that we might understand the interest which we have in the thoughts of God, of which we were the objects in Christ before all the ages ! ”

* * * * *

What then in substance do these few scriptures teach us ? They reveal divine relations which in the beginning existed in Absolute Godhead. They show that before created things were called into being, that before the ages of time began to roll their course, and that when Deity was absolutely all, the Father loved the Son, and, moreover, purposed that when the universe should be brought into subjection to the Son as its Head, there should be heavenly associates with Him in His universal rule, whom He would choose out of the sinful and lost world to occupy this exalted station. Such is the Father’s good pleasure in His beloved Son, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever will be.

“ 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.”

XV.—THE MANIFESTATION IN THE SON

IT would be wicked folly and gross irreverence on the part of any to attempt to pry into the mysteries of the Trinity or to comprehend the Blessed Person of the Son. On the other hand, it would be an affront to divine grace to despise such revelations of Himself as He has been pleased to make. What has been revealed is necessary to the development of the spiritual nature that the Father may receive from us that worship in truth which He seeks ; and that in our worship we may intelligently worship One Whom we know (John iv. 22) according to His own **manifestation** in the Son.

The Meaning of Manifestation

Let us then strive to “ receive with meekness ” what unfoldings of the Father and the Son are stored in scripture for the deepening of our communion. It is an amazing comfort to remember that the profoundest truths of scripture are learned in a personal manner. They are communicated to us, not on tables of stone like the law, but in the Person of Christ Himself. To know the Son is to know the Father also (John viii. 19).

We of course treasure and “ keep ” His words ; they are to us “ sweeter than honey and the honeycomb.” But the Lord Jesus is Himself what He taught. As He said to the Jews, answering their question, Who art Thou? “ Altogether (or absolutely) that which I also say to you ” (John viii. 25). So that the incarnate Son was Himself the embodiment of what He came into the world to communicate. “ He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father.” This truth holds good of Him now in glory. Paul had before him as a governing motive the excellency of “ the knowledge of Christ

Jesus my Lord," and his ambition was "that I may know Him" (Phil. iii. 8, 10). And to come to "the knowledge of the Son of God" is the pursuit of the whole assembly under the combined teaching of the gifts of Christ Himself (Eph. iv. 13).

Setting out the truth in this living personal manner before the eyes of men is sometimes spoken of in scripture as "**making manifest**" or "**manifestation.**" We read of "**God manifest in flesh,**" and that "**the Son of God was manifested.**" Before considering the context of these and other of its occurrences, it is helpful to recollect the meaning of the word.

To make manifest (*phaneroo*) is to bring to light what has been hidden hitherto. The idea of manifestation is never a transition from a state of non-existence to that of existence. You could not call the manufacture of the first locomotive, for instance, its manifestation, for the word takes for granted that the locomotive was in existence previously, but unmanifested, so that it could not be intelligently applied in this or such a case.

Manifestation, therefore, signifies that there is a point of time in the history of the person or thing at which it passes out of a concealed into a public or visible life. Scripture speaks of "God manifest in flesh." That manifestation took place at the time when He Who was God became flesh and was seen of men and angels. In like language, it is said that the Son of God was manifested. He Who was the Son, and unseen and unknown as such, appeared or was manifested "in the likeness of sinful flesh."

Accordingly, if we would do the honour to the Son that is due to Him, we must acknowledge that **He was the Son of God before His manifestation.** The true and acceptable confession of the Son is to own Him in the relationship assigned to Him by the Holy Spirit in the written word. To deny His Sonship before His incarnation is to deny the plain meaning of "manifestation" in its scriptural usage, and to rob the Son of God of this revealed glory. **Being Son of**

God eternally, He has been manifested publicly and visibly in flesh for His mediatorial work (1 John iii. 8).

Manifest in Flesh

“ Manifest in flesh ” is a scriptural term for the incarnation. We find it in 1 Tim. iii. 16, that remarkable passage : “ And confessedly the mystery of piety is great. God has been manifested in flesh . . . ” There is no need to refer to the alternative reading here, “ He Who ” ; for with either phrase, the sense of the passage is unaltered. There is but One of Whom it could be written that He appeared or was manifested in flesh. Other scriptures confirm that **it was the Son of God Who was manifested in flesh** ; and He is the true God and eternal life.

