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The great prophecies o

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The Great Prophecies of the Centuries Concern- ing the Church by

G. H. PEMBER, M.A.

*Save yourselves from this crooked generation.
Arise ye, and depart; for this is not your rest: because of uncleanness
that destroyeth, even with a grievous destruction.
For our citizenship is in Heaven; from whence also we wait for a
Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.*

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P R E F A C E

THIS volume, the publication of which has been much delayed by illness, completes what we have to say concerning fulfilled prophecy. We have, however, in no sense exhausted the theme: indeed, considerations of space and time have compelled us to omit many interesting particulars from the present work. But enough, we trust, has been retained to afford a clear view of the whole subject, and, moreover, to completely equip any reader for further research on his own account. A few remarks on one or two difficult points in the book may, perhaps, render it more easily intelligible.

Commencing with chapters on the purpose of the Church in God's World-scheme, and on the point at which the Mosaic Dispensation gave place to that of Grace and Truth, we go on to show, that the Kingdom of the Heavens, which began to be preached by John the Baptist when the Law and the Prophets had been suspended, is the same Heavenly Kingdom as that which is now our hope and goal. For the Jews, or the two Tribes—which had remained with the Temple of their God, and had clung to the House of David from whence the Messiah was to spring—

v

were still regarded as the peculiar people of God, and, therefore, as having the first right to the highest privileges which He would bestow upon the human race.

For this reason it is, that, when He represents the Heavenly calling as a Royal Banquet, the Jews are termed "those that were bidden"; and it is only after their refusal to come that He commands His servants to go into the Highways of the Gentiles, and to bring in all that are willing, of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, in order that His Banqueting-hall may be filled.

And from this we may perceive how intense an interest we have in the First Gospel, in which, although the Lord is speaking to Jews, He is addressing them as those who are called to the Heavenly Kingdom. Hence every word which He utters concerning the Prize then set before them may be taken as directly and literally spoken to ourselves, to whom the glorious heritage which they rejected is now offered.

There is, also, another fact which we ought to bear in mind, if we would understand this Gospel. During His earth-life, the Lord could say but little of salvation by His Blood, because the Great Sacrificial Expiation had not then been accomplished. Hence the most of His teaching was concerned with the Prize of the Heavenly calling, with the spirit and conduct that must characterize those who would reign with Him above. His standard, as explained in the "Sermon

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on the Mount," is, indeed, high, and far beyond the possibilities of our unaided powers. But the circumstances made it necessary for Him to leave to His Apostles the task of proclaiming, to all men, both the expiation for sin which He was about to effect by His death, and the joyful tidings, that, after His ascension, He would send down His Holy Spirit so to change the nature of His followers that they would be enabled to do all that was required of them.

From what has just been said, it will be evident that the teaching from the Lord's Own mouth is, as might have been expected, the highest in the New Testament; for it is directed to the training of those that are destined to be the Spiritual Princes of the human race, and to follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth.

The reader will now perceive why we have thought it necessary to comment on a large portion of the Gospel of Matthew, and especially on the "Sermon on the Mount"; that is to say, because it is there that the Lord reveals His laws for all those, whether Jews or Gentiles, who would attain to the Heavenly Kingdom.

But, in the "Sermon," He also speaks of the judgment of those who, when they have put their hand to the plough, look back, or are stimulated by mixed motives, or are in any way unfaithful servants. And what we have said of the temporary chastisements after death, with which such persons are threatened, will, we fear, be distasteful to many readers. Let it,

"the Law of Christ" - Gal. 6:2 - not

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however, be remembered, that the texts quoted are no opinions of ours, but the Words of God, which, whether we like them or not, cannot be set aside, but must be fulfilled to the last iota. If, therefore, any one demurs to the literal and logical meaning which we have assigned to them, it is, at least, incumbent upon him to supply a better interpretation: otherwise, his objections can be regarded only as symptomatic of prejudice and dislike to the doctrine evolved.

But believers often treasure up a store of ideas, which they have either received from others or accumulated from their own inadequate study, and sometimes regard them as practically representing the Bible; so that, if they hear anything contrary to them, they at once denounce it as heresy. Such persons, also, are usually prone to forget, that the Word of God is a Living Word, able to turn different sides of truth to men according to their needs and circumstances; and, if it be diligently searched, to reveal, just at the moment when the changing phases of the Church or the world require them, things hitherto unnoticed. And yet there are but few enlightened believers of long standing who have not proved this fact in their own personal experience.

But, to return to the passages which are concerned with the judgment of believers, these solemn texts are usually ignored by Protestants; or, if, perchance, they should be discussed, are often wrongly applied to the unsaved. As regards the latter device for

getting rid of them, our comments will, we trust, enable an impartial reader to see, that such a means of escape is impossible; for the "Sermon on the Mount" is addressed exclusively to disciples of the Lord Jesus who are aspiring to the Kingdom; while the other texts, also, have a manifest reference to believers.

And, as to the ignoring of such Scriptures as we do not like, or cannot explain, that is a most dangerous expedient. For every revelation of God which is most repugnant to our human nature is obviously the very spiritual medicine which we are needing; if, at least, our minds are to be conformed to the mind of God—to effect which is the great object of our probation here below.

Moreover, to decline, either to believe what He has said, or to obey what He has commanded, on the ground that we cannot understand it, is to place ourselves on a level with the High and Lofty One That inhabiteth Eternity—an impious position, from which, unless we abandon it, we shall presently be cast down to the lowest Hell.

Beside which, in so doing, we destroy the bridge by which alone we can pass into His Presence, and stand among His servants that shall serve Him, and shall see His Face. For the sole remedy for the rebellious independence of man is the acquirement, by his own experience, of an absolute faith in God—a faith that will not fail him even in the darkest season of perplexity. This is, indeed, a quality far above

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guilt of past transgressions can be purged away by cleansing fires. For there is nothing that can remove the stains of sin, either in this Age or in that which is to come, save the Blood of the Lord Jesus; and "He is the propitiation for our sins."¹

+ nothing else can ever be associated with it in its cleansing efficiency

"And in none other is there salvation; for neither is there any other name under Heaven, that is given among men, wherein we must be saved."²

It is, then, impossible that the pollution of guilt should be cleansed away by any chastisements that could be allotted to the saved, either before or after death. Such means, whenever they are applied, can only avail to humble the proud spirit of man, and, by convincing him of his miserable and hopeless condition, to render him more eagerly desirous, and more fully capable, of receiving the Lord Jesus as being, on the part of God, made unto him wisdom, as well as righteousness and sanctification, and redemption.³ For it is possible to believe on Him sufficiently for deliverance from everlasting death, without going on "to know Him, and the power of

True

¹ 1 John ii. 2.

² Acts iv. 12.

³ 1 Cor. i. 30. In this verse redemption is mentioned after righteousness and sanctification, because what is here meant is not the price of redemption, which the Lord paid in full upon the cross, but the actual deliverance itself, which is to be the result of His death, and will be effected by the putting forth of His mighty power. It is the salvation ready to be revealed in the last time (1 Pet. i. 5), the hope of which is the helmet of the believer's armour (1 Thess. v. 8).

Christians

His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, by becoming conformed unto His death." And, while no real believer can fail to secure the Gift of Everlasting Life, none but the overcomer can attain to the Prize, which is the First Resurrection, membership in the Body of Christ, and a place in the Heavenly Kingdom. Some further light on this important subject may, perhaps, be obtained from a consideration of the Judgments at the close of each of the three greater Dispensations, which the reader will find discussed in this volume²—for the first time, so far as we know.

The present neglect of the subject of Judgment, and especially of that which will proceed from the Judgment-seat of Christ, is to be deplored. Indeed, it appears to be very generally supposed, that believers in the Lord Jesus, however great their irregularities may be, have nothing to dread in the future, save a possible lowering of their rank in the Heavenly Kingdom. But the teaching of the New Testament is very different; and we have endeavoured to set it forth in the following pages. For in these Laodicean times we cannot afford to lose any warnings which God has graciously vouchsafed, especially when we see around us, even among professing Christians, so many who think that whatever commends itself to their own carnal minds must, also, be pleasing in the eyes of their Almighty Creator. And so, the guilt of

¹ Phil. iii. 10.

² Pp. 116-25.

alas!
too true!

disobedience is being minimized to a vanishing point, and is quickly forgotten. For the ceaseless whirring of the now complicated machinery of human life is suffered to drown the voice of God, so that men do not hear Him saying;—

“These things hast thou done, and I kept silence;
Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such a one as thyself.
But I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes.”

Yes; all the unpardoned sins which men have done, and forgotten long ago, must again be set in order before their eyes: not one of them will be wanting in the dread hour when the Books are opened.

So far as memory serves us, there is no other point in connection with the subjects of this book which requires more elucidation than may be found in the text.

We would, however, invite special attention to the sections that explain the term “Kingdom of the Heavens,” and the relation of John the Baptist and Elijah; to the comments on the “Sermon on the Mount,” which is here regarded as the Lord’s Manual for the use of those who would fain be very near to Him in the coming Age; to the exposition of the phrase “Light of the World,” of the Lord’s Prayer, and of Paul’s thorn in the flesh; to our remarks on the Transfiguration as revealing a most important crisis in the Lord’s work for us; to the section on

the Parable of the Marriage-feast, and its Dispensational teaching; and to what is said of the Vision of the Lampstands and Stars, and its lessons for those who would cultivate Philadelphian Christianity.

In regard to the two aspects of Church-history given in the Seven Parables and the Seven Epistles, it must surely be confessed by every one who studies them, that they afford a wonderful manifestation of God's knowledge of the end from the beginning, and an unanswerable proof of the Divine origin of the Bible. Moreover, they are especially valuable, because they enable us to understand the earthly career of the Church from God's point of view, and with His connecting links; just as the Seventy-eighth Psalm furnishes us with a similar revelation concerning the mysterious history of the chosen people in the previous Age.

The prophecies concerning the Church are, however, scanty as compared with those of Israel, and contain little reference to the Kingdoms of the World. For the Lord's people of the present Age are a Heavenly and not an Earthly Election. Hence it is not their duty to watch and study the politics of this world, but to turn "unto God from idols, to serve a Living and True God, and to wait for His Son from the Heavens."

It is hoped that some fresh light may be thrown upon the Apocalypse by the scheme of interpretation here adopted, which is framed upon the first verse, with a corrected rendering, the tenth, and the nine-

teenth. Its construction is thus found to be the same as that of Daniel's more important prophecies, that is to say, it is a prophecy of the End, or of the Seventieth of Daniel's Sevens of Years, which is connected with the days of the beloved Apostle by a light sketch of the Church-period—chapp. ii., iii.—from about A.D. 96 to the close of the present parenthetical Age.

This book, like other works of the author, has been written in hope that, spite of its many defects, the Great Head of the Church may be graciously pleased to accept and use it as a slight aid to those who desire to know the wondrous revelations of His Word, but have neither time nor opportunity for prayerful study and meditation. To Him be the Glory and the Dominion for ever and ever.

“Lo, these are but the outskirts of His ways,
And how small a whisper do we hear of Him!
But the thunder of His power who can understand!”

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CHAPTER I

THE CHURCH'S PLACE IN GOD'S WORLD-PLAN

I N our previous volume we attempted to trace the origin of the Church, as revealed in Scripture, from a time anterior to the foundation of the world; and to discover the conditions, commandments, and ordinances, to which she was to be subjected during her season of probation here below. We also endeavoured to unveil some of the means and ways by which the Synagogue of Satan succeeded in corrupting and abasing the nominal Church, often to the very level of Paganism.

And now another task lies before us, and, with the help of the Spirit, we would seek to set forth what God has disclosed concerning the Dispensational change from the Age of Law to that of Grace; and to examine those prophecies which reveal the various phases through which the Church was to pass, until her testimony should be finished, and the first act of her removal to the Heavens be about to take place.

But, before we enter upon these deeply interesting themes, it will be well to remind ourselves of one great purpose which God had in view, when, before the mountains were brought forth or ever He had formed the earth and the world, He determined to call the Church into being, and to perfect her in due time.

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For to Him all the events and circumstances of history were foreknown, even from everlasting; while we can learn them only by revelation, or from the uncertain records of men.

When the rebellion of Babel, and the cry of sin ascending from the Cities of the Plain, had manifested the failure of the Noachian Covenant, the Lord of all the earth changed the manner of His action. Thenceforth He would for a while suspend His special dealings with mankind as a whole, and raise up from Abraham a seed of which He would ultimately make a great nation, a Kingdom of Priests, and by whose agency He would cause the inhabitants of earth to return to their allegiance.

Accordingly, as soon as His preparations had been completed, He brought Israel forth out of Egypt with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm, and conducted them to the Land of His choice.

But neither the multitude of His lovingkindnesses, nor the severity of His oft-repeated chastisements, could keep them faithful to Himself: they were continually turning aside after other gods, and by their idolatries causing His Name to be blasphemed among the Gentiles. In such circumstances, then, how could He acknowledge them as His Own before the world, and set them over all the peoples of the broad earth! No: they must be altogether changed, and become His loving and faithful children, before He could fulfil His promises to Abraham. And, since those promises could not be broken, He would take measures to effect the necessary change—such measures as He had already signified, through His servant Moses, in the twenty-sixth chapter of Leviticus and the twenty-eighth and four following chapters of Deuteronomy.

Transferring the sovereignty of the world for a season to the Gentiles, He would drive out the Twelve Tribes of Israel from their own good Land, and scatter them over the face of the whole earth, for a long and terrible exile. And, during its lengthened period, their Land should remain desolate and in the hands of strangers; while they themselves, instead of being at the head of the world, should be hated and trodden underfoot of the nations, and should see their life hanging in doubt before them, and should fear day and night, and have none assurance of their life. For He would make their plagues wonderful, that they might learn to fear the glorious and fearful Name of Jehovah their God.

And when, at length, this appalling discipline should have done its work, should have broken their proud spirit and bowed down their stiff neck, then He would lead them back to their own Land, and, under a new Covenant, would put His Laws, no longer upon Tables of Stone, but into their minds, and would write them upon their hearts.

There is, however, a great obstacle that must be removed before this happy consummation can be effected. For, during their first possession of the Land, nay, even on the journey from Egypt, they had been allured to idolatry, not only by their own evil hearts, but also by external intelligences belonging to the Power of the Air. What the Power is, we have endeavoured to explain elsewhere,¹ and may now be content to remind the reader, that it consists of the fallen angels and demons, organized

¹ See *The Church the Churches and the Mysteries*, pp. 354-5, note. But the whole subject is more fully discussed in *Earth's Earliest Ages*, chap. iii.

4 THE CHURCH'S PLACE IN GOD'S WORLD-PLAN

This unity under Satan's leadership is great but probably not perfect.

and working in perfect unity under the leadership of Satan.

Now, all these evil spirits are, apparently, actuated by a wild desire to exercise power over, and to receive worship from, the human race; and since the heart of Israel was prone to respond to their enticements and ever ready to apostatize from God, He, in His anger, at length "turned, and gave them up to serve the Host of Heaven."¹

We may, no doubt, understand—and, indeed, Scripture contains many indications of the fact—that these fallen angels and demons proceeded with Israel just as they did with all the idolatrous nations of antiquity. And they were wont in those days to establish communications with mortals precisely as they do now with modern Spiritualists. Then, when they had effected so much, they sometimes bribed men, by promises of good luck, to worship themselves; but more frequently terrorized them by threats, which in many cases they proved themselves quite able to carry out.

Hence, as we have learnt by discoveries in Mesopotamia during the last century, the Babylonian religion consisted, for the most part, either of deprecatory prayers, by which the gods, or spirits of the air, were intreated to ward off pain, disease, the effects of the malarious winds, and various other calamities; or of

¹ Acts vii. 42. In its literal acceptance, this expression would mean the Heavenly bodies. It was not, however, the sun, moon, or stars themselves that were adored by the Israelites and other ancient nations, but the angels, or gods, with which they connected them. Similarly Sir Henry Layard discovered that the Yezidis of Mesopotamia did not worship the sun, but the Lord of the sun, who was afterwards found to be Satan himself.

the use of spells, said to have been prescribed by those same spirits for similar purposes.

And, even to-day, if we inquire of experienced missionaries from India, China, or Africa, we shall find that the demons are still frenzied with that craving which, on one occasion, so maddened their Prince that he dared to say, even to the Lord of Glory, "All these things will I give Thee, if Thou wilt fall down and worship me;" and that they still adhere to their ancient mode of procedure and original tactics. For sometimes they promise a man good fortune, if he will recognize them as gods. Or they will enter a house and plague one or more of its inmates, or, perhaps, the whole family, with petty annoyances, disasters, and obsessions, until, at last, the victims, worn out by their persecutions, consent to put up an image, or a tablet, in their honour, and to worship and burn incense to them before it. And this reckless and horrible desire, on the part of fallen spirits, to receive the adoration which is due to the Great Creator Alone, is the obvious cause of every kind of Polytheism and Saint-worship in our world.¹

Now, in the Scriptures, we not only meet with many instances of the power of evil spirits over the Israelites prior to the Dispersion, but are also told, that demons will be exercising a baleful influence upon the Jews after their partial return to Palestine, and just before their final restoration. As soon, however, as the Messiah appears, a great and summary change will be effected.

"And it shall come to pass in That Day, saith the Lord of Hosts, that I will cut off the names

¹ See *The Church the Churches and the Mysteries*, chap. lxxvi., and especially pp. 505-7.

of the idols out of the Land, and they shall no more be remembered: and, also, I will cause the prophets and the unclean spirit to pass out of the Land."¹

The way in which this deliverance will be wrought may be best understood from another passage;—

“And it shall come to pass in That Day, that the Lord shall punish the Host of the High Ones on High, and the Kings of the Earth upon the Earth. And they shall be gathered together as prisoners are gathered in the pit, and shall be shut up in the prison, and after many days shall they be visited.”²

These two verses are taken from Isaiah's appalling description of the ruin upon earth, when “the Lord shall come with fire, and His chariots shall be like the whirlwind, to render His anger with fury, and His rebuke with flames of fire.” And it is sufficiently evident, that the “High Ones on High” can be none other than the present Prince of This World with his angels and demons; or, as Paul calls them, “the Principalities, the Powers, the Rulers of This Darkness, and the Spiritual Hosts of Wickedness in the Heavenly Places.”³

And, again, it is no less obvious, that “the Kings of the Earth upon the Earth” must be the visible and human rulers of Christendom, who still wield the power given to the Gentiles through Nebuchadnezzar.

Here, then, we have set before us the complete scheme of God for the ordering of this planet, which is carried on by means of two governmental bodies. The visible Kings of the Earth exercise dominion from

¹ Zech. xiii. 2.

² Isa. xxiv. 21, 22.

³ Eph. vi. 12.

thrones located upon earth; while, above them, the spiritual and invisible High Ones, acting from the Heaven that belongs to this earth, influence and direct them, too often suggesting, or even exciting them to, lawlessness and sin against God.

For both of these governments have been for many centuries in rebellion against Him, usually owning Him with their lips as the Great Supreme, but neither teaching His ways nor obeying His commandments. Hence one of the great purposes of the Lord's return is to depose these rebels, the spiritual and the carnal alike, and to hurl them into the vast prisons which are prepared for their reception in the centre of the earth.¹

But, although the faithless rulers, whether located in the Heavenlies or upon earth, must be removed, yet the Lord will by no means abolish the perfect scheme of government which He Himself established.

Therefore, it was necessary that other beings, loyal and obedient, whose joy it would be to carry out the will of His Father, should be chosen and made ready to take the place of the rebel High Ones and Kings, when these latter should be consigned to the fathomless depths of the Abyss. For, as God is true, both the polluted earth and the Heaven that surrounds it must yet be purified and filled with His glory.²

And herein it is that we begin to discern the unfolding of the wondrous plans, made before the foundation of the world, which are being continuously evolved as they draw nearer to their consummation, that is, to the Age of the Fulness of the Times, when all things shall be summed up in Christ.³

For during the whole of the past and of the present

¹ Isa. xxiv. 22. ² Heb. ix. 23; Isa. vi. 3. ³ Eph. i. 9, 10.

Dispensation the Lord has been occupied in the selection and training of men from one chosen nation, that of Israel, whom He is preparing to take the place of the Kings of the Earth, and to be to Him a glorious Kingdom of Priests in the Lower Sphere of the Kingdom of God.

But, in the present Dispensation, He has, also, other work. He is seeking out and gathering together into one, from among all nations and tribes and peoples and tongues, those whom He foreknows to be the Sons of God, and who have hitherto been scattered abroad. These, whom He calls His Church, or Election, He has predestinated to sit, under Himself as the Great King, upon the thrones so soon to be vacated by the present High Ones that are on High. And they will form the Kingdom of the Heavens, ruling in the Higher Sphere of the Kingdom of God.

From that time, Israel will be known as "the People of—that is, specially connected with—the Saints of the High Places,"¹ to whom the Kingdom, and the dominion, and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole Heaven, shall be given; and thus the Earthly and the Heavenly Sphere of the Kingdom of God will be indissolubly united, and the time of gladness and reward will follow. And, throughout the happy Millennial days, the air will no longer be filled with temptations and incitements to sin, alluring the Children of Abraham away from Jehovah their God; but will teem with glorious forms ever ready to help and to guard them, and ceaselessly stimulating them to love their God with all their heart, and with all their soul, and with all their mind.

¹ Dan. vii. 27.

It would thus appear, that, so far as God's grand scheme for the redemption of the world is concerned, the Church is subordinated to the interests of Israel; for she is being called into existence to do service to the Children of Abraham, who without her cannot be made perfect. And so, in her insignificant degree, she is made like unto her Lord, Who, also, was born into the world for service, that He might save His people from their sins.

It is quite true that the Church will serve the Children of Abraham - making them to fulfill their allotted place in God's great Plans; but this is surely not the prime reason for which it - the Church - has been called into being, having been predicted as the foundation of the World. - To the Church belongs a most unique & ineffable Mission, calling - even that of becoming "the FOLLOWER of Him that filleth all in all." Epl. 1:23

Create
 want I would
 be a (with term)
 P. 1. We are His
 worshippers
 created " (as members
 of Christ's body) " in
 Christ Jesus " *Yoh. 2: 10.*

CHAPTER II

THE TRANSITION FROM THE LAW AND THE PROPHETS TO CHRIST

SUCH, then, will be the ultimate position of the Church in the great world-scheme of God. We must now seek to discover when the Mosaic system began to give place to the new order of things introduced by the Lord Jesus, out of which the members of His Body, who will be His assessors in the government of the earth, are still being evolved.

For a mighty change was, indeed, effected when God brought into the world the Lamb Which He had provided for Himself, of Which Abraham prophesied, and the sacrifices of the Law were but a shadow ; when, too, the Holy Spirit, Who had left the Temple long before, was manifested in the Body of the Incarnate Son, around Whom from thenceforth the beloved of God were to gather, instead of thronging the roads that led to the Mountain of the Lord's House.

And yet, as Isaiah had predicted,¹ there would still remain, throughout the long centuries of the Church-period, " a holy seed " of Israel, who would be accepted as true worshippers of Jehovah, although they would not, during their earth-life, be able to answer the question, " What is His Son's Name, if thou knowest ? " ²

¹ Isa, vi, 13.

² Prov. xxx. 4.

And these, together with all the previously saved of "the whole House of Israel," would, in the Age-to-Come, form God's glorious Kingdom of Priests upon the earth.

Nevertheless, very many Israelites are seeing the Son and believing on Him during the present Dispensation, by doing which they renounce the earthly promises given to them through Abraham, their father in the flesh, and receive in exchange the more exalted glory and honour of the Heavenly calling.

But we must return to our inquiry, When did the Age of Law begin to give place to the Age of Grace and Truth? This is a point in regard to which we are left in no uncertainty; for the Lord Himself revealed it, when He said to the people;—

"And, from the days of John the Baptist until now, the Kingdom of the Heavens forcibly obtrudes itself, and forceful men seize upon it.

"For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John."¹

And again

"The Law and the Prophets were until John: from that time the Gospel of the Kingdom of God is preached, and every man forces his way into it."²

We shall defer a consideration of these remarkable verses until we deal with the eleventh chapter of Matthew: they are quoted now merely as declaring, on the testimony of the Lord Himself, that the Age of the Law and the Prophets ceased when John appeared; and that the preparation for the new era, in which no longer the Earthly but the Heavenly

¹ Matth. xi. 12, 13.

² Luke xvi. 16.

E.W.B. r.
many other teachers
have gone far afield
when ignoring
obvious &
logical dis-
functional
change indi-
cated by the
2nd Ministry
- they insist
that the
church period
did not
end till the
beginning of
the 3rd
Ministry.

12 this is very simple

FROM THE LAW TO CHRIST

John
is what
is essential
to the Church
is exactly
what

Kingdom should be set forth as the hope of men, immediately commenced. With John's preaching the transition-period had set in, which continued for some four years, until the descent of the Spirit, and the baptism of the disciples into one Body in Christ, gave the signal that the mighty change had been consummated.

Christ
not
in his

With these facts before us, we may readily understand why John was commanded to baptize: for baptism signifies a disappearance from, and death to, one order of things, and an emergence, or new birth, into another. And, while John's baptism specially pointed to the passing of the old system, his message—"The Kingdom of the Heavens has drawn near"—intimated the speedy advent of a new Age.

ha-
mi-
lia-
him
on
earth

Now, since the organization of the Church could not be commenced until the Lord had died, His ministry was of necessity included within the transition-period. In its earlier days, He, too, like John, preached the Gospel of the Kingdom, that is, the good news that the Kingdom had drawn near; so that the whole people might, as it were, stretch forth their hands to secure it. But, as we shall presently see, when the Jews persisted in opposing Him, and He had, consequently, signified His rejection of them, He never again spoke of the Kingdom as being near. It is thus evident, that some great change must have taken place, the nature of which may be discovered in a prophecy of Zechariah—a prophecy whose importance will justify a careful examination of its meaning.

but
as the
King

Christ
Heavens
Hence

It is contained in the Prophet's eleventh chapter, the first three verses of which present a vivid and striking picture. Lebanon is commanded to open her doors, that the fire may consume her cedars and cypresses: then

There
was no
Church
now

and had
been crucified
and on
the
cross

the oaks of Bashan are threatened with a similar fate, as are, also, the pastures adjacent to both mountains, and the luxuriant thickets on the banks of the Jordan, in which innumerable lions were wont to find a covert.

Now, since the districts of Bashan and Lebanon lie to the East and West of the Jordan respectively, they are here used to represent the land, on either side of the river, which makes up the whole of Palestine. And hence the conflagration, which burns up cedars, cypresses, oaks, pastures, and thickets, alike, portends the destruction by invading foes of all that is noble and goodly and powerful and great in the Land of Israel, and the devastation of the whole country.

It is a terrible prophecy of woe to the Promised Land: and one might have thought that it had been fulfilled in the merciless campaigns of Vespasian, Titus, and Hadrian, were it not that a reference to something far later is found at the end of the chapter, even to the times of the last Gentile Emperor, the Beast of the Apocalypse.

Hence the catastrophe here described must be a highly figurative foreshadowing of the final invasion of Palestine, just before the Lord's return, of which we may read other particulars in the three following chapters of Zechariah. And the prophet, having thus foretold the terrors of the end, afterwards proceeds to indicate the causes that would lead up to them, and also the wondrous opportunity of averting them, which God would graciously offer, but offer in vain, to His rebellious people. For He would presently send them a Mighty One, even the Royal Messiah, to be their Shepherd; and—if they would hear Him—to restore their souls and guide them in the paths of righteousness.

Now, in order to make known this loving purpose, the prophet was commanded to personate the Good Shepherd, and to represent, in a figure, what He would do and experience when He should appear. For that this is the meaning of the fourth verse may be regarded as certain for two reasons. First, the prophet was bidden to do things which neither can, nor ever will, be done by any man save the Incarnate Lord Alone. And, secondly, in the fifteenth verse, the same prophet is commanded to personate, also, the Godless and Worthless Shepherd, that is, the Antichrist.

In the person, then, of His representative, Zechariah, the Lord Jesus is bidden to feed the flock that is destined for slaughter. But what can this mean? for He had ever been the Shepherd of Israel, and, in all God's recorded dealings with the people, is the Jehovah of the Old Testament, the Person of the Blessed Trinity Who led His people like a flock by the hands of the under-shepherds, Moses and Aaron. It is evident that something special must be intended, something different from His ordinary action, and the context reveals what it is. For we have here the Father's command to the Son, to assume the body that has been prepared for Him, and, in the flesh, to do the will of His Father visibly on earth.

At that time the people would be—as, indeed, they were also when the prophecy was delivered—in a wretched condition. Their buyers are described as slaughtering them with impunity, their sellers as growing rich at their expense, and even their own shepherds as oppressing them without ruth or pity. These three terms are, of course, intended to carry on the figure of a flock. By their buyers and sellers we are, doubtless, to understand their Gentile masters ;

while the shepherds properly belonging to them are their own native rulers. These last are distinguished by Jeremiah as Priests, Rulers, and Prophets,¹ and in later times by our Lord as Elders, Chief Priests, and Scribes;² and their unscrupulous tyrannies and extortions complete the picture of the people's misery.

This fearful state of things must go on, until the advent of the Good Shepherd; and, if they should reject Him, afterwards, also, until it reached its appalling culmination foreshadowed in the first three verses. For God would no longer spare the inhabitants of the Land, but would deliver them up to destruction, by their own crimes, by civil dissensions and foreign wars, and by the hands of their Heathen over-kings. Thus the doom of terror was working out its fulfilment in all the bloody strifes and lawlessness of subsequent Jewish history, in the many persecutions and massacres by Heathen kings and their agents, and especially by Antiochus Epiphanes; and, later, in the murderous activity of the Zealots and Assassins, and in the cruelties of Vespasian Titus and Hadrian.

And yet the most fearful part of it is still in the future, awaiting the time which is pre-eminently called that of Jacob's trouble, when many of the people will have returned from the dispersion to their own Land, and will have ratified a covenant with the Worthless Shepherd.

The prophet now represents the Lord as undertaking the duty appointed for Him. He proceeds to feed the doomed flock, and, therefore, among them "the poor of the flock." By this last term we are to understand a distinct, but only a small and insignificant portion of

¹ Jer. ii. 8.

² Matth. xvi. 21.

*Tertullian
de The
Quintus
modestus
modestus*

a key to ad
outline of the
16
dealing
with
the nation
& the
"dominant"

the people, who, as we learn from the eleventh verse, would give heed to the Shepherd, and thereby prove themselves to be His Own sheep. These He would not cease to tend when, as we shall presently see, He would refuse to feed the whole flock; but would lead them out of Judaism toward a new fold which He had prepared for them.

But, in order to fulfil His mission in regard to the whole flock, He took two staves wherewith to shepherd it, and gave them names indicating the manner in which He would carry on His work. The one He called "Favour" or "Grace," the other "Bands," or, more literally, "Binders." For if the people would but have given heed to Him, He would have bestowed upon them the abundant favour of God, which, as we may infer from the tenth verse, would have been specially exhibited in defending them from foreign oppression. And He would once more have bound together in brotherly love the disunited Kingdoms of Israel and Judah; so that Ephraim should never again have envied Judah, nor Judah have vexed Ephraim. And so, the two staves of the Good Shepherd were ready to deliver them, the one from external foes, the other from internal dissension and corruption.

Thus far the interpretation of the prophecy has proved obvious and easy: but now we come to a perplexing difficulty, which has never yet been satisfactorily explained. For the Divine Shepherd affirms, that He cut off the three shepherds of the people—perhaps, the same as those mentioned in the fifth verse, where, however, their number is not given—in one month.

It is said that no less than forty interpretations of this statement have been suggested: but each of them

breaks down as soon as it is subjected to close examination. To discover individual shepherds who were thus cut off, is naturally our first effort ; but this part of the prophecy is restricted to the three and a half years of the Lord's ministry upon earth, and there are none such to be found.

The three World-powers, Babylon, Medo-Persia, and Greece, which had already fallen, have been suggested ; but they were wolves rather than shepherds, they were not cut off by the Lord in one month, nor do they seem to have had any immediate influence upon the conduct of the Jews during our Lord's ministry, which, also, was carried out under the Fourth Empire.

Since, however, we are here dealing with a figurative prophecy, it would be permissible to interpret the three shepherds as representing three classes of rulers and teachers, and we should then be reminded of the Lord's division of those who persecuted Him into Elders, or secular rulers, Chief Priests, and Scribes.¹

Or, again, the reference may be to the three great Schools of Teachers, the Pharisees the Sadducees and the Herodians, whose doctrines He strikingly described as leaven which was stealthily permeating and corrupting the whole Law of God. Very likely, then, is it that in these false teachers we may see the three shepherds of whom He spoke. And the many and severe rebukes, with which He oftentimes confounded them before all the people, might be readily accepted as an explanation of the statement "I cut off" ; for, if those words have schools of teachers for their object, they need mean no more than "I deprived of their official position," or "deposed as teachers." And, yet

¹ Matth. xvi. 21.

again, such an interpretation might be corroborated by the narrative in the twenty-second chapter of Matthew, in which we read, that the Lord finally silenced these three bodies in one day ; so that "no one was able to answer Him a word, neither durst any man from that day forth ask Him any more questions."

Nevertheless, plausible as such an exposition may seem to be at first sight, it offers no adequate solution of the difficult expression "in one month." For these words contain a clear and definite statement, which may neither be taken loosely nor explained to mean something quite different. A day is, indeed, contained within a month, but it is *not* the same as a month.

Of course, it would be easy to say, that, if we had more detailed particulars of our Lord's ministry, we might find that the silencing of the three Schools occupied precisely a month. But, even if this were so, it is not likely that God, after having given us the prophecy, would withhold from us the means of interpreting it. Hence we do not doubt that the solution of the difficulty lies hidden somewhere in the Scriptures ; and it may please the Lord presently to reveal it to whichever of His servants He has chosen for that honour.

One might have thought, that the silencing of the three shepherds would have caused the whole people to follow the Good Shepherd : but the actual result would be very different. For the vast majority of them would sympathize with the false teachers, and soon show themselves so inimical to Him Whom God had sent that His soul would begin to grow weary of them. At last, a crisis would come, and He would refuse to feed them any longer. He would plainly announce, that, however dreadful their fate, they must

face it as they could ; for He would no longer interpose on their behalf. And, as a token of His decision, He would cut asunder His staff that was called "Favour," and so break the covenant which He had made with all the nations, and by which He restrained them from evil purposes toward the Children of Abraham. On that very day it would be broken : the chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof would have departed. Henceforth the Land would lie open to the assaults of Gentile foes : now, whenever it would, the nation of fierce countenance might come from afar as with an eagle's flight, and, plunging violently upon it, fulfil the terrible prediction of Daniel, by laying waste the whole country and destroying both the City and the Sanctuary.

At this point in the prophecy, the poor of the flock are again brought before us, and we are told that they, unlike the great multitudes, would have been following, and giving heed to, the Good Shepherd. Consequently, they would, in this case, also, believe that His symbolic action revealed the truth of the Lord. And the mention of their faith and obedience in such a crisis makes it evident, that, although He would now abandon their nation, He would not cease to watch over them. And so, the people would henceforth be divided into two very unequal parts—as a whole they would be rejected ; but a few elect ones would cleave to the Lord, and these He would not forsake, but would continue to tend.

With this prediction of the separation of the vast majority of the people from the poor of the flock, and the rejection of the former, our present object in quoting the prophecy is obtained. We have found the reason of the change in the Lord's preaching :

the Chief Priests, the Rulers, the Scribes, and their adherents, had proved so hostile to Him that He would have no more to do with them. And, since without them the poor of the flock would be too few to form the governing body, He would no longer offer the Kingdom of the Heavens as an immediate possibility: its appearing must now be postponed indefinitely, until other arrangements could be made.

But, although we have little present concern with the remainder of the prophecy, we will continue our sketch of its interpretation for the sake of completeness.

The twelfth and thirteenth verses are usually interpreted as a prediction of the incidents of our Lord's betrayal; and hence many difficulties have arisen. Evidently, however, the words are not a literal prophecy of what should happen upon earth, but a revelation of what God meant by allowing it to take place, and that, so expressed that it might readily be connected with the crime of Judas.

When, therefore, Judas said to the Chief Priests, "What are ye willing to give me, and I will deliver Him unto you?"¹ that was the form in which the Lord's question, "If ye think good, give Me My hire," was put to the Jewish Rulers. They responded by weighing out thirty pieces of silver, which, by the Law of Moses, was the compensation-price to be paid to an owner by any person who had killed one of his slaves. Hence they valued the Lord's services at much less than nothing, since they were willing to give the price of a murdered slave for an opportunity of ridding themselves of Him.

¹ Matth. xxvi. 15.

Immediately an indignant voice from the Heavens bids the Prophet, in his character of the Messiah, to cast the money, that is, to cause it to be cast,¹ into the House of the Lord for the potter. And this was fulfilled by a Divinely sent remorse, which so acted upon Judas that he brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the Chief Priests, and, crying aloud, "I have sinned, in that I betrayed innocent blood," threw the accursed coins upon the floor of the Sanctuary. From thence they were picked up by the Priests, who decided to use them for the purchase of a field from the potter. Thus the will of God was carried out.

In the fifteenth verse, Zechariah is commanded to change his rôle: he is no longer to personate the Good Shepherd, but to take to himself the implements of a Wicked and Worthless Shepherd, by whom God would suffer the Land that had rejected His Beloved Son to be cursed, and whose only object would be to plunder and destroy the flock.

Thus, after the manner of Hebrew prophecies, this chapter, also, ignores the present Age, and passes directly from the times of the First Advent, when Israel was given up of God, to the Seventieth of Daniel's Sevens, when He will resume His pleadings with them. For the Wicked Shepherd can be no other than the Beast of the Apocalypse, who will be prominent in Palestine and the World during the last Seven of Years, being at first received by the Jews, and seeming to favour and protect them, but after-

¹ Since the command is addressed to the Lord Jesus, the Son of God, it is not difficult to understand, that "cast" would naturally mean, "cause to be cast;" for God is wont to execute His will by means of agents.

wards turning ruthlessly upon them to ravage and destroy.

So will the Lord's Own prediction be fulfilled ;—

“I am come in My Father's Name, and ye receive Me not : if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive.”¹

In this chapter, then, Zechariah predicted that the Lord would come to the Land which He had chosen, in order to save His people from their sins ; but that, at length, when they still persisted in rejecting Him, His soul, also, would loathe and forsake them ; and, consequently, that He would withdraw from them the favour of God, and refuse at that time to restore the brotherhood of Judah and Ephraim. And, further, that, although as a nation His Own people would prove rebellious, yet some few of them, “the poor of the flock,” would cleave to Him ; and these He would not abandon, but would continue to feed them. And, if we turn to the tenth chapter of the Fourth Gospel, we shall find a description of His ministry to them, uttered by His Own mouth.

The first of the three allegories, with which the chapter begins, is founded upon a custom of Jewish shepherds, several of whom were wont, in the evening, to lead their flocks into one great fold, at the gate of which sat a porter who remained all night with the sheep, while the shepherds were resting elsewhere.

Now, according to our Western ideas, we should expect that much difficulty and confusion would attend the efforts to distinguish and separate the mingled flocks in the morning ; such, however, was by no

¹ John v. 43.

means the case. For Eastern sheep both know, and will respond to, the voice of their own shepherd: moreover, they are accustomed to follow him, and not to be driven before him, as sheep are in the West. Hence in the morning, as each shepherd returns to the fold and is recognized and admitted by the porter, he calls out his own sheep by name, and they, promptly disentangling themselves from the throng, run to him, ready to follow whithersoever he may choose to lead them.

By means of such a picture the Lord explains the nature of His Own ministry in Palestine. He is the Good Shepherd, and, like a shepherd, enters the Mosaic fold by knocking at the firmly barred gate, that the porter may admit Him.

By His entry at the gate, while thieves and robbers climbed over the wall, we are to understand that His coming was in exact accord with all that the Scriptures had foretold concerning the Messiah. He came at the precise time which Daniel had announced:¹ He was born in Bethlehem,² as Micah had predicted,³ although that city was far from the home of His earthly parents, and a decree which affected the whole of the Roman world had to be issued to bring them to the destined spot.⁴ His messenger, John the Baptist, was sent to prepare the way before Him, in fulfilment of the words of Isaiah⁵ and Malachi.⁶ He was despised and rejected of men, as Isaiah had predicted;⁷ and yet he wielded powers described and attributed to the Millennial King by the same prophet.⁸

The porter who opened the gate was John the

¹ Dan. ix. 24-27.