It may be said of all mankind generally that they are flesh, since all men are naturally born of the flesh (John iii. 6). But the Word **became** flesh (John i. 14). The incarnation was a manifestation of the Word, of Him Who was in the beginning, Who was with God and Who was God (John i. 1). Becoming flesh, and therefore “ manifest,” was a point, an era in the history of the One Whose existence as the Word was previous and eternal and invisible to the creature.

The word, “ **manifest,** ” irresistibly carries our thoughts backward from the date of the incarnation or of becoming flesh, marvellous as that event is. The One Who became visible is the same as He Who was invisible, for there is no change in Him personally, when manifested. The “ Infinite Unseen ” became visible at His manifestation in flesh. He Who dwelt “ in light unapproachable ” came and “ dwelt among us . . . full of grace and truth,” “ the image of the invisible God.”

Manifestation and Mediation

It may be well to remind ourselves that in scripture the **fact** of the manifestation is closely coupled with its

purpose. The incarnation itself is not atonement. The fact of the manifestation of One Whom man has not seen nor could see is wonderful. But the object of the divine manifestation, the true Theophany, was to secure the full glory of God in His dealings in grace and righteousness with sinful man. Therefore, the Son of God Who has been manifested is the Mediator between God and men.

Manifestation and mediation are intimately associated in New Testament teaching, the latter being consequent upon the former, and both being "in flesh." God's manifestation among men was "in flesh" (1 Tim. iii. 16), and "the **Mediator** of God and men" was in flesh also, for He is the "man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. ii. 5). And He "gave Himself a ransom for all." His **mediation** involved not only His appearance in the likeness of sinful flesh, but the sacrifice of Himself, God's Son sent a propitiation for our sins (1 John iv. 10) and "not for ours alone, but also for the whole world" (1 John ii. 2).

In John's writings, the Spirit seems to love to dwell upon the redemptive work of Him Who was manifested. For example, He shows that the object of the manifestation of the Son of God was the removal of our sins and the destruction of the works of the great enemy. He says, "Ye know that He has been manifested that He might take away our sins; and in Him sin is not"; and further, "To this end the Son of God has been manifested that He might undo the works of the devil" (1 John iii. 5, 8). Similarly, Paul links His sacrificial work with His manifestation, saying, "Now once in the consummation of the ages He has been manifested for [the] putting away of sin by His sacrifice" (Heb. ix. 26).

These scriptures all relate to the mediatorial work of Him Who has been manifested. They combine to show that **He Who was manifested in time as the Mediator of God and men was the Son of God before His manifestation in time; and He was therefore the Son in eternity. His original and**

essential relationship of Son in Deity was manifested in flesh, and having been made manifest and recorded, what blindness and hardness of heart to deny it !

The Manifestation of Hidden Treasures

In the treasury of the Father's house the deep and precious things of eternity are stored, unseen by human eye and unknown to man's heart. All "the secret things belong unto the Lord our God" (Deut. xxix. 29), Who reveals at His pleasure what He will to whomsoever He will.

At the moment we are not concerned with the revelation of Jehovah's ways with men in the government of the earth. Above and beyond all these plans are the truths relating to the Essential Being of God, concealed of necessity from the eyes and heart of the creature. **What God is** must be even more private and profound than **what He will do** : "Is not this laid up in store with Me, and sealed up among My treasures ?" (Deut. xxxii. 34).

In New Testament days, many choice treasures of heavenly wisdom and knowledge connected with God and His Son were revealed. Even then, such supernatural knowledge was hidden from the wise and prudent of the earth, but revealed to "babes" by the Father, the Lord of heaven and earth (Matt. xi. 25). So the treasures of God's latest revelations are included in the mystery, the truth entrusted to Paul concerning Christ and the church (*see* Col. ii. 2, 3). The assembly has now been made the depositary of those transcendent truths, hitherto kept secret in the heavenly archives. We may briefly note the following, among other revealed truths of this character :—

(1) God's eternal purpose and grace are now manifested. Accordingly, we find the apostle Paul declaring that God's purpose and grace, given us in Christ Jesus before the ages of time, has now been made manifest (2 Tim. i. 9, 10). The time for this revelation

did not come until Messiah had presented Himself to Israel according to promise and prophecy, and was abhorred by the nation and crucified. This wicked refusal of their King and Saviour was anticipated by "the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God."