² Luke ii. 1-7.

³ Micah v. 2.

⁴ Luke ii. 1, 4, 5.

⁵ Isa. xl. 3-5.

⁶ Mal. iii. 1.

⁷ Isa. liii. 2, 3.

⁸ Isa. xxxv. 3-6.

Baptist, "a man sent from God," who came to "bear witness of the Light, that all might believe through him."¹ For he it was who first proclaimed to Judah, and to all mankind, "Behold, the Lamb of God Which taketh away the sin of the world!"

Before Him the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the Herodians, had entered the fold, not by the door, but by climbing over the wall. For they had not obtained their power over the people by any Divine sanction, but only by means of their own ambitious, and often nefarious, plots and devices; while in Him all things that had been spoken by the Law and the Prophets were fulfilled.

Thus, then, He stood at the door of the Mosaic fold, and called out by their names His Own sheep—His Own in a special manner, "the poor of the flock," who were not merely Abraham's children, but also recognized Abraham's Lord when He came to them; and to whom He gave power to become children of God. As He called them, they hastened to Him, and He began to lead them out of Judaism toward another fold, into which they should enter, and be saved, and go in and go out, and find pasture.

Now, from the important passages which we have been considering, we may gather the following facts. That the Mosaic Dispensation ceased with the appearance of John the Baptist: that by his preaching, as well as by that of the Lord Himself, the Jews, who had been specially prepared thereto by the Law and the Prophets, were invited to accept the Kingdom of the Heavens: that the educated and ruling classes refused the invitation with such bitterness and hostility that, at

¹ John i. 7.

length, the soul of the Lord also loathed and rejected them, and He no longer offered them the Kingdom as a prize that might be immediately possessed: that He then turned His attention, and that of His disciples after Him, to the poor of the flock, received sinners and ate with them, and drew publicans and harlots into the train which followed Him. And thus, that His work during His earthly ministry was to call His Own sheep out from among the mingled flocks in the Mosaic fold, and to lead them, in Person, toward another fold, which, however, they did not reach until the first Pentecost after His ascension. For in such a manner did He teach them, that true human godliness is that which makes Him the First and the Last, and follows Him whithersoever He goes.

Now, since it is the First Gospel that keeps God's Dispensational plans always in view, we may reasonably expect its narration, not only to corroborate all that has been said above, but also to add many particulars respecting the gathering of those who are to be preserved unto the Heavenly Kingdom, their duty and training while here below, and their glorious destiny. We will, therefore, proceed to examine it, or, at least, those parts of it which are connected with our present inquiry.

CHAPTER III

THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW.—PART I

INTRODUCTION

IT will, then, be conceded, that the histories of the four Gospels are concerned with that transition-period which includes God's final trial and rejection of the Jew, and His preparation for the Church-age that was to follow. And, although the Evangelists do not plainly reveal the Church, they, nevertheless, describe the training of her human founders,¹ while her very name is anticipated in the Gospel of Matthew.²

This latter may be fitly styled the Gospel of the King and the Kingdom: yet grave mistakes may arise from such a definition, unless we are careful to remember, that the Kingdom has two Spheres, the Heavenly and the Earthly; and that, although the mysteries of the former are even now being enacted upon earth, it is only with the dawning of the Age-to-Come that either of them will appear.

Naturally, then, we may expect, both in the historic and in the prophetic elements of this Gospel, to find some particulars of each of the orders that are being prepared for the glories of the Kingdom. Nor can we attain to a full understanding of it, unless we are able

¹ Eph. ii. 20.

² Matth. xvi. 18, xviii. 17.

to distinguish the several passages which refer to the Jew, the Gentile, or the Church of God.

Moreover, these three peoples are so intimately connected with, and mutually dependent upon, each other, that it is not possible to comprehend the history of any one of them, unless we are also acquainted with that of both the others. For it was the rebellion of the world that brought about the election of Israel; and when Israel, also, had turned away from God, the necessity of removing the main cause of both failures, that is, the baleful influence of the Spirits of the Air, became apparent. Accordingly, the scattered Sons of God are now being gathered, one by one, into the Body of Christ, in order that, as soon as their numbers are completed, they may, under their Great Head, take the Kingdom of the High Places, and supersede the government of Satan and his angels and demons.

Obviously, then, we may expect to find notices of the Jew, the Gentile, and the Church of Christ, in the First Gospel. And, since its subject is the period of transition from the Israelitish to the present Age, we need not wonder that, while its first Chapter is of an altogether Jewish cast, it ends with the Lord's injunction to His followers, to make disciples of *all the nations*, and to baptize them into the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Now, if we remember, that the Israelites were forbidden by the very nature of the Abrahamic Covenant to seek proselytes among the Gentiles; and, moreover, that they had not been definitely instructed concerning the Ever Blessed Trinity, we may be able, in some degree at least, to estimate the vast change that had been effected during the few years of our Lord's

This expression is only for-
 tunate - tho' doubtless the author's idea is correct. "New order" was certainly not "involved" from a corrupt Judaism" but rather "superceded" it.

THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

ministry. And, as we glance through the narrative of His life in the intermediate chapters of the Gospel, we shall perceive many indications of the process which led up to that change, and of the new order of things which was being evolved from a corrupt Judaism.

The Genealogy, Names, and Virgin-birth

Turning now to the first chapter, we discern in the words, "Book of the Genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the son of Abraham," a clue to the great subject of the Gospel. It treats of the Lord Jesus as an Israelite, as the Son of David, and so as the Anointed of God and the rightful King of Israel. Hence it is that, after the mention of David, the genealogy ceases to exhibit the Lord's natural descent, and becomes a list of the legitimate heirs to the crown, showing in what manner the royal succession ultimately devolved upon Him, though He belonged, not to the line of Solomon, which became extinct, but to that of Nathan. And, doubtless, the certain fact that it did so devolve¹ decided many an honest-minded Jew to believe in His teaching, and to accept the credentials displayed in His acts of power.

His mission, as set forth by the angel, was to save His people—that is Israel—from their sins. And, although no more was said at the time, yet it was evident that complete deliverance from the sins, had it been accepted, must have been followed by deliverance from the consequences of the sins. And so, He was to be named Jesus, or Saviour.

¹ A fact which neither Pharisee Sadducee nor Herodian ever dared to deny.

Isaiah had, however, announced many centuries before, that He should be called Immanuel, which signifies God-with-us. But that Name is not mentioned to Joseph by the angel; for deliverance from our sins must precede the dwelling of God with us. Moreover, the Lord well knew, that, at His First Advent, such a Name would be refused to Him by His nation. And, indeed, they will never be willing to concede It, until He comes again. Then will the poor of the flock say;—

“Lo, This is our God: we have waited for Him, and He will save us.”¹

Then, at length, the glad exhortation will go forth;—

“Cry aloud and shout, thou inhabitant of Zion; for great is the Holy One of Israel in the midst of thee!”²

He was born of a virgin in fulfilment of the well-known prophecy of Isaiah.³ But we must not omit to observe, that, both the Hebrew original, and Matthew's quotation of it, have, “Behold, *the* virgin shall conceive;” not “*a* virgin,” as the Authorized Version reads in both passages, and the Revised in Isaiah. And the definite article is of the greatest importance, because it points backward to the first of all prophecies, and indicates the particular virgin to which God referred when He spoke of “the Seed of the woman.” For so unusual an expression hinted, that, so far as the human race was concerned, a woman only, should be instrumental in bringing the Saviour into the world; or, in other words, that He would have no human father.

¹ Isa. xxv. 9.

² Isa. xii. 6.

³ Isa. vii. 14.

The Magi. Some Messianic Prophecies

So far, then, our Lord's surroundings are exclusively Jewish: the genealogy and the words spoken by the angel, as well as the prophecies quoted from Isaiah, would, at the time at least, have seemed to refer to Israel alone.

But, in the second chapter, the horizon begins to expand, and we learn that a Gentile oppressor, and, still worse, one of Esau's hated race, was then ruling in Judaea. Moreover, the tyrant Herod was himself the subject of a great Over-King, that is, of the Emperor of the Roman World, the head of the Fourth and last of the mighty Kingdoms which were to succeed each other during the interval between the giving up of Jerusalem to the Chaldeans and the still future descent of the Lord upon the Mount of Olives.

Thus the prophecies of Daniel, also, were being manifestly fulfilled. And to him who prayerfully and intelligently meditated upon the Scriptures, how varied, how irresistible, was the evidence, presented from many quarters, that Jehovah, the Mighty God, was directing all things according to the foreordained purpose of His will!

The Gentiles, then, were at the height of their power when the Saviour was born; while, at the same time, Judah was subject to the Roman and the Edomite; and the Ten Tribes, in the far distant land of the Parthians beyond the Euphrates, were abiding, as they are to-day, "without king, and without prince, and without sacrifice, and without pillar, and without ephod or teraphim."¹

¹ Hos. iii. 4.

This of course does not mean a "masonic" order; but see Daniel 2:48.

But this state of things was not to continue for ever: One had now appeared in the world Who should, in due time, restore the Kingdom to Israel. And, even while He was lying in the manger at Bethlehem, the coming change cast its shadow before it, and Gentile Magi from the East came to search for and to worship the new-born King.

They may very possibly have calculated the time of His birth from the prophecies of Daniel, the ancient Grand Master of their Order, whose works were likely to have been preserved in their libraries. But, whether they did this or made their discovery in some other way, God helped them by causing the appearance of a star, in which they recognized the signal that the wondrous Child was born, and which led them to the place where He was.

And, as they neared the end of their journey, so far were they from wishing to conceal the object of their quest, that they cried aloud in the streets of Jerusalem;—

“Where is He that is born King of the Jews? for we saw His star in the East, and are come to worship Him.”

They had manifested a strong faith, and God is not wont to stint His grace to those who so put their trust in Him. Hence, He not only saved them from the perils of their journey and the anger of Herod, but seems, also, to have accorded them a special privilege, of which they may have known nothing in this world, but shall know hereafter. (For it is probable, that their offerings furnished the Lord's parents with means for their flight into Egypt, whereby the life of the Young Child was preserved.

But to Herod the words of the Magi were as a knell

This is merely conjecture.

of doom : he was troubled, and we do not wonder at that. It is, however, somewhat strange to find that all Jerusalem was troubled with him. Good reason, indeed, had the usurping tyrant to tremble when he heard that the rightful King had come into the world : but these Jews, these Pharisees, who had for so many years anticipated His coming, made their boast in Him, magnified themselves above all others, because He was to be their Messiah—what ailed them that they should be troubled, when, at length, He was actually within the borders of their land !

Alas ! their professions had been suddenly brought to the test, and found wanting. They had been using the Divine Name merely to bring honour to themselves, to add authority to their teaching, and to support a system which they had evolved, and which raised them to positions of influence over their people. But, feeling instinctively that the Lord of Glory would never be induced to favour their selfish aims, they were troubled at His birth ; and, when subsequently He presented Himself as their Teacher Prophet and King, they hated and rejected Him. Then, at length, His soul also loathed them, and the day of their visitation had passed by : He left them ; and they died in their sins.

Is this sad story of hypocrisy and ruin to be repeated at His Second Advent ? There are grave reasons to fear that it will be in the case of not a few professed believers. For there are many who call Him Lord, and, perhaps, even talk glibly of His coming, but do not the things which He has commanded. The Spirit of Christ Jesus is not in them : they are none of His, but are merely imitating the Pharisees by greedily seeking their own ends under cover of His Name. They may deceive themselves, as well as others, so

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long as He is absent ; but, in the awful moment of His return, their covering of lies will be torn away, and a doom worse than that of Lot's wife be their portion.

The passage from Micah,¹ cited in part to Herod by the Chief Priests and Scribes, indicated the Babe then lying in a manger at Bethlehem as the future Shepherd of Israel. And had they quoted and meditated upon its remaining clause, "Whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting," they might afterwards have conceded to Him the right to say, "Before Abraham was, I am."² But they ignored that which they did not, or would not, understand, and so deprived themselves of its all-important revelation.

The expression "My Son," in the fifteenth verse, is used of Israel in God's message to Pharaoh ;—

"Israel is My son, even My firstborn ; and I have said unto thee, Let My son go, that he may serve Me."³

And in the words, "Out of Egypt have I called My son,"⁴ Hosea, undoubtedly, referred to the bringing of the Children of Israel out of Egypt ; and, so far as himself was concerned, probably intended nothing more. Matthew, however, is not quoting what Hosea intended to say, but "*that which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet.*" And the same Spirit Who inspired Hosea to utter His words inspired Matthew, also, to interpret them, and to show that their import had now been transferred from the sinful people to the sinless Substitute and Representative. The former had, indeed, been called out of Egypt, in order that they might be set before the world as the son and the servant of

¹ Micah v. 2.

² John viii. 58.

³ Exod. iv. 22, 23.

⁴ Hos. xi. 1.

God. But they proved altogether unable to fulfil their vocation ; for Hosea continues ;—

“As they—the prophets—called them, so they—Israel—went from them : they sacrificed to the Baals, and burned incense to graven images.”¹

Thus the people had utterly failed to glorify God : therefore, He sent His Only Begotten Son, not only to expiate their sins, but also to do their duty. And hence, in one passage, Jehovah actually addresses the Lord Jesus as Israel ;—

“Thou art My Servant, O Israel, in Whom I will be glorified.”²

On this account, it was necessary that the Lord should tread the path of Israel ; and, since the nation in its infancy had gone down into Egypt, and was afterwards brought up out of the alien country, so must it be with the Lord. But, while Israel, when restored to the Land of their fathers, served other gods and became sons of Belial, the Lord Jesus diligently set Himself about His Father’s business.³

In the following verses, we see the alarmed Power of Darkness in action : the Gentile ruler is impelled to a ruthless deed by the hope of thereby destroying the Infant King. And a prophecy is quoted from Jeremiah,⁴ which, as we are distinctly told, was fulfilled by the slaughter of the babes in Bethlehem and the surrounding hamlets. One of these hamlets was Ramah,⁵

¹ Hos. xi. 2. ² Isa. xlix. 3. ³ Luke ii. 49. ⁴ Jer. xxxi. 15-17.

⁵ Evidently the Ramah intended by Matthew must have been near to Bethlehem : very possibly the spot now pointed out, about four hundred yards from Rachel’s tomb, may be its actual site. That Rachel was buried near Bethlehem, we are expressly told in Gen. xxxv. 18-20 ; and, also, in the words of Jacob ;—“And as for me, when I came from Paddan, Rachel died by me in the Land of Canaan, in

near to which the traditional site of Rachel's tomb is still shown. And, since the hamlet itself was close to the border of Judah and Benjamin, there may have been many Benjamites residing in it at the time—a circumstance which, if true, would give greater point to the prophecy.

An examination of the chapter, from which the prediction is taken, will show that the prophet is describing the restoration of "all the families of Israel," or, in other words, of the Twelve Tribes, though he dwells especially upon that of Ephraim. But, after fourteen glowing verses, his tone suddenly passes into a minor key, and he speaks of the wailing in Ramah. A few words on the repentance of Ephraim follow, and the chapter closes with glorious promises to all the Tribes, including that of the Millennial Covenant.

Now, it would seem that the episode of Ramah is introduced both as a specimen of the cleansing pains by which the chosen people must be prepared for their restoration, and to afford comfort to those mothers whom Herod's bloody but vain attempt was to bereave of their children at the time of the First Advent. For it runs, as follows;—

"Thus saith the Lord;—A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping, Rachel

the way, when there was still about a *kibrah* to come to Ephrath: and I buried her there in the way to Ephrath, the same is Bethlehem" (Gen. xlviii. 7). Unfortunately we do not know what the length of a *kibrah* was; but, since, in both passages, Jacob is said to have buried Rachel on the way to Ephrath, it is probable that there was no other town or village of importance between her grave and Bethlehem. "I cannot believe," says Thomson, "that either of the present well-known Ramahs could be meant. They were too far off, and separated from Bethlehem by other villages and intervening mountains and wadies."

weeping for her children: she refuseth to be comforted for her children, because they are not.

Thus saith the Lord;—Refrain thy voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears: for thy work shall be rewarded, saith the Lord; and they shall come again from the land of the enemy.

And there is hope for thy latter end, saith the Lord; and thy children shall come again to their own border."¹

Here, in highly figurative allusion to the fact that Rachel's tomb was at, or near, Ramah, the prophet depicts her spirit, as that of a mother in Israel, rising from the grave to weep over the slaughtered infants. But, in view of the foregoing prediction,² she is bidden to refrain from weeping; because, at the time of its fulfilment, she shall find that, after all, her travail has not been in vain: for that then her lost children shall return from the land of the enemy. And, in so poetic a passage, there is no difficulty in understanding the enemy, from whose land they shall return to be Death.³ God will ransom the murdered babes from the power of the grave, and will redeem them from Death, according to His promise.⁴

But this was not all; for the dead children are to come again *to their own border*. This exactly agrees with another prophecy, which speaks of a Premillennial resurrection of faithful Israelites, whom God shall cause to come up out of their graves, and bring into the Land of Israel.⁵

¹ Jer. xxxi. 15-17.

² Namely, that which is contained in vv. 1-14.

³ Compare 1 Cor. xv. 26. "The last enemy that shall be destroyed is Death."

⁴ Hos. xiii. 14.

⁵ Ezek. xxxvii. 11-14.

Not long after the massacre at Bethlehem, Herod the Great died ; and Joseph was commanded to return to Palestine, with the young Child and His mother. He obeyed, and seems to have journeyed toward Bethlehem, supposing, no doubt, that the Christ ought to dwell in the village of His ancestors. But, when he heard that Archelaus was reigning at Jerusalem, he was afraid to settle in that neighbourhood ; and, guided by a Divine warning, proceeded to Galilee, and made his home at Nazareth.

Thus, as Matthew tells us, the declaration of the prophets, that the Lord Jesus should be called a Nazarene, was fulfilled. Here, however, we find ourselves in some perplexity ; for no such prophecy as this is to be found. The most probable explanation is as follows ;—

Nazareth was a city of Galilee, and in that district there was a mixed population, many Gentiles having settled there. Hence the country was often called Galilee of the Gentiles, and its inhabitants were greatly despised by the pure-blooded Jews. That Nazareth had its full share of this contempt, we may see by the words of Nathanael ;—“ Can any good thing come out of Nazareth ? ”¹ And so, the very name of Nazarene seems to have conveyed the idea of one who was despised and contemned, and the words of Isaiah at once occur to us ;—

“ He was despised and rejected of men ; a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief ; and as one from whom men hide their face, He was despised, and we esteemed Him not.”²

Many similar passages might be cited from the

¹ John i. 46.

² Isa. liii. 3.

*This is interesting
perhaps some
what
far-etched*

prophets and the Psalms, and they agree with what the Lord says of Himself in the twenty-second Psalm ;—

“ But I am a worm, and no man ;

A reproach of men, and despised of the people.”¹

The Kingdom of the Heavens

The third chapter brings us to a crisis and the open preparation for a stupendous change. The old order, after a long and, apparently, fruitless course of fifteen centuries, must now give place to the new. For it has been proved over and over again, that, in present circumstances, the favoured children of Abraham are no more capable of being educated and disciplined into fealty and obedience to God than are the rest of mankind.

Hence the Age of the Law and the Prophets, which had continued until now, is to be ended ;² and the Forerunner of the Messiah is already preaching in the Wilderness of Judaea. A Kingdom is his theme : but it is not the Kingdom of the Prophets, not that which the God of Heaven will set up upon earth after the destruction of the Ten Kings : nay, it is a Kingdom that has never been revealed in the past, the Kingdom of the Heavens.

This term is, however, peculiar to Matthew ; for in the parallel passages of the other Gospels, as also in the rest of the New Testament, the phrase “ Kingdom of God ” is invariably substituted for it.

But that phrase is also found five times in the First Gospel, where it seems to be used either as a general term, the Kingdom which God will set up, or with particular reference to the part of it, which will belong

¹ ver. 6.

² Matth. xi. 12, 13.

to Israel, that is, to its Earthly Sphere. On the other hand, when Mark and Luke substitute it for Matthew's expression, "the Kingdom of the Heavens," it must, of course, be regarded as synonymous with the latter.