Consequently, "a better thing" was purposed by God from the beginning. If man's infamy thwarted the introduction of promised blessing for the earth, God purposed to let loose the flood-tides of His grace and bestow spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus. Silence was kept throughout the times of the ages concerning this purposed heavenly calling of the assembly, but now the treasured heavenly secret is made manifest, being announced by prophetic scriptures (*see* Rom. xvi. 25-27).

(2) Life is now manifested in Christ Jesus. The apostle John was chosen by the Holy Spirit to set out in his writings the present manifestation of life in Christ Jesus. Again we encounter the term, manifestation: "**the life has been manifested**" (1 John i. 2). It was not a life recently come into existence, but it was a life eternally existent in the Son, and hidden until now when it has been manifested. Its characteristic feature is "fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ" (1 John i. 3); and this fellowship is for us!

Here, then, is another priceless secret brought forth from the treasure-house of eternity, and now disclosed to the family of God. Sin-tainted life had been upon the earth since the days of Adam, but none had seen that Eternal Life, which was with the Father, until it was displayed in the Son Who became incarnate. That Eternal Life was ever with the Father, but in these last days has been manifested among men by Him Who is "the true God and eternal life."

This life then was ever existent, for it is "in the Son," but was concealed from men until its manifestation, of which John testifies for himself and his

fellow-witnesses : “ the life has been manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and report to you the eternal life, which was with the Father, and has been manifested to us ” (1 John i. 2).

(3) The love of God has now been manifested. The love of God announced in the gospel is not of recent origin. It was hidden, but is now made manifest. Upon this aspect of love John dwells. He teaches us that “ **love is of God** ” and that “ **God is love** ” (1 John iv. 7, 8). God Himself is the origin, the primeval fount of love : He is love.

It being so that love is the very nature of God, that love of God is inscrutable, incomprehensible, inaccessible to the creature, as the divine nature must necessarily be. But in our day the choicest treasure of the Father’s house has been manifested, being adequately and gloriously displayed in the Incarnate Son. “ Herein as to us **has been manifested the love of God**, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world that we might live through Him ” (1 John iv. 9).

This manifestation is very simple in its results to us, and profoundly blessed. How do the family of God learn the eternal love of God as it rests upon and affects themselves ? They absorb it as they meditate upon it and contemplate it where alone it has been or could be manifested—in the Person of God’s Only-begotten Son.

Measureless Manifestation

Among other beauties that shine upon us as by faith we behold the Son of His love is that we perceive in the glory of that Blessed One the **unbounded measure** of His manifestation of the love of God. We may inquire to what degree the infinite love of God has been displayed in this poor world. On the one hand is the illimitable expanse of the love of God for manifestation ; on the other, the tiny vessel of the human heart for its reception. Was the eternal fullness of divine love

manifested sufficiently to fill our little cups, and then did the display stay, like the widow's oil ?

Ah, no ; a restricted display of His love was not the will of God. His boundless love has been manifested to its utmost bounds, for the glory of His own name and the delight of His own heart. It is His will that we should know the love which passeth knowledge, and that we should learn its rich plenitude in Jesus Christ, His Son. **In Him, in Whom dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, dwells the love of God**, which in its essence, its qualities, its activities, baffles all human comprehension. The love abiding in Him is the love wherewith the Father loved His Only-begotten Son before the foundation of the world ; yet we may say, Of that vast fullness have all we received.

Manifestation in the Son

The competency of the Son of God to manifest the Father's name (John xvii. 6) rests upon His own relationship with the Father before His incarnation. His own self-revealing words were, " I came forth from the Father . . . again, I leave the world and go to the Father " (John xvi. 28). Moreover, while here in the lowly guise of manhood His relationship of Sonship remained intact. He speaks of the Father as " My Father," and in addressing the Father He speaks of " Thy Son."

Incarnation had not broken nor weakened the eternal bonds between the Father and the Son. Throughout His manifestation, They were in the most intimate communion. His disciples might leave Him alone, but He was not alone, for **the Father was with Him** (John viii. 29 ; xvi. 32). He said, " **I am in the Father, and the Father in Me** " (John x. 38 ; xiv. 10); and, speaking of His service, He said, " **The Father that dwelleth in Me, He doeth the works** " (John xiv. 10).

These sayings in the mouth of even the greatest of

mankind would seem contradictory and paradoxical, and even worse, but as utterances of " God manifest in flesh " they are exquisitely appropriate and illuminating. The Son was in conscious communion with the Father, for He said, " I and My Father are one " (John x. 30). He was in conscious manifestation of the Father's name, for He said, " He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father " (John xiv. 9).

Clearly, the plenitude and perfection of the Son's manifestation of the Father depended upon His eternal relationship. In this lay the radical difference between the Son and the many servants of God. The latter were assigned their several duties, and each entrusted with some particular message. They remained subordinates, however high their temporal dignity.

Abraham was called the friend of God, and Jehovah confided in him the impending destruction of the cities of the plain (Gen. xviii. 17). Jehovah spoke to Moses, the mediator of Israel, face to face, as a man speaks to his friend (Exod. xxxiii. 11). These were great honours for two of the sons of men, yet they never advanced above their original status, as the parallel record of their frailties and failures testifies concerning both of them.

In the lips of Abraham, how incongruous and evil would have been the words, " He that hath seen me, hath seen the Almighty " ! But our Lord said, " He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father." How true and how blessed the saying in His lips !

Nor would Moses have dared to say, " I and Jehovah are one ; " yet the Lord said (not, My Father and I are one), but " I and My Father are one." This order of precedence was not used invariably, for elsewhere He said, " My Father worketh, and I work " (John v. 17). Each phrasing is beautiful and appropriate in its setting; while all His sayings unite to show the divine personality of the Son on earth as the Sent One of the Father.

None but " God manifest in flesh " could make such claims, and escape the blasphemer's doom. We may surely take up the language of redeemed Israel, and

as we consider the **manner** of this marvellous **manifestation**, say, " This is the Lord's doing ; it is marvellous in our eyes " (Ps. cxviii. 23). The Son came down from heaven (John vi. 33) to reveal the Father to whomsoever He would (Matt. xi. 27). Coming down out of heaven, He testified what He had seen and what He had heard (John iii. 31, 32).

The Son's words were, " I speak what I have seen with My Father " (John viii. 38). **The character of His manifestation rested upon the fact that He was with the Father before His entrance into the world.** Of this eternal presence with the Father, and of the glory He had along with Him before the world was, the Son was fully aware, and of it He has testified (John xvii. 5), that we may believe that the Father sent the Son, and, believing, Father and Son adore.

XVI.—CONCLUDING REMARKS : SONSHIP AND SERVICE

IN the course of our meditations upon the “ Son of His love ” we have surely learned that in that Blessed One, the Mediator of God and men, we possess a perfect representative of God Who is love, since He, the Son, is God, the fullness of Godhead dwelling in Him abidingly. Moreover, He is the Son Who reveals the Father to whomsoever He will (Matt. xi. 27).

This manifestation by the Son was made “ in flesh.” “ The Word became flesh.” The Incarnate Son appeared among men to accomplish atonement and to set forth the revelation of His Father “ in the days of His flesh.” “ In Him is no sin,” but “ God, having sent His own Son in likeness of flesh of sin, and for sin, has condemned sin in the flesh ” (Rom. viii. 3). The Son at the close of His earthly ministry said to the Father, “ I have completed the work which Thou gavest Me that I should do it ” (John xvii. 4). We honour the Son, therefore, even as we honour the Father, honouring Both as being equal in the Deity.

Now, the transcendent glory of the obedience of Christ which He carried as far as death, even the death of the cross, lies in the fact that being the Eternal Son He deigned to enter into that relationship of submission for the glory of God. Being Son in the Godhead and exempt from all obligations and conditions of servitude, He **became the Servant** of God, of Jehovah. To this end, He “ emptied Himself, taking a bondman’s form, taking His place in [the] likeness of men ” (Phil. ii. 7).

But while the Holy Spirit in Philippians describes graphically how One “ in the form of God,” a Divine Person, took the “ form of a servant,” or bondsman, we nowhere in scripture read that He took “ the form

of a Son," though scripture witnesses that in His incarnation He was still the Son, but not Child.*

To the place of subjection, the Blessed One "descended," for He chose to become the Righteous Servant of Jehovah, but **all scripture is silent as to His becoming the Son.** Being the Son, He both willed and submitted to be sent, and being sent, He did the will of Him that sent Him. "Though He were Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered" (Heb. v. 8). His obedience was more than the obedience of a Servant; it was the obedience of the Son—an obedience, moreover, which He learned in the school of suffering.

The New and Strange Doctrine

This unique excellence of the obedience of Christ appears to be obscured, if not entirely obliterated, by doctrines much in vogue now in some quarters. It seems to be held that "Son" is applied to our Lord in the sense of "Servant," subjection being, it is said, denoted by sonship, and for this reason Sonship could not be true of our Lord before His incarnation.