Bearing these facts in mind, we shall be disposed to explain the phrase "Kingdom of God" as properly denoting the Millennial Government as a whole; because, whether administered by Christ and His Church in the High Places, or by the Israelitish Kingdom of Priests upon earth, it will rule in righteousness with a single eye to the commandments and glory of God, and not be swayed by selfish motives, like the present government of Satan and the Kings of the Earth. But, since it embraces both Spheres of the Kingdom, it may sometimes, if the context so demands, be applied specially to either of them.

The appellation "Kingdom of the Heavens" must, however, be regarded as belonging exclusively to the Heavenly sphere of the Millennial Kingdom, for the following reasons.

First, because, as we have already seen, the Law and the Prophets had ceased when John the Baptist appeared, and from that time the Kingdom of the Heavens began to force its way. It is, then, clear, that the latter must be something that had not been taught by the Law and the Prophets. But the Prophets had had much to say concerning the glory of the restored Kingdom of Israel: therefore, Matthew's phrase must be interpreted of the Heavenly Kingdom, of which, nothing, or nothing that could be understood, had been revealed in Old Testament times.

Again, in the Parable of the Marriage-supper, those who were gathered from the highways that led to the uttermost parts of the earth, were brought in to the

*This is very
interesting
I never
saw it
before*

banquet which had been prepared for the originally bidden guests, that is, for the Jews. But, when the Lord commanded His disciples to preach to all nations, it was the Heavenly Kingdom which they were to set before those nations as their hope. Therefore, it must have been the Heavenly Kingdom, that was first offered to the Jews.

Lastly, it had been declared by the Prophets, that the Earthly Kingdom could not be restored until the Messiah should have been cut off, the City and the Sanctuary destroyed, and a long exile, terminated by a period of wonders and unexampled trouble, should have run its course. But none of these things had taken place when the Lord began His ministry: therefore, for this reason, also, it is certain that the Kingdom which He announced as being at the time within the reach of the Jewish people was the same Heavenly Kingdom which is now our hope.¹

For the Two Tribes were His Father's chosen people, who had been entrusted with His oracles; and, still more, were the descendants of those Israelites who had avoided the greater sin of the Ten Tribes, and had not despised and abandoned the Temple of Jehovah, and the royal line of David from which the Messiah was to spring. Moreover, among them were some few, at least, who, still loving their God and treasuring His Word in their hearts, remained a holy seed.

Since, then, the time for the restoration of the Earthly Kingdom was not yet, He would give to them, and to them exclusively, the first offer of the Heavenly; and, had the whole nation been in a condition to accept it, He might, perhaps, have changed His plans, and

¹ 2 Tim. iv. 18.

*celebrating.
It now seems of course
to me that
the Earthly
Kingdom was a
thing promised
to Israel - & to
be made good
to them in the
coming millen-
nial period;
whereas the
Heavenly King-
dom was a
thing offered
to the Jews
by the Lord Jesus
at His first
coming (the Jews
were in a condition
to accept it)*

*Christ was
first offered
to the Jews
and then to
the Gentiles*

spared them the painful and lengthened period of exile. But they spurned His love ; and, when His offers had been many times rejected, He withdrew them, and left their nation to stumble on to its doom. But it was only because they had turned away from the glorious vision that it was set before us as the Prize which we must agonize to obtain, as soon as the Unspeakable Gift of God has delivered us from our sins.

Such, then, seems to be the meaning of the term "Kingdom of the Heavens." But there is yet another point of importance connected with it, which we must not omit to notice. The Greek original of the New Testament never reads the "The Kingdom of Heaven," as both of our Versions have it, but always "the Kingdom of the Heavens." And the plural with the article evidently indicates the whole series of Heavens, in the highest of which is the Throne of God, and not merely the first of them that surrounds our earth.

Now, it is probable that the Heaven of our earth is at present, to some extent at least, cut off from the Highest Heavens, because of the rebellion of Satan. But when the Lord Jesus takes to Himself His great power and reigns in the Air, all the Heavens will be thrown open, and the Son will hold sway in union and direct communication with His Father. For, as Nathanael reminds us, He is the Son of God as well as the King of Israel.

Before we leave this subject, it will, perhaps, be well to inquire, whether any definite reason can be suggested for the use by Matthew of his peculiar phrase. Probably, we may find one in the Holy Spirit's intentions in regard to the First Gospel. For it appears to have been devised with a special view to the conversion of Jews from Judaism to Christ. Now, Jews

*Distinction
between the
Prize (Kingdom)
+ The GIFT
(Eternal Life)*

were well acquainted with the Old Testament and the purpose and promises of God as set forth therein. Since, then, the continued apostasy of their nation had, at length, rendered it necessary to defer that purpose and those promises for a full age, the Spirit of God would gradually draw off the attention of all faithful Jews from earthly prospects, and fix them upon the Heavenly hope that was now to be set before them. Had the term "Kingdom of God" been used, they might have referred it to the Earthly Kingdom, but the new phrase would point them to those Heavenly things which were shortly to be revealed.

In accordance with this gracious purpose, the very first word of John the Baptist proclaimed the failure of the Law, and, to those in whom faith should be found, the end of its dominion.

"Repent!" he cried to the whole nation, without any exception. But if the people were commanded to repent, this could only be because they were all guilty transgressors before God. The Law, therefore, could have no further dealings with them, except to pronounce their doom. For, according to its judgments, the soul that sinneth, it shall die.

But the judgment of the Law is true; for it came from God and "is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good."¹ Therefore, all those who gave heed to John were bidden, first, to confess their sins, and then, by means of baptism, to pass in a figure through the waters of death. And, by descending into the river and bowing their heads beneath its stream, they acknowledged, that death and burial was the just punishment of their transgressions. Nevertheless,

¹ Rom. vii. 12.

→ God.

The Law failed, not because it was not holy, just & good - but because the flesh with which it had to deal was so evil. In other words,

"the law was" weak through the flesh" - Rom. 7:3.

they were allowed to raise their heads again, and to pass safely out from the waters, as a sign that God had devised some way whereby He would deliver them from death.

Of this John had, doubtless, given them a hint, as we may see in the fact that both Mark and Luke speak of him as preaching "a baptism indicative of repentance *with a view to remission of sins.*" For, although the people understood it not as yet, baptism did not merely betoken death because of transgressions, but also a full satisfaction paid to the Law, and their consequent freedom from its power. Nor had they any need to dread the death that was required to effect this deliverance; for God was just about to unveil the meaning of all the substitutionary sacrifices of the Law, by giving up His Own Son to die in their stead.

The Relation of John to Elijah

We must now investigate the very important subject presented to us in the third verse, that of the ancient prophecies concerning John the Baptist. And here we have to deal with a misconception, long prevalent among Christian students, but which, apparently, originated in a Jewish error. For it has been carelessly assumed, that what was predicted of John belongs, also, to Elijah, and was intended to have a double fulfilment, first in the person of the Baptist, and afterwards in that of the other great Prophet.

The history of this strange and confusing idea seems to be as follows. The Jews, since they did not recognize what is now called the First Advent, but were looking for the speedy appearing of the Messiah in power and glory, were, of course, watching for the signs that are to herald the Second Coming. And

Good comment
on the
meaning of
Baptism

hence, in accordance with the prediction that closes the Book of Malachi, they were expecting the fulfilment of God's promise to send them Elijah the Prophet before the coming of the Great and Dreadful Day of the Lord.

And so, finding two other prophecies¹ of a messenger who—as we, at least, can understand from a comparison of the context and the New Testament—was to announce the First Advent, they confused him with Elijah, and referred the three prophecies to the latter. They ought, indeed, to have been corrected by John himself, who, while he claimed to be the one crying in the wilderness, of whom Isaiah spoke, did at the same time peremptorily deny that he was Elijah, thus clearly intimating that Isaiah's prophecy was not concerned with the Tishbite.²

Further on in this Gospel, the Lord Himself declares, that Malachi's prediction of the Nameless Messenger³ was fulfilled in John,⁴ and so indicates that it, also, had no reference to Elijah. There remains, then, but one utterance in the Old Testament which directly foretells the re-appearance of Elijah upon the earth,⁵ namely, that which is contained in the last two verses of the fourth chapter of Malachi. And these verses are never quoted in the New Testament in connection with John: nor, indeed, could they be; for they are to find their fulfilment in the times immediately preceding the Great and Dreadful Day of the Lord, that is to say, just before the Second Advent. Hence it is clear, that the prophecies respecting John are abso-

¹ Isa. xl. 3; Mal. iii. 3.

² Mal. iii. 1.

³ John i. 21.

⁴ Matth. xi. 10.

⁵ But, although he is not mentioned by name, it would seem that Elijah is one of the Olive Trees of Zech. iv., and one of the Two Witnesses of Rev. xi. Compare Zech. iv. 3 and 14, with Rev. xi. 4.

lutely distinct from the one which is concerned with Elijah : nor is there any confusion, or instance of double fulfilment, to be found in their case.

We must, however, return for a moment to our Lord's discourse in the eleventh chapter of this Gospel, which contains the mysterious words ;—

“And, if ye are willing to receive him, this is Elijah which is to come.”¹

Now, that the Lord has here no intention of pronouncing John to be the real Elijah is sufficiently evident from two considerations. First, because such a statement would be a direct contradiction of John's own testimony. For when the Priests and Levites inquired of him, “Art thou Elijah ?” he replied, “I am not.” And, secondly, because, if John were indicated as the real Elijah, no reasonable sense could be assigned to the clause, “if ye are willing to receive him ;” for his personality could not be changed by circumstances.

In this clause, however, lies the clue to the Lord's meaning. John had come, according to the words of Gabriel, “in the spirit and power of Elijah ;” and, if the Jews could have received him, he might have done the work of Elijah among them, and so have prepared the way for the appearing of the Messiah in His glory some seven years after his humiliation and death. But God had foreknown, that the condition of the Jews at the time would render it impossible for John to accomplish this work : therefore, he had already promised to send Elijah the Prophet to do so at the fitting moment, a little before the Great and Dreadful Day of the Lord. Thus by the words, “if ye are

¹ Matth. xi. 14.

willing to receive him," the whole responsibility for the long delay and painful exile of more than eighteen centuries is cast upon the Jews. God did not wish to inflict such a trial; but their hard hearts and stiff-necked disposition made it an absolute necessity.

Another of the Lord's sayings respecting John will now become easily intelligible. It was spoken, after the Baptist's death, to the three favoured disciples, as they were descending the Mount of Transfiguration in much bewilderment, and with all their visions of the future confused. For they had actually seen Elijah, of whose coming to prepare the Children of Jacob for the Messiah's Kingdom the Scribes had taught them. And, lo, the long-expected Prophet, instead of abiding with them to proclaim their Master as King, had speedily disappeared. Moreover, as if this were not enough, they had been still further perplexed by a peremptory command to tell no one what they had seen, until the Son of Man should be risen again from the dead.

In these difficulties they turned to their Lord, and inquired, "Why, then, say the Scribes that Elijah must first come?" To which He replied;—

"Elijah, indeed, cometh, and shall restore all things. But I say unto you that an¹ Elijah came² just now,³ and they knew him not, but did unto him whatsoever they listed. Even so shall the Son of Man also suffer of them. Then understood

¹ There is no article in the original. We, therefore, render "an Elijah" to express idiomatically what is evidently meant, namely, one resembling Elijah.

² "Came" is a literal translation of ἦλθε, which is the aorist tense, and not the perfect.

³ ἦδη differs from νῦν precisely as *jani* does from *nunc*. νῦν refers to the present moment; ἦδη either to the immediate past or to the immediate future.

the disciples that He spake unto them of John the Baptist." ¹

Now, these words, spoken as they were after the death of John, are an unmistakable assertion, that he had not fulfilled the prophecy concerning Elijah; for they declare, that the latter must yet appear, and accomplish the work assigned to him. Nevertheless, the temper of the Jews had just been tested. An Elijah, one preaching repentance with power, even as Elijah did in the past and will do again in the future, had been presented to them. And the result had shown, that the time for the work of the great Prophet was not yet. For they had rejected John, and were not at all perturbed when he was seized and put to death by an alien king. And before long they would be dealing in an even worse manner with the Lord Himself.

Perhaps, this is all that we could have extracted from our Lord's answer, if no other version of it had been handed down to us. But the report of Mark is slightly different, and enables us to trace more clearly the line of thought which the Master wished to set before His disciples;—

"Elijah, indeed, cometh first, and restoreth all things. And how has it been written of the Son of Man, that He should suffer many things, and be set at nought? But I say unto you that an Elijah has even come, and they did unto him whatsoever they listed, even as it has been written of Him." ²

That is to say, Elijah, indeed, was yet to come; but was that all that the disciples knew of the future? What meant those prophecies which they might find in

¹ Matth. xvii. 10-13.

² Mark ix. 12, 13.

the Scriptures, and the like of which they had recently heard from His Own lips, that the Son of Man must suffer many things; and be set at nought? Could such things happen to Him after He had taken His seat on the Throne of His Glory, to rule over a Kingdom which must break in pieces all other kingdoms, and endure for ever? Surely not. The sufferings and death, then, must precede the coming of the Kingdom, and hence the disciples were premature in their expectation of Elijah, whose appearing was still in the far future. Yet was this long delay due, not to slackness on God's side, but to the hardness of Jewish hearts. And this they might readily understand; for God had lately sent them one in the spirit and power of Elijah; and, instead of listening to his words, they had treated him just as it had been predicted that they should also deal with the Son of Man.

Thus, the mission of John the Baptist was connected with the First Advent; while that of "Elijah the Prophet" will be to bring back the hearts of the Children of Israel to their God just before the Second Advent. And, as we have now shown, neither the prophecies of the Old Testament, nor the words of our Lord in the New, confuse these two servants of God, or make the one a type of the other, or countenance the theory of a double fulfilment of any prophecy that concerns either of them. The predictions which relate to them are as distinct as are their missions and the times of their appearing.

The Baptism and Appeal of John

Now, John came baptizing, and as we may see by the fourth verse of Mark's Gospel, his baptism was a "baptism indicative of repentance with a view to

remission of sins." The means by which the sins were to be remitted were not yet disclosed, but might, nevertheless, have been discerned by a comparison of the early chapters of Leviticus with the fifty-third of Isaiah.¹ The Jews, however, do not appear to have perceived this. Like Christians of our own days, they seem to have dwelt upon those Scriptures only which they could wrest and make to speak smooth things concerning themselves; while they neglected revelations that exposed their real condition and pointed to its remedy. For they thought, that the bare fact of their connection with Abraham by birth and circumcision—a privilege corresponding to what is now called Church-standing—would suffice to ensure them a title to all the promises. And they had altogether forgotten, that the awful sentence, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die," was passed upon the Children of Abraham, no less than upon the rest of the world. Hence, they had no desire to hear of "the Lamb of God, Which taketh away the sin of the world."

At least, however, they were able to understand from John, that, if they repented and desired the remission of their sins, obedience in the matter of baptism was the first step appointed by God to that end.²

Of course, the baptism of John was altogether distinct from that which the Lord commanded after His resurrection: nor could the former be allowed in any way to take the place of the latter. This is evident, not only from their differing circumstances, but also from the case of the disciples whom Paul found at Ephesus, and who had been baptized only with John's baptism.³

¹ See ver. 10.

² For the vast importance of this obedience, see Luke vii. 29, 30.

³ Acts xix. 1-7.

For the baptism of John involved no more than a confession of sins, with a promise to believe on Him Who was coming after John. But, in that which the Lord commanded, the believer bowed his head beneath the water to acknowledge, in a figure, that God had reckoned him to have died and to have been buried in Christ ; and then he rose and came out of it, to indicate that he had received grace to know the power of his Lord's resurrection, and to walk in newness of life.

Great multitudes were continually coming to John from Jerusalem, Judaea, and the whole country adjacent to the Jordan, and numerous were the baptisms administered by himself and his disciples, who were, however, presently reinforced by the disciples of the Lord. But, when John perceived the irrepentant^d self-satisfied, and arrogant, demeanour of the Pharisees and Sadducees who had come among the people, his spirit was stirred within him, and a thrilling appeal broke forth from his lips ;—O brood of that old serpent, the Devil, who has warned you to flee from the wrath that is coming ! Know, then, that, if you would escape it, your only hope lies in a repentance so sincere that the humility, the meekness, and whatever other fruits it ought to produce in you, are evident to all men. Do not deceive yourselves : your undoubted privileges may increase your condemnation, but they cannot avert it. What is it to God that you are children of Abraham according to the flesh, if the faith and obedience of Abraham are not to be found in you ? If He be in any need of your race, He has but to speak the word, and every stone on these pebbly beaches would spring into life as a child of Abraham ! And, if you would repent, let there be no delay ; for judgment is close at hand. Already the axe is laid at the root of the trees, and

every tree that brings not forth good fruit will be speedily cut down, and cast into the fire. Do you ask me, Whence will you draw the power to carry out these brave words? I am but the messenger of Him Who will do it. I can only baptize you in water, to signify your repentance and acknowledgment before God, that your sins are worthy of death. But a Mighty One is coming after me, Whose very slave I am not fit to be, He, if you have truly repented and been baptized in water, will baptize you in the Holy Spirit and in fire. But, beware; He will come as to a threshing-floor with His fan in His hand, and will quickly separate the corn among you from the chaff. And, while He gathers the one into His garner, He will burn the other with unquenchable fire.

As given by Matthew this address is a marvel of concentrated truth and power. No wonder that the people were moved from one end of the land to the other, and perceived, that, after so long an interval, a great Prophet had, indeed, arisen among them.

But the words with which we are at present concerned are those in which John announces the end of the Israelitish Dispensation, and describes the manner of the Church-period which was about to take its place. And here, for the first time, we have Israel, God's earthly people in the past Age, contrasted with believers in the Lord Jesus of the present Dispensation. Most appropriately, the former, who will soon be settled in glory upon the earth, are represented by a tree, which strikes its roots firmly into the ground, remains in its place, and should bear fruit on the same spot from year to year. But Christian believers are like wheat, which produces fruit for one season only, and is then cut down and removed from the field which signifies the

world, in order that its grain, after separation from the chaff, may be safely stored in the Lord's garner.

The figure of the threshing-floor is very striking, but cannot, of course, be understood without some knowledge of the way in which agriculture was carried on in those days. The threshing-floor, usually circular, was raised a little above the level of the surrounding field, and made hard and smooth by admixtures of clay and much rolling or beating. When it had thus been prepared, the wheat was spread over it in a convenient manner, in order that it might be trodden out by oxen. Afterwards, the mass of grain and chaff was swept into a heap, or heaps, and the winnowing fan brought into use. This was a large fan-shaped wooden shovel, by means of which the mingled wheat and chaff was taken up and tossed into the air. When it came down, the heavier grain would fall near the spot whence it was thrown up : but the light chaff would be wafted away by the breeze, and, at a distance of a few yards, form a heap which could easily be thrust into sacks, and carried off to be burned.

So would the Lord test all those who should be brought within the circle of Gospel-influence in the Age then about to begin. By causing them to pass through this life of trial, He would throw them, as it were, against the wind. Then would come the gales of affliction or persecution, of the cares of this life, of the deceitfulness of riches, of the desire of other things than God, or it might be the air stirred directly by the wings of the Evil One. These impulses would carry off the chaff, and prove it worthless and fit only for the fire ; while the grain, though it might alas ! be somewhat impelled by the testing winds, would, nevertheless, fall safely within the circle of the floor.

Thus the axe was lying at the root of the Jewish trees : they were on the point of being cut down : their allotted time had passed by. A new Age was about to run its course, during which the Lord would thoroughly cleanse the wheat that should be brought to His threshing-floor ; that is to say, He would test and separate by the trials of this life all the souls that should be privileged to hear His Gospel-message. Those who proved faithful He would take to be with Himself, but the worthless chaff He would reserve for the unquenchable fire.

In the thirteenth verse, the Lord Himself, Who was now about thirty years of age, appears upon the scene. And the fact that He insisted on being baptized by John, in spite of the earnest protest of the latter, indicates that John was still the leading figure in what was going on ; and so, that the Lord in subsequently baptizing by the hands of His disciples was merely assisting John ; and, therefore, ceased to immerse as soon as John's ministry had ended. For His Own baptism had not yet been instituted, and, indeed, could not be, until He had risen from the dead.