The following quotation is a definite doctrinal statement to this effect, denying the eternal Sonship of the Lord Jesus Christ: "Scripture teaches, as has been variously pointed out in recent years, that while His Person remains unchanged, the sonship of our Lord denotes *subjection*, and thus does not rightly apply to Him in pre-incarnate Deity, when He was eternally in the form of God, which *cannot* imply subjection." (The italicized words are in the original statement.)

This statement contains the substance of one of the main arguments of the Unitarians who deny the Deity of the Lord Jesus, maintaining that since the Lord asserted His own Sonship, He by this, His own confession, took a subordinate place, and therefore

* Compare Appendix D (page 191).

could not be the Supreme God ! The teaching quoted above also maintains that "sonship," since it denotes subjection, does not and cannot apply to the Lord in His pre-incarnate Deity. Thus, while they differ widely in other matters, they both agree with the enemies of the Lord in denying His eternal Sonship, and for the same insufficient reason.

The reason adduced (that sonship "denotes subjection") is without support from scripture, where in general usage, as we shall seek to show, **sonship frequently denotes dignity, character, nature, and privilege, rather than subjection.** And, therefore, since sonship does not *invariably* in scripture denote subjection, their argument falls to the ground.

For example, we read in Ps. lxxii. 17 (margin), "His name shall be as a son to continue his father's name for ever." The son, here, is he who transmits fully and faithfully to a future generation the dignity and excellency of the father. Again, Moses refused to be "called the son of Pharaoh's daughter" (Heb. xi. 24); he surrendered the dignities of the royal court of Egypt, where he was recognized as a "son," not as a "servant."

Sons are those who reproduce the typical or distinctive traits of their fathers, and this sense of parental representation is often used in moral matters. Thus, the "sons of disobedience" (Eph. ii. 2) are those whose conduct displays disobedience as definitely as a son resembles a father. Barnabas exhibited the features of consolation so clearly that he was called the "son of consolation" (Acts iv. 36). The Lord said that the Jews were of their "father, the devil," because they did his lusts and his deeds, showing their moral origin (John viii. 41-45).

There are many similar phrases, such as, sons "of light," "of this age," "of the resurrection," "of perdition," "of the prophets," "of the covenant," and the like, where character and nature are denoted, but not subjection or service.

The truth is that the new theory which claims that "sonship" denotes subjection confuses the scriptural

distinction between "son" and "servant." Subjection is a feature which is essential to the character of a servant, but exceptional and voluntary in the case of a son. A son may consent to become a servant, but a servant cannot elevate himself to become a son. When the son obeys, his obedience is that of a son, and not of a servant.

The Son Learned Obedience

The teaching of scripture concerning our Lord is that He, the Son, at His incarnation came into the place of subjection or obedience. It was in that place of relationship that He "learned" to submit to the will of Him Who had sent Him. "Though He were Son, yet learned He obedience from the things which He suffered" (Heb. v. 8). The personal dignities and glories of Him Who is the Son and Who assumed the conditions of subjection and suffering are previously unfolded in the same Epistle (Heb. i.). He Who is there shown to be God and Jehovah as well as Son learned obedience from the things which He suffered. Does not the essential glory of His Person magnify His obedience beyond all comparison and elevate His submission to an unexampled excellence?

Subjection was foreign to the nature of the Eternal Son, yet He learned obedience when incarnate. The absurdity of the assertion that subjection is denoted by the word, Son, is seen at once when applied to this passage, substituting those words for the word "Son." The statement of the Messianic glory is converted into a mere platitude by this change: "Though He were *in subjection*, yet learned He obedience from the things which He suffered." How commonplace! The one who is subject *must* obey. The emphatic force of "though," which means "notwithstanding the fact that," is lost. The glory of the obedient Son is departed from the passage!

This gratuitous suggestion is a real dishonour done to the Lord in the circumstances of His humiliation.

If sonship "denotes subjection," as they say, then obedience is the normal duty of the Son, and if He does the things commanded Him, He is not worthy even to be thanked (Luke xvii. 9). If His obedience cost Him suffering, does not *every* good soldier endure hardness (2 Tim. ii. 3)? By this faulty interpretation of Sonship as applied to our Lord, the true significance of Heb. v. 8 is perverted, and the glory of the obedience of the Son is reduced to the level of the faithfulness of a servant.

The subjection described in this text was exceptional and unequalled because it was found in One Who obeyed, "**though He were Son.**" His personal status exempted Him from all obligation to be subject, yet He obeyed. Of His own voluntary will, He undertook the position and responsibilities of a bond-servant. The Son becoming subject was a glorified excellence unparalleled in the history of creation, and this excellence the Holy Spirit delineates and magnifies, especially in the Gospel of Mark and in the Epistle to the Hebrews.

Sonship denotes Liberty not Bondage

When in his minority or nonage, a son is regarded as a child or infant, and as such is subject to the family authority. But in due time, having passed the stage of "infancy," or immaturity, he is recognized as the "son," and is freed from his former bondage to guardians and stewards. The apostle uses this distinction between sonship and childhood in teaching the difference between law and grace (Gal. iv. 1-7; Rom. viii. 15).

Here again, we find that the dictum that sonship "denotes subjection" does not hold good; for, in this passage, **sonship is placed in contrast with subjection or bondage.** Under the law, the Israelite was in bondage, held in subjection to its rites and ceremonies by its threatened curse; he was a bond-servant. Under grace, however, the believer is

delivered from the bondage of the law, and his obedience is not constrained, but spontaneous and delightful, the obedience not of a slave, but of a son, crying Abba, Father from the heart; in its character it is the obedience of Christ, unto which he is sanctified (1 Pet. i. 2). "A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master" (Mal. i. 6); and the subjection of the Son was perfect, as He said Himself, "I honour My Father," and "I have kept My Father's commandments" (John viii. 49; xv. 10). He Who was the Eternal Son became the Servant-Son.

Sonship denotes Community of Nature

"Son" only "denotes subjection" in childhood and in the adolescent stage, before maturity is reached. When full-grown or fully developed, the son is competent to represent the father, because he corresponds in nature and qualities with the father. **The son, therefore, in normal conditions, is considered not inferior but equal to the father, and able to maintain the prestige of the family.** This sense agrees with scriptural usage of the word, son.

In this representative sense, Isaac is called the son of Abraham. Three times God described Isaac as Abraham's "only son" (Gen. xxii. 2, 12, 16). Ishmael and the children of Keturah are disregarded, not being in any degree representatives of the father in the line of divine promise. Isaac alone was the true seed, and the witness of Eliezer concerning him was, "Unto him hath he (Abraham) given all that he hath" (Gen. xxiv. 36). Abraham's faith and pious character were reproduced in Isaac, so that he was Abraham's son in the ideal sense of possessing community of nature and character with his father in a manner that "the son of the bondwoman" did not.

In the Mount Moriah incident, this communion of interest and voluntary obedience are beautifully seen in Abraham and Isaac; twice we read, "They went both of them together" (Gen. xxii. 6, 8). Though

there were two servants and the ass, Isaac bore the wood for the burnt-offering. Though some twenty-five years of age, he consented to be bound by Abraham and laid upon the altar. The ready obedience of the son is most marked in the history, but under what exceptional circumstances! Whenever was there such absolute submission demanded of a son? But Abraham's faith and obedience to God had their facsimile or counterpart in the behaviour of Isaac. And the marvel of Isaac's obedience is that he was a son, not a servant. There was an identity of nature and character between him and Abraham, which was the cause of his filial submission, and in which he exhibited a like piety to his father.

Jesus Christ the Servant-Son

It was Christ's eternal Sonship that imparted the incomparable character to His service on earth. In the Godhead there is uniformity of will, and therefore no subjection of One to Another. In Deity, the Son knew no subjection, but on earth, "though He were Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered." In the lowly place of subjection which He assumed, the Son chose to receive commandments from the Father and to be obedient to them with infinite dispatch and infinite delight. What obedience could match this in kind or in degree?

Taking upon Him the subject-state by His incarnation, the Son was perfected in all the relations that were proper to His subjection, and He became the Author of eternal salvation to all that obey Him (Heb. v. 8, 9). As in Deity the will of the Son constantly coincided absolutely with the will of the Father, so a like unanimity was preserved when He became a bond-servant. And this display of unvarying obedience to the Father's glory was made not in a sinless heaven but in a sinful earth, not by an archangel, the most exalted of servants, but by the Son of the Father's love, in Whom dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.