The Lord's Ministry in Galilee. The Gospel of the Kingdom

As the Lord came up out of the water, He was anointed by the Holy Spirit, and was then led into the wilderness to be tempted of the Devil. After he had overcome the Tempter, He left the desert ; but, when He found that John had been cast into prison, and that the Priests the Scribes and the Pharisees were all inimical to Himself, He would not at that time tarry to press His claims at Jerusalem, but retired to Galilee

and abode at Capernaum, from whence He began His mission.

By adopting this course, He brought about the fulfilment of a prophecy and promise uttered by Isaiah. The seer had been predicting the Assyrian invasion with all its accompanying horrors—horrors which would be likely to fall with the greatest severity on the lands of Naphtali and Zebulon, known in later times as Upper and Lower Galilee. For this district included the northern boundary of Palestine to the West of the Jordan, and so was specially exposed to the raids of Syrians and Assyrians; while every invading army that would march upon Samaria or Jerusalem must needs pass through it. And so, there can be little doubt that it must have suffered severely in the Assyrian invasion which Isaiah was predicting. But the Prophet was bidden to say, that the doomed region would not always be overshadowed by the black clouds of woe, for;—

“In the former time He brought into contempt the land of Zebulon and the land of Naphtali; but, in the latter time, He hath made glorious the way of the sea, the other side of Jordan, Galilee of the nations.

The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.”¹

That is to say, the region which was so terribly

¹ Isa. ix. 1. “The way of the sea” is the tract of land to the West of Jordan and adjacent to the Sea of Galilee; while Galilee of the Gentiles, that is, the circle or district of the nations, comprehends the northern part of Naphtali which bordered upon the coasts of Tyre and Syria. The country beyond Jordan is, of course, the frontier district to the East of Jordan.

wasted and degraded by the Assyrians should, in later times, be highly favoured ; for there should the Messiah, in Whom is that life which is the light of men, begin His ministry. Among the Galilaeans should His words of power be first spoken, before they were heard in Judah and Jerusalem ; and a flood of joy should pass over the once tormented land, while its sick were being healed, all who were oppressed by the Devil delivered, and its poor were having the Gospel preached to them.

Arrived, then, in this dark region, He called some of His disciples to follow Him, and began to repeat the proclamation of John ;—

“ Repent ; for the Kingdom of the Heavens has drawn near ! ”

This announcement, which we have already explained, is now termed “ the Gospel of the Kingdom ; ” and it is essential that we should have a clear idea of the meaning of the phrase, and not identify it, as many do, with the Gospel of the Grace of God, or the Gospel of Jesus Christ. For the latter phrases indicate the glorious truth, that Christ died for sinners, and that there is now no condemnation for those who place their trust in Him. But the Gospel of the Kingdom is the joyful news, that the Lord is all but ready to begin His Millennial reign. Hence, while the Gospel of Jesus Christ can be proclaimed at any time during the present Dispensation of Grace, the same cannot be said of the Gospel of the Kingdom. That was, indeed, preached by John the Baptist, by the Lord in the first period of His ministry, by the Twelve when they were sent out to the lost sheep of the House of Israel, and by the Seventy on their similar mission. For the Kingdom, that is to say, the Heavenly Kingdom, had then come near as a possibility : it was offered exclusively to the

Jews ; and, had they been willing to accept Jesus as their Lord, they would shortly have obtained it. For, as we may fairly infer from the Parable of the Marriage-supper, if those who were originally bidden had presented themselves without delay, the guest-chamber would then have been filled, and the Supper have taken place.

But this could not be ; and, accordingly, as soon as it became evident that the Jewish nation had not profited by the instruction and discipline bestowed upon it, and was by no means prepared to follow the Lord Jesus as its Shepherd, then He ceased to preach the Gospel of the Kingdom ; and, after His death, His Apostles never once alluded to it. Indeed, the phrase is found in no subsequent passage of the New Testament, save in the fourteenth verse of the twenty-fourth chapter of Matthew. And there the reference is to the Time of the End, when the Kingdom will not merely have drawn near as a possibility, but will be on the point of actual manifestation.

Thus, from an early period in the Lord's ministry until the time immediately preceding His Second Coming, there is an absolute silence in regard to the Gospel of the Kingdom. But, in the last Seven of Years, it will be preached again, just before the Lord appears to establish His reign.

It is, then, clear, that the Gospel of the Kingdom has no direct reference to salvation by the Blood of the Lamb ; but to a subsequent result of that salvation. It is the good news, that Satan is just about to be deposed from the Principdom of This World and of the Power of the Air, and the Kingdom of This World to become the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, Who shall reign for ever and ever.

But while preaching the immediate possibility of the glorious change, the Lord did not omit to present credentials of His authority to do so ; for He healed every kind of disease and weakness among the people. His fame was spread abroad, from village to village and from city to city, throughout all Syria, and crowds began to follow Him, carrying with them those who were in any kind of evil case. And whether the afflicted ones were being destroyed by various maladies and pains or harassed by obsessing demons, whether they were lunatics or paralytics, it mattered not ; for He healed them all.

There was no limit to His power : He spoke the word, and it was done. And these wondrous miracles not only bore testimony to His Divine Personality, but were, also, a slight foretaste of the joy that He will bring with Him when He comes again. For then, on a far larger scale, if not universally ;—

“ The eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing. . . . And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come with singing unto Zion ; and everlasting joy shall be upon their heads.”¹

¹ Isa. xxxv. 5, 6, 10.

details. But, before we offer them, we must direct the reader's attention to certain internal proofs that it was addressed to men of heavenly, and not of earthly, hopes.

For the great reward which it holds out is "in the Heavens;"¹ and, indeed, is the Kingdom of the Heavens,² not the Land of Israel; while the treasure of aspirants is laid up in the same place,³ and they are warned, that there, also, their hearts should be.⁴

Evidently, then, the discourse was not meant for Jews as Jews, but only for such of that people as should be willing to give up their earthly inheritance, and to follow the Lord Jesus, through present tribulation and hard service, into the glory of the Heavens. Those, however, who were so disposed were but few; and the hope of the rest lay, not in the Heavens, but in the promise, that God would open their graves, and cause them to come up out of their graves, and bring them into the Land of Israel.⁵ For the Covenant with Abraham has never yet been fulfilled, nor, indeed, can be, until a resurrection of all Israelites who were not cut off from their people has taken place.

of inheritance

*Interest
→ very
likely
true.*

But, if the Lord was not addressing those who would prefer to remain under the Law, there were, in God's reckoning, only two other classes of men by whom His words could be heard, namely, the Gentiles and the Church of God⁶—the latter being, at the time, repre-

¹ Matth. v. 12.

⁴ Matth. vi. 21.

² Matth. v. 3, 10, 19, 20; vii. 21.

⁵ Ezek. xxxvii. 12-14.

³ Matth. vi. 19, 20.

⁶ 1 Cor. x. 32. The original text has "Greeks," and not "Gentiles." But, at that time, it was customary to divide the world's population into Greeks and Barbarians, the former term being applied to all the nations that had adopted Greek civilization, the latter to those which had not done so. Hence Paul speaks even of the Romans as Greeks (Rom. i. 14).

60
 sented by the few disciples who surrounded Him, His Own sheep, who had heard His voice, and had come to Him as He stood at the door of the Jewish fold.¹

Now, that He could not have been speaking to Gentiles is manifest; for His words did not deal with salvation, but were concerned exclusively with the Prize to be won in a battle, and in a race, whose lists no one might enter, until he had first been saved by the Blood of the Lamb.

It remains, then, that "the Sermon on the Mount" must belong to believers in the Lord Jesus; and, if we study it with earnest prayer, the Spirit of God will, through its teachings, make us perfect in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is well pleasing in His sight.²

But to many, who do not know the secret of the Spirit's power, these teachings of the Lord appear to be simply impracticable. For, moved by a perhaps unconscious desire to serve both God and Mammon, they are unwilling to admit, as a law unto themselves, precepts which aim directly at the annihilation of selfishness. And so, they strive to maintain, that such a code does not suit the existing order of things, and was not intended for it, but must be regarded as in abeyance until the Millennial Age, when it will be found to be in perfect harmony with its environment.

To this it might be quite sufficient to reply, that, unless special directions to the contrary be given, or be implied in the context, the Lord's words must always be understood to apply to those to whom they were addressed. In the case before us, we are told that He was teaching His disciples, and the same disciples

¹ John x. 3.

² Heb. xiii. 21.

were the nucleus of the assembly of those who, on the Day of Pentecost, were all baptized, in one Spirit, into one Body.¹

To the disciples, then, and to all who should afterwards believe on the Lord through their word, that is, to the whole Church, was His code of laws delivered. And, we repeat, they were not laws of salvation, but laws of discipline and training for the use of those who, having believed on Him, were willing also to suffer with Him, if by any means they might attain to the First Resurrection, and reign with Him in glory.

But we can go yet further, and show, that, not only the circumstances, but, also, the internal evidence of the "Sermon" proves it, beyond a doubt, to have been intended for believers of this Age, and for them alone. For the Lord assumed, that those to whom He was speaking would be subjected to persecution,² to smiting,³ to extortion,⁴ and to every kind of oppression; that they would have enemies who would curse them, hate them, and treat them despitely;⁵ that they would be liable to loss by thieves,⁶ and even to anxiety respecting their daily bread;⁷ and, moreover, that they would be in danger of deception by false prophets.⁸ In short, that they would be living amid all the troubles, temptations, and illusions, which must ever beset the children of God in this world, so long as Satan continues to be its Prince; but which, on the Millennial eve—at that evening-time when it shall be light—will pass away like a dream, and be known no more. To no case, then, save that of the believers of our Age; can "the Sermon on the Mount" be adapted: for it addresses

for
Salvation
is "by Grace
through Faith"

¹ 1 Cor. xii. 13. ² Matth. v. 39. ³ Matth. v. 44. ⁷ Matth. vi. 25-34.
⁴ Matth. v. 10-12. ⁵ Matth. v. 40. ⁶ Matth. vi. 19. ⁸ Matth. vii. 15.

those only who have a Heavenly calling, and all the conditions which it takes for granted will have ceased to exist at the close of the present Dispensation.

We can now understand the vast importance of this Divine utterance to ourselves. It does not, indeed, tell us of the ransom which God has found, and wherewith He will deliver us from going down into the pit : that is not its intention : for it is addressed to those who have already become disciples of the Lord Jesus. But, for all who have put their trust in Him, it is a code of laws, a summary of principles, a system of rules for conduct and self-discipline, a chart that warns them of the dangers and pitfalls on the way : in a word, it forms a complete guide for all who desire to do those things which are well pleasing to God, and to obtain the great reward, which includes the First Resurrection, incorporation in the Body of Christ, and a place in His Heavenly Kingdom.

How believers, in all their weakness, could dare to aspire to such a life as it enjoins, the disciples, when they first heard it, would, doubtless, have been unable to say. But they ought, at least, to have had confidence, that their Great Master would never issue commands, unless He knew that adequate power to carry them out was within the reach of the obedient. What He would do to aid them in this case was revealed in due time ; and, on the memorable Day of Pentecost, the Spirit of Power was sent down from the Heavens, and rested, in the form of cloven tongues as of fire, upon the head of each of them.

The Eight Benedictions

But we must now consider the discourse itself, the opening words of which are as follows ;—

man is filled with that godly sorrow which worketh repentance unto salvation.

But a genuine and protracted sorrow for sin is ever blessed with the influence and leading of the gracious Spirit, and cannot fail to render the mourner meek, lowly, and ready to bear with and forgive the sins of others, even when they have been committed against himself.

At this stage his accumulated experiences of sin, in himself and others, will have so intensified his abhorrence of it that he will be possessed by an ardent and ever-increasing desire to be absolutely sinless, and to attain to that perfect righteousness which will enable him to rejoice in the very Presence of God. If this desire really exists, God is pledged to fulfil it, though it cannot, indeed, be wholly satisfied in the present life; but the stronger it grows the nearer shall we be able, even on earth, to approach to the perfection for which we pant. Here, however, we must be careful to avoid confusion, and to remember, that we are not now speaking of the imputed righteousness of Christ, in which we must be clad if we would be saved from everlasting death; but of that intrinsic righteousness, wrought in us by the Spirit of Christ, which, when the judgment is set, will decide our position among the saved.

For the righteousness of Christ is always perfect and unchangeable, in which, if we be once clothed, we are saved for ever from the wrath of God. Nevertheless, we must all stand at the bar of Christ, where, however, the inquiry will have no reference to His imputed righteousness, but will be exclusively concerned with the diligence and faithfulness with which we have followed after that sanctification without which no man shall see the Lord.

Why don't you
short your face!

See
page
354.

Now, he who has progressed thus far will not be content with inward feelings, good as they may be in themselves, but will prayerfully strive to strengthen and develop them, so that they may become manifest in his outward conduct.

If he has known what it is to be smitten with a painful sense of his own sins, and feels that only the mercy of God and the Blood of the Lord Jesus stand between him and death, he cannot but be tenderly merciful to others. He will be eager to forgive them, as God for Christ's sake forgave him: he will rejoice to help them, even out of troubles which their own folly has brought upon them: for that is just what God did for him.

So, too, his godly sorrow, and bitter mournings for his sins, will so chasten and purify his heart, that he will become frankly truthful, and quite unable to avail himself of the shufflings, quibblings, and prevarications, which are so common in human society. His yea will be yea, and his nay, nay: he will swear to his own hurt, and change not: his perfect purity and sincerity will be manifest to all men.

And, again, the serenity and blessings which ever attend upon the meek believer—upon him who has repressed the angry retort, or proved willing to surrender his own rights, in order that he may live peaceably with all men—make him long to allure others into his own tranquil paths: so that he becomes a peacemaker.

Lastly, if there be in him a real desire for righteousness, he will not be thwarted in his pursuit of it by any persecution—even to suffering and death itself—to which he may be subjected in this world of unrighteousness.

Such are the steps toward sanctification marked out

*This seems
not to be a
very profound
or satisfactory
analysis of
the benedictions.*

by the Lord, and upon each of them He pronounces a blessing, adding the promise of an appropriate reward.

The poor in spirit is, indeed, blessed ; because, of such, and of such alone, is the Kingdom of the Heavens. By the Spirit's aid he has attained to true self-abasement ; and, therefore, shall certainly be exalted. For pure humility is the first and greatest qualification for the Kingdom ; and he who possesses it is so sure of receiving all the other needful graces in due course that he may be said to have already gained the Prize. For pride, involving as it does self-will, and practical self-deification, is the root of all evil ; so that, as Elihu tells us, the chief end of God's afflictive dealings with our race is ;—

“ That He may withdraw man from his purpose,
And hide pride from man.”¹

He that mourns for his sins shall be comforted, even in this life, by a realization of the glad truth, that “ the Blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin ; ” and, hereafter, he shall see his sins sought for and not found, and God shall wipe away all tears from his eyes.

The meek may be despised of men, and thrust out of all his possessions ; but let him take joyfully the spoiling of his goods ; for presently he shall appear in glory with Him Whom, not having seen, he loves, and shall look down upon the broad earth as one of its appointed lords.

He that hungers and thirsts after righteousness shall be filled and satisfied with it, and shall be placed for ever far beyond the reach of sin.

¹ Job xxxiii. 17.

He that shows mercy to his fellows shall obtain mercy from the Lord in That Day when all His people will so sorely need it.¹

He that is pure in heart shall be permitted to gaze with enraptured eyes upon the glorious vision of the Holy and Almighty God.

He that strives to make peace among estranged brethren shall be recognized before the universe as a son of God, the Great Peacemaker, Who reconciles the world to Himself by the death of His Son.

And he that has been persecuted here because of his righteousness shall soon exchange his bitter experience for the peace and glory of the Heavenly City, where righteousness dwells and reigns; where there is no night; "and death shall be no more; neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain, any more."

"But," it may be said, "we rarely or never see this regular process of sanctification in the spiritual lives of those around us, or experience it in our own." This is true; but the fact is far from proving that the Lord's description is mistaken: nay, it is in ourselves that the fault lies. For our neglect of watchfulness and prayer, and its sad consequences, hinder the Spirit of God, so that His work is more or less marred. And, if, through our worldliness and resistance of His power, the conviction of sin which He has wrought in us should be weakened, how great would be the disaster! For then we should not be likely to bewail our fallen condition with perfect sincerity: our meekness would be liable to be swallowed up at times by paroxysms of pride, ill temper, or resentment: our

¹ 2 Tim. i. 18.

longing for righteousness might become intermittent : we might now and then show ourselves harsh, instead of merciful : some little dissimulation might be detected in our hearts : we might find ourselves joining in a quarrel and stimulating it, instead of striving to reconcile the disputants : and, lastly, we might feel disposed to cover up our righteousness for a while, were we to see persecution moving in our direction.

And so the process of sanctification might become tedious and exceedingly painful ; whereas, otherwise, it would have been speedy, and have involved, comparatively at least, but little chastening.

Often God is compelled to deal with us as He did with Israel. For, owing to the murmurings and complainings and idolatries of the people, they did not reach Canaan to possess the Land, until thirty-eight years after they had left Sinai : and yet, as Moses remarks, the whole journey should have required no more than eleven days.¹

And, finally, the Lord does not by any means affirm, that the process of sanctification will always be carried out as He has sketched it. No : what He says is, that they are blessed in whose case it shall prove to be so.

Thus far He has spoken generally ; but now He addresses Himself specially to the disciples before Him in these memorable words ;—

11. "Blessed are ye when men shall reproach you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely, for My sake.

12. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad : for great is your reward in the Heavens : for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you."

¹ Deut. i. 2.

Here the Lord passes on to a practical application of the final test of discipleship. In effect He says, I am not teaching you mere theories, that you may preach them to others. Nay, if you would be Mine, and would, therefore, love and follow after righteousness, you must yourselves be prepared to suffer persecution in the world. For, where unrighteousness reigns, righteousness cannot expect peace: where Satan is still the Prince, they that are Christ's may not hope to remain unmolested. X

Three grades of injustice are mentioned. "Re-viling" is mere verbal abuse: "persecution" may involve acts of ill treatment: "saying all manner of evil falsely" is defamation of character. This last is doubly painful, because it brings a temporary disgrace upon our Lord, as well as upon ourselves. It finds its realization in the countless calumnies which the Devil is never weary of inventing, at once to justify and to intensify the maltreatment to which he is ever striving to expose the Children of the Kingdom. X

Such were the charges of cannibalism, uncleanness, and atheism, which were brought against believers in the earliest times. Such, too, were the many calumnies which have been ceaselessly manufactured since those days, and the unscrupulous and cruel lies which have been so frequently used for the purpose of destroying the influence of individual servants of the Lord, and of inflaming the hatred of the world against them.

The words, "for My sake," are a caution to us, to see to it that we are persecuted only because we are followers of the Lord Jesus, and not on account of our own misconduct or injudicious behaviour. They are, also, very important in that they enable us to determine to what order of men this discourse is directly X

addressed. For, during the present Age, the Jews, as a nation, could not possibly suffer for the sake of the Lord Jesus ; since they neither believe in Him now, nor will do so until He comes again in glory. Moreover, in the Millennial Age, neither Israel nor the Church will suffer persecution at all. Hence, as, indeed, we have already seen, the application of the discourse is confined to those who, having become disciples of the Lord Jesus in this present Age, are anxious, at any cost, to walk worthily of their vocation, and to live for His glory.

Such believers may well rejoice, however great their present troubles may be. For, having deliberately chosen to suffer with Christ rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season, they must also reign with Him, according to His promise ; and great shall be their reward in the Heavens.

The last words afford another proof of the restriction of the discourse, in its literal application, to Christian believers, to whom alone,¹ so far as we know, rewards will be given in the Heavens.

But those who have to endure distress and persecution for the Lord's sake should by no means think it strange concerning the fiery trial, which comes upon them to prove them, as though a strange thing were happening unto them. They are but sharing the lot of all the prophets and witnesses for God which have preceded them, and may rejoice, nay, even leap for joy, because they, also, are accounted worthy to be numbered among His specially beloved ones.

¹ That is, of those who live in the present Age ; for, in Matth. viii. 11, the Lord gives us a hint, that the Patriarchs—those who were not under the Law, at least—will attain to the Kingdom of the Heavens. See also Heb. xi. 10.

Believers as the Salt of the Earth

13. "Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out and trodden under foot of men."

Up to this point, then, by means of His eight benedictions, the Lord has taught us, that, if we would be partakers in His Heavenly Kingdom, there are four inward qualities, and four others resulting from them, for which we must pray. And now, availing Himself of two familiar illustrations, He proceeds to show, that the inward qualities will make us like the salt of the earth: while the outward will set us forth as lights in the world.

By these figures, also, the real cause of the hatred and persecuting attitude of the world toward the Children of the Kingdom is disclosed. For, after the new birth, believers are found to have become diverse from, and antagonistic to, the great masses of human society, being constrained by their changed nature to oppose and counteract the opinions and tendencies of unregenerate men. This changed nature is illustrated in its internal and external workings by the properties of salt and light—the world, in the first figure, being conceived of as a putrefying carcase, upon which believers must act as biting salt; and, in the second, as a region of night and of the shadow of death, in the midst of which they must stand, as lamps of God, dispelling the darkness around them.

Thus salt seems rather to represent the essential and inward state of the believer, his disposition and principles when cleansed and changed by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and so set in sharp opposition to that

which is of the world, and not of the Father. For even the very presence of one who has become as salt is a check upon the putrefaction around him : this truth is manifested in the irritation which his bare mode of life among them rouses in the Children of this Age. Light, on the other hand, is the outward manifestation of what the Lord has wrought within us.

Now, the salt of the natural world is a pervading and pungent essence infused into things by the Creator, to preserve them from decomposition. It is God's great antiseptic in a sphere of decay and corruption. It is inwrought in the rocks and soils of the earth, so that the waters which filter through them become more or less charged with it, and convey it, by means of the streams and rivers which they feed, into the ocean where it accumulates. And were it withdrawn from that vast reservoir, the sea would no longer be a source of freshness vigour and health, but would speedily become an abyss of death, the pestilential vapours arising from which would cover the face of the earth with unburied corpses. It is, also, essential to our own bodies, and is a necessary element of the blood which is the life.

Such is salt in the material world : what, then, is it in the Spiritual ? It is the result of the entering of God's great truth and power into the spirit of man, by which the corruption of the latter is checked, and a new and immortal life is imparted to him. And this life manifests itself in a vivid sense of the facts connected with the glorious Gospel of the Blessed God, penetrating the spirit and soul of the man, and compelling in him an abhorrence of his sinful self, an unspeakable gratitude for the love that has saved him, and an eager desire to obey in all things, and to follow

at all costs, the Lord Who ransomed him from death with His Own Blood.

Now, it is this appalling conviction of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment which none but God can avert, that brings a man down to the very dust, and makes him to be of a contrite and lowly spirit: it is this vision of the Most High God leaving His lofty habitation to rescue a worthless and hopeless sinner that impels him to mourn for his sins in bitterness, and yet in tenderness, of spirit, casting reproaches only upon himself, and saying, "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not:"¹ it is the thought of That One, Who His Own Self bare our sins in His Own Body on the tree, that shatters all the penitent's pride, leaves him meek and lowly as a little child, and causes him to hunger and thirst after righteousness, that he may no longer be reckoned among the murderers of his compassionate and loving Saviour. No wonder, then, that the Lord, after the most severe of His lessons on self-denial, should say to His disciples;—

"Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace one with another."²

For the man who is thus affected in his own being is himself become salt, and begins instinctively to exert all the powers given to him, to spend and to be spent, in order that he may, in some small degree, at least, check the corruption of all flesh which he sees going on around him.

Sometimes, however, the salt of earth loses its savour: its biting and pungent quality is gone, and it has become insipid: it has lost the very property for which it was

¹ Lam, iii. 22.

² Mark ix. 50.

created and exists, and is, therefore, absolutely worthless. For its saltness, when once lost, can never again be restored. Many things, indeed, there are, which, even if they should have lost their characteristic and most valuable quality, would still retain other virtues, and, therefore, could be applied to other, though possibly less important, purposes. But such is not the case with salt, the value of which depends solely on its antiseptic sharpness. Hence, if that has evaporated, the salt is absolutely useless: there is nothing to be done with it, save to throw it out into the highroad to be trampled under the feet of the passers-by, until it is all trodden away.

The application of this fact to the case of certain believers is very solemn. For, if a man be so affected by the Spirit as both to become salt in himself and to act as such upon others, he must have advanced very far beyond mere conversion: the power of the Spirit must be operating not only in, but also through, him. And yet the Lord here implies, that he may lose the spiritually antiseptic virtue, and become as worthless as insipid salt.

We may often see the progress of this tragedy. One, who has, perhaps, been highly gifted of the Lord, begins, almost unconsciously, to use the gifts bestowed upon him—to some extent, at least—for his own ends, to look for praise and seek honour from men; or it may be that his opportunities for indulging in the good things of this world engender in him a taste for them; so that he makes a vain and foolish attempt to serve two masters. In either of these cases, or in any other of a similar kind, the Spirit is offended, and withdraws His aiding power.

The man, however, is no less desirous of continuing

his work, and has not given up his faith in the Lord Jesus as his Saviour ; but his spiritual capabilities are gone. The thought of what the Lord has done for him can no longer keep him in whole-hearted devotion : therefore, he has no Divine Power behind him : his resources are limited to his own energy, intellectuality, and eloquence. He essays to speak as he was formerly wont to do. But the now unhindered Power of Darkness can easily reduce all his efforts to nothingness, or even to derision. His words carry no spiritual fervour or weight of conviction with them : they can no longer work a painful consciousness of sin, and a longing for pardon, in the minds of his hearers. Of course, if he happens to be eloquent and naturally influential, he may stir up in many a carnal enthusiasm, which will, probably, lead to some kind of religiousness. His system will, however, either continue to diverge further and further from Scriptural teaching ; or, otherwise, it will soon pass away, and be remembered no more.

But the most terrible point in the Lord's words is the declaration, that, if the saltiness imparted by the Spirit be once lost, it can never be restored : nor is this the only passage in which the dread truth is set forth.¹ May it impress upon us the exhortation, " Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." ² May it urge us to be watchful, prayerful, and zealous to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling,³ and to make our calling and election sure.⁴ There will always be danger, so long as we are still in the flesh : but God is able to keep us from falling, and most assuredly will do so, if we continue in prayer and supplication.

¹ See John xv. 2, 6 ; Heb. vi. 4-8.

² 1 Cor. x. 12.

³ Phil. ii. 12.

⁴ 2 Peter i. 10.

If, however, after having received much grace, we find ourselves no longer abounding in those good works which a living faith must produce, but growing more and more indifferent and careless as the days glide by ; then it is, indeed, time to consider our ways, and to humble ourselves before our God with strong crying and tears, that He may not cast us away from His Presence, nor take His Holy Spirit from us.

Let us, however, be careful to avoid confusion in the very grave subject before us, and ever to remember, that the Lord is not here addressing the unconverted, but His Own disciples, who are assumed to have believed on Him, and so to have received the gift of everlasting life from the God Whose gifts and calling are without repentance.¹ He, then, who has once received this gift can never lose it, although his enjoyment of it may be deferred until the Thousand Years have gone by. For, should he prove unable to overcome, or unfaithful in service, he could not be entrusted with the government of ten cities, or even of five,² in the Age-to-Come : he could not reign in glory with his Lord ; for none, save the " called and chosen and faithful," shall stand before Him.³

Believers as the Light of the World

14. "Ye are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid.

15. Neither do men light a lamp, and put it under the bushel, but on the stand ; and it shineth unto all that are in the house.

16. Even so let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in the Heavens."

¹ Rom. xi. 29.

² Luke xix. 17, 19.

³ Rev. xvii. 14.

But aspirants to the Kingdom must not only be as the salt of the earth, checking the corruption around them : they have also to act as the light of the world, and, by their testimony and example, to draw others after them into and along the Way of Life. The title "Light of the World" belongs properly to the Lord Alone ; but is here most graciously applied to His disciples, through whom His light is reflected upon the world.

The figure is usually supposed to be taken from the sun, as the great illuminator of the physical world. But such an explanation is inappropriate. For the present Age is the last part of what the Bible calls "the night," that is, the whole period from the fall of Adam to the second coming of the Lord : and the sun was appointed to rule the day. Not yet, then, does the Lord illumine the whole earth ; but, on the contrary, darkness covers it, and gross darkness the peoples. Before long, however, He will return, and the Kingdom of this world will become the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ : and He shall reign for ever and ever. Hence we do not wonder to find, that, in a prophecy of the glorious Age-to-Come, He is described as the Sun of Righteousness, arising over His saved people, and over all the surviving inhabitants of earth, with healing in His wings.

But now that He is still absent, it is night, and there is no sun to dispel the spiritual gloom that broods over the world. It is clear, then, that He must have had some other and less universal light in view, when He was illustrating His gracious influence in the present Age—one that could guide through the darkness of night those who were willing to follow it. And what this light was, we may learn from another of His sayings.

In the eighth chapter of John's Gospel, He is recorded to have proclaimed ;—

“ I am the Light of the World : he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.”

Now, it is evident, that we could give no adequate sense to these words, if the figure were taken from the sun ; for who could avoid the night by following that glorious luminary when he sinks beneath the horizon ? But the context tells us, that the Lord was speaking at the Feast of Tabernacles, when two great features of the wilderness-wanderings were wont to be set prominently before the eyes of the people, namely, the water that flowed from the rock, and the Pillar of Fire that led Israel by night. The first was celebrated by a daily procession, in which, amid great rejoicings, water was borne from Siloam to the Temple, and was then poured out before the Lord : the other, by huge candelabras in the Court of the Women, which were lighted in the evening, and were said to have been visible in every part of the city. It is, then, to the Pillar of Fire in the wilderness that the Lord compares Himself when He appears as the Light of the World, during the nocturnal darkness of the present Age, to lead men whither God would have them go. And so, the words, “ he that followeth Me,” are found to be exquisitely appropriate.

But the disciples, also, each in his infinitely smaller degree, must resemble the Pillar of Fire. For “ with unveiled face reflecting as a mirror the glory of the Lord,” they must be “ transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord the Spirit.”¹ “ Blameless and harmless, the children of God without

¹ 2 Cor. iii. 18

blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation," they must "shine as lights in the world, holding forth the Word of Life."¹

How fearful, then, is the responsibility that devolves upon any one of us who has received the Spirit of Christ! For we have been placed by God in the company of those upon whom the world depends for its light: to whom the means have been furnished, and the command given, to illuminate it. And it is with this responsibility upon us that "we must all be made manifest before the Judgment-seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he hath done, whether it be good or bad."²

The Lord further illustrates the position of His followers in this world by comparing them to a city set upon a hill, which, therefore, cannot be hidden. Conjectures are not wanting as to the place which He had in view when He uttered these words. But no city of earth has ever been set upon a hill for the express purpose of giving light to the surrounding neighbourhood. And yet such a one seems to be required here by the context.

Should we not, then, in our feeble efforts to trace the thoughts of the Saviour, be ever guided by that which has been revealed to us concerning His inner life? From many passages, not only in the Gospels, but also in the Psalms and Prophets, we may learn how pained in spirit He was by the contradiction of sinners, and by all the circumstances with which He was surrounded when on earth: nor is His consolation hidden from us. It was, that, in due time, He should see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied; ³ and, for the sake of this

¹ Phil. ii. 15, 16.

² 2 Cor. v. 10.

³ Isa. liii. 11.

joy that was set before Him, He even endured the cross, despising shame.¹

Thus, in His human nature, He would seem to have been strengthened by an ever-present vision of the results of His sufferings, of the many whom He should justify, of the then groaning creation freed from sin and misery, of the wilderness and the solitary place made glad for His redeemed, and the desert rejoicing and blossoming as the rose; and, above all, of His glorified Church, of the ransomed of Israel, and of the Golden City prepared by His Father, in which both the Father and the Son would dwell with those who had overcome by the Blood of the Lamb.

What, then, is more likely than that He here alludes to the Heavenly Jerusalem, as though He had said;—“Your destiny is to be citizens of a glorious City, set upon the Hill of God, that the nations may walk in the light of it. Even now, therefore, in your time of weakness, must you strive, so far as you may, to act the part which you will hereafter perform in power and glory.” Certainly such an allusion would well agree with the Apocalyptic description of the pyramidal City, which hath the foundations.

Another illustration follows, Men do not light a house-lamp with the intention of covering it with the corn-measure, but in order that it may give light to them that are in the house. And, just so, God, when He has lighted the spirit of man, which is His lamp, from His Holy Spirit, not only intends that it shall first search all the chambers of that man’s heart, but also that it shall afterwards illumine the darkness around him.

¹ Heb. xii. 2.

Let us take heed that we hinder not this gracious purpose ; for if any one of us who has the light covers it, he is restraining the mercies of God. The Lord Himself may, indeed, cover it for a while, that it may gather strength, and avoid the risk of being blown out by the first gust of temptation or trouble that passes by, even as a man shields with his hand the struggling flame of a newly lighted candle. On no account, however, may we ourselves cover it, but must let it shine with all the brilliancy which it has pleased God to give to it.

We should carefully note, that the original text has "the" and not "a" "bushel," or "corn-measure." And the definite article is very important, because it signifies that the utensil mentioned was ordinarily found in houses, and would, consequently, be the most convenient thing at hand wherewith to cover the lamp. No doubt, its special use was to measure out the corn which the women ground every morning for the day's bread.

Just so, in spiritual matters, every man has his own bushel, which Satan takes care to keep at hand, that means may never be wanting to hide, or even to extinguish, the lamp of the Lord. Sometimes it is a false shame, sometimes a churlish or morose temper, or a disposition prone to envy hatred and malice, which the Tempter is ever cunning to provoke, or a minding of earthly things, or a troublesome crotchet which is never suffered to rest, or an arrogant mien and arbitrary manner ; or, it may be, a general absence of that attractive love which ought to be the glory of every believer.

For, in this figure, the Lord is not so much concerned with doctrine—which is rather included in the figure of

salt—as with conduct and example. He is urging the duty of exhibiting the effect of the Word upon ourselves, the wonderful change which the grace of God can produce in beings naturally evil and selfish, and so of attracting others within the circle of the same Divine influence.

Here, as with the word for corn-measure, the Greek text prefixes a definite article to “lampstand.” And so, in this case as in the other, there is an intimation, that, as a matter of course, a lampstand would be found in every house, and would be placed in the best position for distributing the light.

Similarly, every man who has received into himself the light of life, and who is earnest in prayer and supplication that he may be permitted to serve the Lord by means of it, will find that God has provided a station for him, in which he may let his light shine to the greatest advantage: those whom he is to illumine will be guided into his sphere of influence; and, unless he fails to obey the impulses of the Spirit, he will do that which is assigned to him, and afterwards enter into the joy of his Lord.

Like, then, to the city set upon a hill, or to the lamp placed upon its stand, so must we let our light shine before men. For to let it shine is all that we can do: we can by no means produce it: that is the work of God Alone. But, when He has once kindled it within us, it is our duty to give diligence that it may meet with no check or hindrance on our part. Moreover, we must so present it that those who are attracted by it may glorify, not ourselves, but Him Who kindled and sustains it, and Who Alone is worthy to receive all honour and blessing.

penalty of being cut off from his people. Again, the Earthly Sphere of the Kingdom which He preached had been gloriously foretold by the Prophets, whom He had just pronounced to be blessed. Moreover, He presently recognizes the Temple, and the altar with the gift laid upon it, as belonging to God, sends the cleansed leper to report himself to the Priest, and so on.

It was not, then, with any purpose of setting aside either the ceremonial or the moral Law that He came, but to magnify and to fulfil them. For, if the ceremonial Law be examined, it will be found to consist of symbols figures and types of Himself and His work, of which He proved Himself to be the great Antitype by fulfilling them in His Own Person. And so, it was only after their purpose had been effected that the rites and ceremonies ordained by Moses passed out of use ; for who would care to turn again to the shadow when He That cast it stood before him in bodily Presence ? But, as soon as the ceremonial Law was no longer needed, God was careful to signify the fact in a very striking manner. For, at the moment when the Great Sacrifice, Which has perfected for ever them that are being sanctified, was consummated, He rent in twain, from the top to the bottom, the veil that concealed the Holy of Holies ; and so indicated, that all men might now draw near to Himself, through the Blood of the Lord Jesus.

The moral Law, on the contrary, remains valid. And by means of it, with the aid of the wondrous comments which we shall soon have to consider, we, too, may learn what things are well pleasing in the sight of God. Moreover, Israel must yet return to it, and in order to help them to do so, the Lord will send them Elijah the Prophet, before the coming of His great

produce in Scripture is Christ's obedience during His earthly life, said to be reckoned to the believer - His act of obedience in dying on the cross, constitutes us righteous - i. e.

NOT TO DESTROY, BUT TO FULFIL THE LAW 85

justification us.

and terrible Day. For "the Law is holy, and the commandment holy, and righteous, and good."¹

But "the Law is spiritual,"² as the Lord presently shows us by His exposition of it; whereas, we are carnal, in that we have been sold under sin. Hence it is not possible for us to keep the Law; and, therefore, the Lord as our Substitute kept it for us, satisfying all its requirements. And, if we have believed on, and have been joined to, Him, His perfect obedience is reckoned also to us.

Thus He honoured the Law, and by no means set it aside. And, to emphasize this fact, He now makes use of a striking and common saying, which in the mouths of men is extravagantly hyperbolic, but is literally true in the case to which He applies it. For the Law was ordained for the present Heaven and earth; therefore, not the smallest item of it can be relaxed while they remain. But, when the Great White Throne is set for the final Judgment, the Heaven and the earth will flee away from the face of Him That will sit upon it, and no place will be found for them. Then the Law, also, will disappear together with the order of things for which it was appointed; for then its work and its prophesyings will have been completely fulfilled.

By "one jot or one tittle," the Lord means the very smallest portion. For, in the written Hebrew Law, the jot, or *yod*, was the smallest letter; while the tittle, or horn, was the smallest part of any letter, though, in some cases, it was the only mark by which one letter could be distinguished from another.

In its perfect entirety, then, must the Law be fulfilled: and, if a man breaks any commandment on the ground

Not scriptural
No (Pauline be-
liever) are not
under Law. The
Law was given
until the full
of should come to
whom the promise
was made. Christ's
obedience is not
reckoned to the
believer. It
procured for
him a righteous
nature. (Rom.
5: 19).

you must

Note by
P. M.

¹ Rom. vii. 12.

² Rom. vii. 14.

that it is one of the least, and teaches others to follow his example, that man shall be called least in the Kingdom of the Heavens. That is, he will be placed in the very lowest rank by a decree from the Judgment-seat of Christ.

In speaking of any commandment as least, the Lord is alluding to the folly of the Pharisees, who wasted time in dividing the Mosaic precepts into greatest and least, comparing the so-called least with the letters *yod* and *vau*, the smallest in the Hebrew alphabet. And folly, indeed, it was : for they should have known that all the commandments of God are equally valid and important, simply because they are His ; and, moreover, that they are all dependent one upon another, so that he who breaks one of them breaks all. These truths they ought to have learnt from the very borders of their own garments, which they were so careful to enlarge ; for they must have been aware of the origin and meaning of that part of their dress, as narrated in the Book of Numbers.¹ There they would have read of the man who had gathered sticks on the Sabbath Day—probably, because he regarded the Fourth Commandment as one of the least—and had been stoned by all the people, at the Lord's command. And they must have noticed, that, immediately after this sad event, the Israelites were directed to wear a fringe, or tassel, upon the border of their garments, the many threads of which were to be attached to a ribbon, or cord, of deep blue. Upon this the wearers were to look, and so to remember all the commandments of their God, and to do them. The meaning of the symbol is, perhaps, as follows. The many threads of equal length bound together in the fringe seem to have represented the several precepts of the

¹ Num. xv. 32-41 ; Matth. xxiii, 5.

Law, pointing to their close connection with each other, and to the fact, that, in one sense, they were all of equal importance; because, as the ribbon of blue to which they were attached indicated, they had all proceeded from the same Heavenly source, being the commandments of the Lord God of Israel.

In this case, then, as in many others, the Pharisees, while superstitiously preserving an outward sign, and even enlarging the borders of their garments to emphasize it, were either wholly ignorant of, or utterly indifferent to, its inward and spiritual meaning.

From all this it follows, that he only is a great teacher, and will be recognized as such in the Kingdom of the Heavens, who, seeing the seal of God upon every sentence of His Word, deems no precept trivial, no revelation obsolete; but extracts wholesome instruction for the Children of Light from every portion of the Sacred Writings.