However distinguished the service of an angel, it could never be more than the obedience of a servant. But the obedience of Christ was the obedience of One Who had the more excellent name of Son, and Who was under no obligation to obey. His due place in God's house was that of "Son over His house," His Person giving Him absolute supremacy. Moses, famous lawgiver and leader though he was, rose no higher than a ministering servant in that house (Heb. iii. 5, 6).

The Son is the Creator of All Things

It is not true that the "sonship of our Lord denotes subjection," except that the Son at the appointed time assumed the place of a Servant. Subsisting ever in the form of God, He took the bondman's form, becoming obedient even as far as death, the death of the cross (Phil. ii. 5-8). Colossians i. 15-17 definitely attributes the whole **work of creation** to the Son of the Father's love, which, of necessity, was accomplished in **pre-incarnate Deity**. The **work of reconciliation** (vers. 18-22) is the work of the Son in **incarnate Deity**. The same Person, the Son of the Father's love, acts throughout, and yet we are told that Sonship "does not rightly apply to Him in pre-incarnate Deity." Surely, those who make such an assertion do not "continue in the Son and in the Father" (1 John ii. 24). They claim "new light," but it is only the light of their own fire and of the sparks they themselves have kindled.

"Whosoever goes forward and abides not in the doctrine of the Christ has not God. He that abides in the doctrine, he has both the Father and the Son" (2 John 9).

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

(page 18)

The Three Persons of the Godhead

THAT there is unity in the Godhead no Christian denies ; while he fully believes three Persons in the Godhead, even the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Matt. xxviii. 19).

Nor is this truth to be enfeebled in the least degree. He who allows no more in the Godhead than three aspects of one Person is not a Christian, but a deceiver and an antichrist. He does not confess the fully revealed and true God, not the Godhead merely in three characters but in Three Persons ; and so distinct that the Father could send the Son (1 John iv. 14), and the Holy Ghost descend on that Son in the presence of the Father and in the consciousness of the Son (Mark i. 10, 11), as it was even outwardly before man also (John i. 33, 34).

The Trinity

Such is the early and immense fact recorded in the Gospels, a clear witness to "the Trinity." What sympathy can one have with those who, overlooking such a fact, stumble over the term ? Why be so servile to the letter, and so anxious to get rid of a word because it is in the Bible ? The **thing** is distinctly there ; the truth, not only open in the New Testament, but pervading the Bible (in a more veiled form, characteristic of the Old Testament in general) from the first chapter to the last.

One cannot now read the first chapter of Genesis intelligently without seeing that there are more Persons than One in the Godhead. Even the first verse of the

first chapter yields a positive though gradual preparation for divulging it, at least after it was revealed.

The Plural Noun and the Singular Verb

Do you ask how this can be? "In the beginning God created" (Gen. i. 1). Perhaps all may not have heard, but it is nevertheless true, that in the original Hebrew "God" is in the plural, naturally pointing to more than one Person; yet "created" is in the singular, a form not used where it speaks of heathen gods, but where it speaks of the living God. With the gods of the nations, the verb is plural. With the true God, although the subject be in the plural, the verb is often in the singular. Cases like Gen. xx. 13 ("God caused"), where the verb is plural (like the noun), prove that God (Elohim) was known to be a true plural.

One God, Three Persons

Could anything prepare better for revealing unity of the nature and plurality of the Persons? Granted that none in the Old Testament could certainly see the Three Persons as revealed later; even the believer had to wait until the New Testament for full light and truth. But when it came in Christ and by the Spirit, the peculiar (grammatical) concord where God's name occurs of old could not but strike those who heed every word of Holy Writ.

Every Word Inspired

Men who hold lax views of inspiration may no doubt dispute the force of any word, because their views are unbelieving and pernicious; for these necessarily enfeeble and undermine inspiration as God has revealed it, and as His Spirit reasons on it. No error has consequences more widely spread than limiting inspiration to God's thoughts in general, and denying it to His written words.

W.K.

APPENDIX B

(page 49)

In and From the Beginning

HE was the Word and Son before the time described as "from the beginning." The Eternal Son of the Eternal Father no human mind can fathom ; and the incarnation necessarily adds to its inscrutability. But this is not the least ground for not believing what is infinitely above and beyond us ; it is revealed without a doubt. And the reason why men break down upon it all is that they reason from man up to God, which is always false. You must reason down from God to man if you are to be in the truth ; for who knows the truth but God ? And who can reveal the truth but God, as He has done in Christ ?