Your righteousness, then, continues the Lord, must be very different from that of the Scribes and Pharisees. You must not think any sin, either of omission or commission, to be of little moment; but must aim at absolute obedience. And, although you cannot altogether attain to it in the present life, you must, at least, be content with nothing less. You must mourn over every failure, however unimportant it may seem to be, as a violation of the Law of God in its entirety. Nor must you confine your attention to the letter and surface meaning of a precept; but must search into its inmost spirit. Nay, you must descend into the depths of your own being, and there trace out the earliest cause of that symptom which the Law condemns, in order that obedience may begin in your thoughts, and so pass on naturally to your words and deeds.

But these Scribes and Pharisees—and how many resemble them in our day!—these dividers of the Law, these teachers of the letter without the spirit, these zealots of bare outward forms and rejecters of the love and grace which those forms were intended to represent, thought that their righteousness far excelled that of all other men, and scornfully said, “This multitude, which knoweth not the Law, are accursed.”¹ How piercing, then, was the irony conveyed in the Lord’s words, which were in effect;—Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees as much as they imagine that their righteousness does that of other men, there will be no need to discuss the question of least and greatest; for you will never be able even to enter into the Kingdom of the Heavens.

The Corruption of the Law

After this terrible condemnation, the Lord proceeds to show how miserably the Scribes and Pharisees had corrupted the Law, through their lack of spiritual insight, and the consequent additions restrictions and alterations by which they strove to drag the commandments of the Living God down to the low level of human codes. And—unfortunately for the nation—their opportunities of so doing were ample.

For, when the Jews returned from the Babylonian captivity, the common people had altogether forgotten their own language, and were no longer able to read the Hebrew Scriptures. Clearly, then, it was the duty of the learned to provide them with a plain and simple translation into Chaldee or Aramaic. But the proud

¹ John vii. 49.

If include the proceedings of the so-called priests, who reserve the Sacred Volume for their own expositions, read out to the common people only in parts, by slavish or traditions.

THE CORRUPTION OF THE LAW

and selfish Rabbis sought the glory of their own Order, not that of God, and the good of the people; and so preferred to keep the Sacred Writings in their own hands and power. Hence, instead of preparing a translation which could be used by the many, they were wont, in the synagogues, to read off a loose rendering of the text, alleged to be simpler than the original, and interspersed with their own explanatory remarks.

The Sixth Commandment

And so, the Lord correctly says ;—

21. "Ye heard that it was said to them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment."

For He was speaking to His disciples and the multitude, few, if any, of whom were able to read the Hebrew Scriptures. And, consequently, they could have become acquainted with them only through such translations and expositions as their teachers in the synagogues might have chosen to give them. In these circumstances, they had heard the Law, but had not read it; and, without doubt, had often failed to distinguish between what was delivered as the text and the traditions and expository remarks of the Rabbis. And it is easy to conceive how numerous must have been the errors which resulted from the working of such a system.

It must, however, be admitted, that we ourselves, in this twentieth century, are suffering in a somewhat similar manner. For many traditional and ecclesiastical interpretations, which cannot be maintained, and may often be traced to very unsatisfactory sources, are current among us as Bible doctrine. How careful,

then, should we be to prove all things, and hold fast only that which is good. For, should we fail to do so, we cannot plead the excuse which might fairly have been offered by many of the Jewish people: the Word of God, rendered into our own language, is in our hands, and we have all been taught to read; so that we can search it for ourselves. How great then are our responsibilities!

Of the errors propagated in the synagogues, we have a specimen in the verse before us; for, in this case, the Lord does not quote the pure Word of God, but cites the commandment as the Scribes and Pharisees taught it. "Thou shalt not kill," was, indeed, the Law of God, capable of expansion into the widest spiritual meaning, as those to whom it was addressed advanced in knowledge and experience. For it by no means dealt with murder as a case for the judicial courts of men—that aspect of the crime is explained elsewhere¹—but simply regarded it as a sin against the Almighty Creator. And, as men became more spiritually minded, they would learn to reason from such a law;—"If He Who desires truth in the inward parts condemns murder, it is evident that we must also abstain from all that might lead us on to that culmination of wickedness." And so, they would soon discover, that "Thou shalt not kill," really means, "Thou shalt not hate."

But the Scribes and Pharisees cut short this process, and did away with all possibility of arriving at the true intention of the commandment, by confusing it with another, of an altogether different character, which was concerned with the bare act of murder as an outward crime for the consideration of the judicial courts of

¹ See Exod. xxi. 12, 14; Num. xxxv. 17-21; Deut. xix. 11-13.

"He that hateth his
brother is a
91 Murderer."

earth. "And whosoever shall kill," was their gloss, "shall be in danger of the Judgment."

Thus they circumscribed the scope of the commandment; and, by connecting it with earthly courts, both suggested to their hearers, that only outward acts are sinful, and, also, removed the very wholesome terrors of the Judgment-to-Come. For then God Himself will lay bare, not only the actual deeds of men, but even their inmost thoughts, and account the murderer in desire and intention equally guilty with the actual slayer of his fellow. For the sin of him who would commit murder is in no wise diminished because God has chosen to frustrate his purpose, by depriving him either of his courage or of his opportunity.

The Lord, then, by the expression, "Ye heard," does not imply knowledge of the pure Word of God, but only of the confused and powerless teachings of the Scribes and Pharisees, which passed for it. For, as we have already learnt, the Law had been corrupted by tradition, and was handed down to posterity by a succession of evil guardians, who had continued to adulterate it more and more with their glosses and explanations.

And now the Lord, with His royally authoritative "I say unto you," sweeps away the accumulated rubbish, and once more sets before the world the Law of the Most High in all its awful beauty and power.

22. "But I say unto you, that every one who is angry with his brother¹ shall be in danger of the Judgment; and whosoever shall say to his brother, Thou fool, shall be in danger of the

Perhaps
→ was
equally
guilty
in all
cases
Substantive
guilty.

¹ Here some MSS. insert the word *εκρη*, "without a cause," which is, however, probably spurious.

Council, and whosoever shall say, Thou rebel (against God) shall be in danger of the Hell of fire."

In these words we have mention of three degrees of hatred, any of which will, on the Lord's Word, render a man liable to punishment as a violator of the Sixth Commandment. First comes the concealed resentment: then the milder term of insult: lastly, the stronger word of bitterest feeling, when the tongue "is set on fire by Hell." Further than this the Lord does not go: for even the Pharisees would have admitted the justice of punishment for assault and violence.

The first word of insult, *Raca*,¹ signifies an empty, vain, or worthless fellow—the English "fool" in its ordinary sense—and is commonly used by Jewish writers as a term of contemptuous scorn.

The second, generally assumed to be Greek, might also, in that case, be correctly rendered by our word "fool," provided that we understood it in the peculiar Scriptural sense of "godless" or "reprobate one;" for this the context seems to demand. But it is better to regard it as a Hebrew word, fixed in the Jewish mind because of its connection with a very memorable incident, and so retained by the people even when their language had become Aramaic. It will thus be identical with *moreh* "a rebel," the very word used by Moses when he spoke unadvisedly with his lips, and said; "Hear, now, ye rebels: must we fetch you water out of this rock?" And, for so haughty a speech, the Lawgiver was doomed to die in the wilderness.²

Hence we may, perhaps, obtain a clue to the intensity of the sin of calling another man, "Rebel!" that

¹ An Aramaic word.

² Num. xx, 10-13.

Not only for this speech but for striking the Rock twice.

THE SIXTH COMMANDMENT

is, "Rebel against God!" For he who does so assumes, that, because he can bear no longer with his fellow, the patience, also, of God is exhausted; thinks, that the will of the Most High must needs follow the leadings of his petty spite; and arrogates to himself the right of acting as God by adjudging his adversary to perdition.

Again, with regard to the penalties—in ordinary language, "the Judgment" and "the Council" were names given to the local Jewish Courts, which had cognizance of minor offences, and to the Supreme Court, or Sanhedrim, at Jerusalem, respectively; while the Hell of Fire—literally, the Fiery Valley of Hinnom—indicated a prerogative of the Sanhedrim, by which they were able to order, that the body of an executed criminal should be conveyed to the Valley of Hinnom, and there be cast, amid the sewage of the city and every kind of offal and corruption, into one of the numerous fires which were kept ceaselessly burning for the purpose of consuming the filth.

Such, then, were the meanings of these three terms among the Jews. It is, however, impossible, that, in this solemn passage, the Lord could be alluding to the Judicial Courts of Israel upon earth, none of which, moreover, would be competent to deal with a case of concealed resentment. But it must be remembered, that these Courts were established by Divine command:¹ hence the Lord may be speaking of the celestial patterns of which they were copies—just as the Tabernacle was framed and furnished after Heavenly models. And, indeed, we have no difficulty in finding Scriptural indications of the action both of local Angelic Courts²

¹ See Deut. xvi. 18, and xvii. 8-11.

² See, for instance, Dan. iv. 12-17; Acts xii. 23. Compare, also, Exod. xxiii. 20, 21.

*This is, in
perhaps all
93 Countries,
the chief
expression
of hatred.*

and of Supreme Councils,¹ summoned to decide the more important concerns of the present world, and presided over by Him Who is not only able to kill the body, but can, also, cast both body and soul into Hell.²

If this be so, what the Lord would here impress upon us is, that all our words and actions, and even our very thoughts, are under the ceaseless inspection of angels—appropriately called “watchers” in the Book of Daniel³—who chastise or punish, according to fixed laws of God, even as they did in the cases of Nebuchadnezzar and Herod. And that any matter which falls without the limits of their commission, passes on to the great Court before the Throne, by which decrees are issued similar to those recorded in the histories of Job and Ahab, and which may also pronounce a doom to be consummated beyond the grave. But this interesting and most solemn subject has been fully discussed in our previous work, *The Church the Churches and the Mysteries*,⁴ to which we must refer the reader who wishes to investigate it.

23 and 24. “If, therefore, thou art offering thy gift at the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way, first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.”

Seeing, then, that even a secret feeling of anger—and much more a contemptuous or maledictory reproach—constitutes in God’s sight a breach of the Sixth Com-

¹ Job. i. 6-12, ii. 1-6; 1 Kings xxii. 19-23.

² Matth. x. 28.

³ Dan. iv. 13, 17.

⁴ In the section entitled, “Because of the Angels, or the Judicial Courts of Heaven,” pp. 359-90.

mandment, and that He will not accept one guilty of such a crime as a worshipper, we must, without delay, remove every root of bitterness that might spring up and produce so deadly a fruit. Should a man be at the very railing which separates the Court of the People from that of the Brazen Altar, and have actually given his offering into the hands of the Priest, yet, even then, if he should remember that another has a cause of complaint against him, he must at once leave his gift before the Altar, hasten to seek the offended brother, and, at any cost to his own pride or interests, effect a reconciliation. But, when peace and love have been thus restored, he must not forget to return and offer his gift. For, although God will accept no worship from us, unless, so far as in us lies, we be on loving terms with His creature man, yet it must not for a moment be imagined that the performance of our duty to man can free us from the obligation of direct service to God.

But, alas! if He, unto Whose eyes all things are naked and open, searches thus minutely into the hearts and circumstances of His suppliants, how vast must be the number of petitions that every day are presented in vain, because those who offer them have not used every effort to be at peace with their fellows!

Primarily, the gift is, of course, one of the offerings prescribed by Moses. For the Lord Jesus had not yet said, "It is finished!" therefore, the ceremonial Law was still in force, and the servants of God subject to it; for which reason the Lord was compelled to convey His lesson through one of its ordinances.

We have, however, no difficulty in transferring what He said to ourselves. For us, the gift is that reality of which all the offerings of the Law were but a shadow.

Scripture does not say
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The belief is
that we are to
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God through
the sacrifice of
Christ.

It is our privilege to present before God the once offered Sacrifice of Christ in our stead, whether we be pleading for the expiation of sin, or intreating pardon for failures in whole-hearted devotion to God or in duty to our fellow men. Useless, then, is it to supplicate the mercy of God, for the sake of the love and yielded life of Christ, unless we have first exhausted every effort to reconcile to ourselves an estranged brother.

Hence every one who has been a cause of offence to another, whether intentionally or accidentally, should bethink him, whenever he bends his knees for prayer, that he is about to draw near to the common Father of the offended brother and himself, Who would fain love both of them, but can receive neither, if he be casting a stumbling-block in the way of the other.

We must carefully observe, that the Lord supposes the case of a brother who has something against us, not one in which we ourselves have suffered wrongfully. For it is not enough to forgive others their trespasses against us: we must also strive to make peace with one who either has, or thinks that he has, received an injury from us. Moreover, if we leave a sense of wrong or unkindness to rankle in his breast, we know not of what angry or malicious feelings we may become the cause, or how great may be the resulting sin, in the guilt of which we must assuredly participate.

The Punishment of Disobedient Believers

25. " Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art with him in the way; lest haply the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison.

26. Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no

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Sent with God
to glorify
himself that
"we are to be
reconciled to
God through
the sacrifice of
Christ."
On
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your met's,

means come out thence till thou have paid the last farthing."

The other version of these words, found in the Third Gospel,¹ is surrounded by an altogether different context, which claims for it a more general application. There the debtor, or defendant, stands for any sinful man, the road which he treads represents the course of his life, and his Adversary is the violated Law of God haling him to the Judge, the threshold of whose Court is death. The two verses thus contain a parable of human life, by means of which the Lord reveals its secrets and its meaning. But of that passage we have endeavoured to give a detailed exposition in *The Church the Churches and the Mysteries*.²

Here, however, while the exposition must be conducted upon the same lines, the scope of the illustration is confined by the context to the particular case set before us in the previous verse, which is now pressed still further, even to its final consequences at the Judgment-seat of Christ. And so, the offended brother becomes an adversary, that is, as the Greek word³ discloses, a legal adversary, a complainant, plaintiff, or prosecutor.

What follows is, apparently, taken from the usual mode of procedure in Roman Law, which was, of course, supreme in Palestine in the days of our Lord. According to its provisions, a creditor might, at any time, summon his debtor to accompany him to the Magistrate's Court. While they were on their way thither, they were at liberty to come to an amicable agreement, if they could, and so to settle the business between themselves without the interference of the Law. But, as soon as

¹ Luke xii. 58-9.

² pp. 378-81.

³ ὁ ἀντὶδικός.

Believers' persons will not be judged, but their works will be severely scrutinized & passed upon at the Judgment Seat of Christ. This Judgment

they had appeared before the Judge, the matter passed ^{is con-} out of their hands, and thenceforth both of them were ^{netted} subject to the decision of the Court.

If, then, we take the way, or road, to the Court, ^{not with} to signify the lifetime of those who walk on it, the ^{endless} adversary to be the brother who believes that he has ^{Life"} been wronged, and the Court to represent the Judgment ^{but with} to which (we must all be subjected after death,¹) the ^{the} Lord's lesson may be readily understood. During the ^{Prize.} present life, we are permitted to settle disputes amicably between ourselves, and to make reparation to, and obtain pardon of, any person whom we have offended or wronged. And, should we succeed in effecting a reconciliation, the matter will have passed away for ever, and will not be cognizable by the Lord on His Judgment-seat.

Now, that we ought to act as the Lord directs when we know that we have wronged another, would be admitted by all men. But He insists, that we must do just the same even in a case in which, although a brother thinks that we have injured him, we believe ourselves to be altogether innocent of the charge. And two reasons, at least, for this warning are obvious. For, if we be worshippers of the God Who is Love, we must surely strive to preserve His great characteristic among those who believe on Him, and gladly sacrifice our own pride, or dignity, or any other thing that we hold dear, if we may but accomplish so sweet an end. Moreover, we do not always see our own faults, and so may really have offended against the brother, though we be not aware of it. And, should this prove to be the case, he

¹ "It is appointed unto men once to die, and after this cometh judgment."—Heb. ix. 27.

would win his cause before the Lord, and so would deliver us up to the terrors of the Judge the Officer and the Prison.

If, therefore, one who believes that we have injured him walks by our side in the path of life, we must make our peace with him, or, at least, use our best endeavours to do so, as speedily as possible, lest the opportunity should be taken away for ever by the sudden removal of one or both of us to another world. Then it would be too late to arrange the matter among ourselves ; and we should have to answer before the Lord for the sin which we have caused in another, as well as for that which we have committed in our own person. Should we, however, be found to have already judged ourselves in the true spirit of love, we should not need to be judged of the Lord.

But let such of us as long to be called children of the God of love turn our thoughts, for a moment, to another case of this kind, that in which we ourselves have a just cause of complaint against a brother. In such circumstances, there should be little necessity to repeat instructions, which no one acquainted with Divine teaching could fail to know, namely, that we must freely forgive the offending brother, even as God for Christ's sake forgave us ; and not only so, but must also do all that in us lies to secure his full acceptance of reconciliation, that we may once more be united to him in perfect love, as becomes members of the Lord's Body.

In conclusion, we would urge the necessity of continual prayer on behalf of the wrong-doer, and, especially, that we ourselves may not be thoughtlessly impelled by our feelings to do him harm, or to shorten the respite given to him for repentance.

And, on this point, we may find a most wholesome lesson in the history of the woman taken in adultery. It is, indeed, often supposed, that, in judging the woman, our Lord either relaxed, or even set aside, the Law of Moses in her favour: but such an idea is altogether false. The course which He took did certainly show that sinful men are not qualified to administer the Law; but He Himself acted in the strictest accordance with it.

For, by setting the woman before Him, the Pharisees had constituted Him her Judge. But a judge might not condemn without evidence. He that despised Moses' Law did, indeed, die without mercy, but not unless there were two or three witnesses to the crime. When, therefore, the sharpness of the Lord's rebuke had caused the Pharisees to leave the Temple, He turned to the culprit, and said;—"Woman, where are those thine accusers? Did no man condemn thee?" She answered, "No man, Lord." "Neither," He rejoined, "do I condemn thee. Go and sin no more." Now, His last words are an emphatic proof that He by no means pronounced an acquittal: He merely dismissed the case as "not proven," according to the Law of Moses, because there were no witnesses.

Does not this incident help us to discover one way in which love may be made to cover a multitude of sins? For if, when a believer is wronged, the love of God abides in him with such power that the wound is instantly closed, and no complaint, no bitter cry against the wrong-doer, ascends to the Heavens, Satan is baffled: he is deprived of the evidence wherewith he would have urged the destruction of the oppressor. And so, the faith of the child of God, working by love, may have procured a respite and mercy for him that did the wrong. Glory will descend, before the Judg-

ment-seat of Christ, upon the head of that one who shall be found to have thus followed in the steps of his Lord, and to have realized, that his mission, also, however insignificant his influence, was not to destroy, but to save.

On the other hand, if the Lord deals thus severely with His Own people, how terrible must be the doom that awaits the oppressors and defrauders of this world. Even in the Law such a man may read;—

“If thou shalt afflict them in any wise, and they cry at all unto Me, I will surely hear their cry; and My wrath shall wax hot, and I will kill you with the sword: and your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless.”¹

Yet, because the wrath of God does not immediately break forth upon him, because the lightning spares him, and no sudden destruction sweeps him into perdition, he will say in his heart;—

“God hath forgotten: He hideth His face: He will never see it.”²

For such a one thinks only of present pleasure and gain, and never arrests himself to meditate on the end of these things. His oft-repeated iniquities have rendered him blind and deaf: he sees not that he is being hurried along the road to Judgment by the ever-increasing crowd of those whom he has wronged: he hears not yet the appalling din of those cries against him, which may startle his soul upon his death-bed, or burst with accumulated force upon his shuddering spirit as he enters the gates of Hades; while they will certainly deprive him of speech and hope when he stands before the Throne.

¹ Exod. xxii. 23-4.

² Psa. x. 11.

But to return to our text, the Officer is doubtless the angel appointed for that work; and, since the prisoner must be a disciple, it does not, at first sight, seem likely that the Prison is the Lake of Fire, which is the Second Death. At least, there is no mention of torment, nor is the punishment said to be everlasting—indeed, it could not last beyond the Thousand Years of the Millennium. For the Lord has promised, that, at the Last Day, He will raise up all believers, who were not thought worthy of the First Resurrection, to the full enjoyment of everlasting life.¹ But into this subject we have already inquired in *The Church the Churches and the Mysteries*.²

Thus the Millennial Age will be a time, not only of reward for those who will have overcome by the Blood of the Lamb, but also of chastisement for such believers as will be found to have failed in their walk—through indolence, or the minding of earthly things—and will, consequently, be sentenced to remain in abodes of the dead until the Last Day. For it will then appear, that, through their lack of earnestness and prayer for the Spirit's help, their sanctification was not perfected during their earth-life; and it must be so before they can dwell for ever with the Lord. They did evil in the body as well as good, and did not judge themselves and repent with bitter crying before the Lord: therefore, they must be judged by Him, and even as they did, so must they also receive.