In the Gospel, John is most careful to say that " In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." It matters not how far one essays back in thought into the depths of eternity. Imagine millions of years ! These are not the beginning ; though of course one cannot with propriety talk of " years " before the measures of time apply. But go back in imagination into these unmeasured depths, there He subsisted. No beginning had He Who is eternal, and in His own personality He was " with God."

Again, not only was He with God as a distinct Person from the Father and the Spirit ; but He was God. Nor is there any property of God more distinctive than His being eternal ; if not eternal, not God.

But quite a different thing is referred to in 1 John ii. 13. It is not knowing Him that was in the beginning with God, but knowing " Him that is from the

beginning." It is the beginning of His taking flesh, the incarnate Word, in this world. Such is the absolutely new fact. "From the beginning" is reckoned from His manifesting Himself as Emmanuel, the God-Man.

This was He Whom the "fathers" knew. What can you know about the Son in eternity except that He was the Only-begotten Son in the Father's bosom, the object of His everlasting delight, as even Prov. viii. tells us ?

Such He was when not a creature existed above or below, neither angel nor man nor lower being. There was only the blessed God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, as we know now ; and there were divine counsels which were afterwards to be divulged to us who now believe. What do we know more than this ? But if we look at "Him that is from the beginning," there is, one may say, almost everything to learn and know.

Exposition of the Epistles of John,

by W.K., pp. 120, 121.

APPENDIX C

(page 86)

“ THE Son is here presented to us as Creator, not to the exclusion of the Father’s power, nor of the operation of the Spirit. They are One, but it is the Son Who is here set before us. In John i. it is the Word Who creates all things. Here, and in Hebrews i., it is under the name of Son that He, Who is also the Word, is revealed to us. He is the Word of God, the expression of His thought and of His power. It is by Him that God works and reveals Himself.

“ He is also the Son of God ; and, in particular, the Son of the Father. He reveals God, and he who has seen Him has seen the Father. Inasmuch as born in this world by the operation of God through the Holy Ghost, He is the Son of God (Ps. ii. 7 ; Luke i. 35). But this is in time, when creation is already the scene of the manifestation of the ways and counsels of God.

“ But the Son is also the name of the proper relationship of His glorious Person to the Father before the world was. It is in this character that He created all things. The Son is to be glorified even as the Father. . . .

“ In the Epistle to the Colossians that which is set before us is the proper glory of His Person as the Son before the world was. He is the Creator as the Son. It is important to observe this. **But the Persons are not separated in their manifestation.** If the Son wrought miracles on earth, He cast out devils by the Spirit ; and the Father Who dwells in Him (Christ) did the works.

“ Also it must be remembered that that which is said, is said, when He was manifested in the flesh, of

His complete Person, Man upon earth. Not that we do not in our minds separate between the divinity and the humanity ; but even in separating them we think of the one Person with regard to Whom we do so. We say Christ is God, Christ is man ; but it is Christ Who is the two.

“ I do not say this theologically, but to draw the reader’s attention to the remarkable expression, ‘ All the fullness was pleased to dwell in Him.’ All the fullness of the Godhead was found in Christ.”

J.N.D.’s *Synopsis*, (*Colossians i*).

APPENDIX D

(p. 144 and p. 175)

Jesus Christ is called Son, but not Child of God

JESUS is never called *teknon* but *whyos*. It would be derogatory to, and a denial of, His eternal glory to speak of Him as God's *teknon* (child).* But He is Son (*whyos*) in more senses than one.

He is Son of God as born in time and viewed on earth in His predicted association with Israel as their Messiah and King (Psalm ii.). He is determined Son of God in power by resurrection from the dead (Rom. i. 4).

And what is more important than all, and the basis of all, He is Son of God, Only-begotten Son in the Father's bosom, entirely apart from the time of His manifestation or the results of His work of redemption, Son of the Father in His own nature and personal relationship in that eternal subsistence which is essential to the Godhead and characteristic of it. For this last we have to consult the Gospel and Epistles of John.

Nothing therefore can be more correct than the language of all the inspired writers; nothing more feeble than its appreciation by theological writers even with the facts and words before their eyes. But the source of their failure is quite intelligible: a sense of Christ's glory as inadequate as of the derived privileges of the Christian.

W.K.

* In the phrase, "Thy Holy Child" (Acts iv. 27, 30, A.V.), *pais* not *teknon* occurs in the original, and therefore "Servant" is a more correct translation than "Child."