Hence the Judgment-seat of Christ will dispense temporary chastisement for trespasses, as well as rewards. This is plainly indicated in the verses under our consideration, as well as in other striking passages

¹ John vi. 40.

² See especially chapp. v.-vii.

of the First Gospel, which, as we study them in due course, will increase our knowledge of a solemn but disliked and much neglected truth. We shall, moreover, find it revealed, with equal clearness, in other parts of the New Testament.

For instance, what does Paul mean in the subjoined passage? In speaking exclusively of those who have accepted the only true foundation, he tells us, that it is possible to build upon it either with gold, silver and costly stones, or with wood, hay and stubble, and then continues;—

“ Each man’s work shall be made manifest : for the Day shall declare it, because it is revealed in fire ; and the fire itself shall prove each man’s work of what sort it is. If any man’s work shall abide which he built thereon, he shall receive a reward. If any man’s work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss ; but he himself shall be saved ; yet so as through fire.”¹

And again,

“ Wherefore, also, we make it our aim, whether at home or absent, to be well-pleasing unto Him. For we must all be made manifest before the Judgment-seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he hath done, whether it be good or bad. Knowing, therefore, the fear of the Lord, we persuade men, but to God we have been made manifest ; and I hope that we have been made manifest also in your consciences.”²

And was not the sentiment expressed in the last verse, the fear of the Lord’s terrible judgment of His

¹ 1 Cor. iii. 13-15.

² 2 Cor. v. 9-11.

Own House, powerfully affecting the Apostle when he wrote ;—

“The Lord grant mercy unto the house of Onesiphorus : for he oft refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain ; but, when he was in Rome, he sought me diligently, and found me—The Lord grant unto him to find mercy of the Lord at That Day—and in how many things he ministered at Ephesus, thou knowest ~~very well~~ !”¹

Surely, if Paul was moved to interpose this fervent ejaculatory prayer on behalf of one who was not only called, but had also shown himself faithful by fearlessly ministering to the Lord's servant while he was fighting with wild beasts at Ephesus, and, subsequently, at Rome, when he was in the clutches of the most unscrupulous and cruel of persecuting tyrants—surely, if the Apostle was impelled to pray for such a one, that the Lord would grant him mercy in the Day of His Judgment, there can be no believer who is not in need of the same mercy.

Hence the decisions issued from the Judgment-seat of Christ will have the following results :—

Those servants of the Lord who shall be found to have been faithful will be judged worthy of the First Resurrection, and will immediately be made Priests of God and of His Christ, and will reign with Him for a Thousand Years.² They will thus enjoy the great Sabbath that remains for the people of God, and will themselves rest from their works, even as He did from His.³

But the unfaithful servants will be banished into the darkness without the pale of the Kingdom, where they

¹ 2 Tim. i. 16-18.

² Rev. xx. 6,

³ Heb. iv. 10.

*It may
be so!*

will be detained, and dealt with according to the sentence of the Lord, until the Last Day. Then, when the time of reward has passed by, He will raise them up to everlasting life, even as He has promised to do in the case of all who have believed on Him.

The remainder of the inhabitants of earth will not appear before the premillennial Judgment-seat. But the Jews who survive, together with the remnant of the Gentiles, will form the nucleus of a population for the renewed earth; while the unsaved dead, imprisoned either in Hades or the Abyss, will be left where they are, until the end of the Age which follows that of their own earth-life. Then, before they can be cast into the Lake of Fire and Brimstone, they must be brought to the foot of the Great White Throne to receive their sentence.

These various destinies may seem strange to ordinary readers of the Bible, who merely seek to find in it the few doctrines which they have adopted, and allowed to become fossilized in their minds. But it will not be so with painstaking and minute students, who are earnest in prayer that their minds may be kept open and ready to apprehend and receive whatever the Spirit may present to them. Such persons will be privileged to aid in bringing to light the still unknown truths which lie embedded in the Scriptures of God.

The Seventh Commandment

27. "Ye heard that it was said, Thou shalt not commit adultery.

28. But I say unto you, that every one that looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.

29. And if thy right eye causeth thee to stumble,

pluck it out, and cast it from thee : for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not thy whole body be cast into Hell.

30. And if thy right hand causeth thee to stumble, cut it off, and cast it from thee : for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not thy whole body go into Hell."

The Lord now cites another Commandment, the Seventh in the Decalogue, and draws forth its spirit from the letter. "Ye heard that it was said, Thou shalt not commit adultery." Yes, they had, indeed heard so much from the Pharisees, who saw in this commandment no more than the bare injunction, "That no man should lie with another man's wife : " and taught their disciples, that, so long as they abstained from that particular act of sin, they were satisfying the requirement of the Law. Yet they should, at least, have noticed, that, in Old Testament usage, the Seventh Commandment, though it mentions only the worst sin, is made to include every kind of whoredom and uncleanness, natural or spiritual. And had they done so, they would have come very near to the Lord's exposition, that here—just as in the Sixth Commandment—the culminating crime is mentioned, and the conscience of the hearer left to infer, that anything which partakes of its nature, or may ultimately lead to it, is also forbidden, even to an inmost thought of the heart. For the Lord declares, that the commandment may be broken, not only by an actual commission of the crime in question, but also by a secret and unexpressed desire ; so that the man who merely looks upon a woman to lust after her is instantly guilty in the sight of God.

But, in order to understand what is meant by "looking upon," we must note the words which follow, "with

a view to lusting after her." It is not the first involuntary glance, nor yet the momentary thought inspired by it, that constitutes the crime. For these are caused by the promptings of our fallen nature when it is tempted and stimulated by the foul spirits of the air, and we are often unable to avoid them. But, if a second glance be cast to feed the impulse which seized upon us unawares, or if the evil thought be deliberately retained in our mind, the sin has been committed, and is forthwith written in the Books of God.

How appalling the agony that will follow the opening of those Books on the Great Day; how unexpected, startling, and countless, will be the entries against many, who, while in the flesh, never cared to inquire whether, "by reason of use," they had "their senses exercised to discern good and evil!"

Do any of our readers tremble at the thought of so fearful an ordeal? Let them, then, at once, before the opportunity is gone, turn to Him Who Alone has access to the dread records, and is able with His precious Blood to blot out all the writing that is against us.

In the solemn verses which follow, we are made to look still more deeply into the mystery of our sinful being, in order that we may better understand the source and process of one kind of evil, and learn how to resist it.

What is the origin of the involuntary and irrepressible, though, perhaps, only momentary, thought of evil desire, with which none of us can be unacquainted? It owes its birth and course to the members of the flesh. Men see with the eye, and desire is generated: then, regardless of consequences, they rush forward to seize with the hand. In other words, such sins as we are now considering usually arise from the action of material

Balm
139:23,
24

objects upon our bodily organs : which last, by conveying an impression of them to the soul, inflame our passions. And the soul being, even in the case of believers, only in partial subjection to the God-conscious spirit, too often responds, nothing loth, to the invitation of the body. And if it becomes accustomed to do this, it will soon begin to find its chief delight in sensuality, and itself prompt the organs of the flesh to satisfy its unlawful cravings. So will the mind of the man become earthly and soulish ;¹ and, unless God interpose, he will presently step into hopeless perdition by also becoming demonlike.²

What, then, must be done to prevent this everlastingly fatal result*? The mischief must be met at its beginning : the organs which are the inlets of sin into the soul must be plucked out, or cut off ; and cast away. But in what manner this peremptory command is to be applied, every believer must judge for himself. If, in any case, literal obedience, and nothing less, is required to produce the wished-for effect, there is no alternative but to render it—a truth which is very plainly indicated in another passage.³

As a rule, however, the sacrifice of a right eye, or a right hand, would not be likely to free us from evil impulses, and to keep us pure within. Generally, then, the command will be much the same as Paul's injunction ;—

¹ ψυχική, that is, dominated by the self-consciousness, or by the emotions and intellect.

² δαιμονιώδης, James iii. 15. Since πνευματικός is conventionally used of a man whose spirit is in communion with the Spirit of God ; therefore, James used δαιμονιώδης for one whose spirit has been developed, and made like to themselves, by evil spirits.

³ Matth. xix. 12.

See Is. 56:4, 5

“Mortify, therefore, your members which are upon the earth ; fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desires, and covetousness, the which is idolatry.”¹

We must not yield our members as instruments of unrighteousness. We must make a covenant with our eyes that we look not : we must keep back our hands that we touch not : we must restrain our feet that they go not in the way of temptation. That which enslaves us to the body, and separates between us and our God, may be dear to us as a right eye or a right hand : nevertheless, we must violently sever our connection with it, and cast it from us.

And, just as, when a man consents to the amputation of a broken or diseased limb, he does so because he believes the sacrifice necessary to the welfare of his whole body, so are we bidden to suffer the loss of any part, however precious, of that which makes up our present being, rather than to have the whole of it cast into the Hell of Fire. But the fact that the Lord puts the case in such a way indicates plainly enough, that He regards the actual excision of a member as being possibly necessary, in certain circumstances, for those who are determined to remove every obstacle out of the way that leads to the Kingdom.

It will, however, matter but little, when we are entering the Gates of Light, whether we have lost one or more of our earthly members. For we shall then exchange the whole of the unsubstantial and decaying tabernacle, in which we now dwell, for an everlasting building of God. And how inconsistent should we be to hesitate for a moment over the sacrifice of a member

¹ Col. iii. 5.

of our mortal body, or of a fleeting joy of earth. For have we not placed ourselves under a rule, the deliberate aim of which is the destruction of every member of the flesh, the crucifixion of our "old man" with all his passions and lusts ?

The prominence here given to the body in a reference to sufferings after death is remarkable. It demonstrates, that the Lord's chastisements do not take place immediately after death, as in the case of the Pagan and Catholic Purgatories ; but are postponed until after resurrection and judgment. It would seem, too, that a slave to the particular sins alluded to in the text, who spends his life in indulging the lusts of the flesh, does in some way so develop his body, and absorb his spirit into it, that he reduces himself, as it were, to mere sense-consciousness, and so is hereafter chastened by means of that very part of his being which, in this world, has been the cause and means of his sin.

But whither are we drifting upon these words of the Lord ? We have already proved, that His discourse is addressed to disciples only, though it may be to erring disciples : but can it be that children of God will, in any circumstances, need literal cleansing fires for the completion of their sanctification ? Believers as a body repudiate such a suggestion : they have never been taught, that those who are saved by the Blood of Christ can possibly have anything to suffer after the close of the present life.

Never by man, perhaps ; for the subject is most distasteful to all of us. But does the Word of God mention such a possibility ? Let us meditate for a few moments upon four texts, which are usually dismissed with very inadequate consideration, if, indeed, they

receive any consideration at all. And may the Spirit of God grant us a right judgment of their meaning, for the sake of Him Who loved us and gave Himself for us !

I. "For every one shall be salted with fire."¹

These words, we are often told, refer, in a figure, to the afflictions of the present world. But glance at the context, and you will find that the statement is joined by the conjunction "for" to the previous verse, and that the previous verse contains a description of Hell. If, then, there be any logical sequence in the passage, the salting must take place in Hell. And, since the Lord is here dealing with the faults of believers, what can the salting with fire mean but the burning away of corruption ?

II. In declaring that every man's work shall be proved by fire on the Great Day, Paul adds, that,

"If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss : but he himself shall be saved ; yet so as through fire."²

Here the idea presented is that of one passing through a fire, which consumes everything that he has about him, but out of which he himself escapes with his bare life. Is this fire the same as the Hell-fire wherewith every one is salted ?

III. In the sixth chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, we read of certain persons who have accepted the faith, laid down its foundations, nay even received the gifts of the Spirit ; and yet, after all, have fallen away. Of such we are told, that they can never again be restored to the position in which they once were. This statement is usually understood to mean, that they

¹ Mark ix. 49.

² 1 Cor. iii. 15.

are lost for ever: but to such an explanation two powerful reasons, at least, are opposed.

(1) From the description given of the men in question, they must have been converted, must have received the gift of God and so have been saved: moreover, it is also evident, that they must have been baptized in the Holy Spirit. Now, if, after these experiences, it were possible for them to fall away in such a manner as to be finally lost, then the gifts and the calling of God would not necessarily be without repentance: then it would be possible to be saved to-day and lost to-morrow, and the teaching of the New Testament would become confused and contradictory.

(2) The fate of the fallen ones is explained by the case of two tilled fields, both of which are equally favoured with rain. But, while the one responds to its advantages by bringing forth herbs meet for them for whose sake it was tilled, the other produces nothing but thorns and thistles. Hence the latter is "disproved;" instead of being blessed by God, it comes nigh unto a curse, and commandment is given to burn it.

But what does this condemnation mean? We find three points in it worthy of notice.

First, the word rendered "disproved," or "rejected," is also used by Paul when he fears, lest, after having preached to others, he himself should be "rejected." There, however, the context shows that it is not the loss of salvation that is contemplated, but only that of the Prize, or First Resurrection. Why, then, may not the reference be to the same thing in the present passage?

Again, the unfruitful field is *nigh* unto a curse; but that is all. So far as we are informed, it is never actually cursed.

in these mentioned
in Heb. 6. 4. were
not saved.
(Note by P.M. -
open to
question).

Heb. VI is a
deep & difficult
subject. here
the persons of
whom it treats
are really
converted, or
not? - that
is the question!

1 Cor. 9: 27

Compare I Cor. 10: 1 - 12 - noting especially verses 5 & 6
also - Heb. 3: 6 - 13 - vs. 13 - 17

And, lastly, since other measures do not succeed with it, the only resource left will be to burn it. But the burning of a field is an incident which is soon over: it by no means suggests lasting, and much less everlasting, burnings, as the perpetual fires in the Valley of Hinnom are made to do. Moreover, it is an operation effected *for the good of the field*, to clear it of weed-roots, and make it fit for the reception of good seed.

Interesting

Hence the fallen ones, whose course of discipline is compared to the treatment of such a field, can by no means be regarded as finally lost. They have, indeed, missed the Prize of their upward calling, and can never again aspire to the Kingdom and the glorious Sabbatical rest of the Millennium. Nay, still worse, they must, during that happy time, be subjected, in some way not clearly revealed, to the process of being salted with fire. Nevertheless, at the General Resurrection, they will, at length, be raised to everlasting life by the Great Lord in Whom they have believed.

*See
Jno.
6:40*

IV. To close our argument, we will quote not one text, but two, as follows;—

“He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the Second Death.”¹

“Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the First Resurrection: over them the Second Death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.”²

Interesting

Ordinary believers rarely ever notice, much less meditate upon and pray over, these remarkable verses. The subjects of them are overcomers, who, as such, will be deemed worthy to have part in the First Resurrec-

True.

¹ Rev. ii. 11.

² Rev. xx. 6.

tion. They are those who, by reason of their abiding communion with God, receive power to withstand the temptations of the world the flesh and the Devil. And they are enabled to maintain their communion, because they walk in the light, even as He is in the light ; for the Blood of Jesus Christ is ceaselessly cleansing them from all sin, and keeping them holy and acceptable in His Father's sight. Thus, as we are elsewhere told, it is by the Blood of the Lamb that they overcome : it is through their faith in Its sin-cleansing power that they can carry their petitions into the very Presence of the Almighty God, Who is able to keep them from falling. And, since they love and trust in His Son, therefore He loves them,¹ delivers them from every evil work, and will preserve them unto His Heavenly Kingdom.

But, to return to our immediate subject. What is the Second Death by which these overcomers shall not be hurt, and which has no power over them ? There is no difficulty in obtaining an answer to this question ; for the Scriptures tell us plainly, that the Second Death is nothing less than the Lake of Fire and Brimstone.²

Since, however, an inspired statement affirms, that overcoming believers will not be hurt of the Second Death,³ what is the natural inference in regard to those who are overcome, who do not withstand temptation, nor lead consistent lives, though they do believe in the Lord Jesus, and occasionally, perhaps, evince their faith in an unexpected manner ?

Surely, if they leave the world fully justified, but incompletely sanctified, it follows that they *will* be hurt of the Second Death, though only temporarily ; for the

¹ John xiv. 21.

² Rev. xx. 14.

³ Rev. ii. 11.

not to "consume the unholiness" but to bring fully under Judgment

The Sin which all liars which failed to judge in themselves while in the body. See I Cor. 11: 31, 32

Life of Christ is in them, and must finally vanquish the power of Death: it is certain that the Fire will have power over them, but only until it has consumed such unholiness as is still left in them. For, otherwise, what point would there be in so prominent a mention of the immunity enjoyed by overcomers?

Of course, when we speak of the sanctification of the overcomer as not having been completed, we have no thought of absolute holiness in our minds, but only of that standard which God has appointed for attainment in the present life, but has not revealed to us. For absolute perfection in holiness we regard as unattainable by those who are still in sinful flesh. Yet, in the case of believers who draw the fullest benefit from the discipline and aid of the Spirit of God, it may be that the cause of unholiness is ultimately banished from spirit and soul, and that it remains only in the body, by the laying aside of which sanctification would thus be completed. For the body of this death can never be made holy: at best we can but keep it down: therefore, it must be either destroyed or changed before we can enter into the Presence of the King.

The way to "make dead" our members (Col. 3: 5) - as to "walk in the Spirit" at all times

Now, in regard to the use of the Lake of Fire, during the Millennium, as the place in which the saved who have done evil in the body may receive according to what they have done, a significant fact is revealed to us.

From the Apocalypse we learn, that none of the lost, save the Beast and the False Prophet, will be cast into the Lake of Fire before the establishment of the Millennial Kingdom. Neither Satan and his angels nor the unsaved of the human race will be found there, until after the Thousand Years are ended, and the final sentence has been pronounced from the Great White Throne. Hence, during the Millennium, Hell will be

practically empty, so far as the lost are concerned, only two of their number being then confined within its bounds. And this fact accords well with the inspired hints, that the Lake will then be needed for other, though only temporary, purposes.

As to the fact itself, that the overcome are detained either in Hell or in some other places of the dead, during the Age following that in which they dwelt upon earth, we can find traces of similar treatment in the case of those who lived in the other two greater Premillennial Dispensations. For, apart from mere changes in the earth's government, there are also three greater Ages, each of which is closed by acts of judgment. These are the Age from the Fall to the Flood, that from the Flood to the First Advent, and that from the First Advent to the Second.

But it will be impossible for the reader to understand what we have to say respecting these three Judgment-Dispensations, unless he remembers, that irrevocable punishment is decreed for men only when they have knowingly and wilfully rejected the Lord Jesus, God's unspeakable Gift. "And this is the judgment," as He Himself declares, "that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the Darkness rather than the Light; for their works were evil."¹ Surely, then, they that never saw the Light cannot incur the Judgment. And hence we find, that those who lived in Old Testament times were never threatened with everlasting punishment, although some verses, either through mistranslation or misinterpretation, may seem at first sight to contradict this statement. For example, in the Authorized Version we read, "The wicked shall

¹ John iii. 19.

be turned into Hell.”¹ But the Revised gives the literal and true rendering of the original, namely, “The wicked shall return to Sheol,” that is, “to Hades.” Then, again, in the last verse of Isaiah, the worm that dies not, and the fire that is not quenched, are mentioned: but the passage is prophetic, and foretells the doom of those whom the Lord will find in rebellion against Himself when He returns to our earth, at the close of the present Dispensation. Here, then, we should expect the introduction of Hell; since those sinners will not have been ignorant of the Light, and so will be liable to the Judgment.

For, as soon as the depths of God’s love in giving up His Only Begotten Son for us had been revealed, and men were, nevertheless, treading under foot the Blood of the Lord Jesus, then, as Paul declares, for those who dare so to act, “there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and a fierceness of fire which shall devour the adversaries.” And such men were warned, that, should they persist in their rebellion, the smoke of their torment should go up from the Lake of Fire and Brimstone for ever and ever, and that they should have no rest day and night.²

By keeping this point in mind, we shall be able to understand a passage in the First Epistle of Peter which has perplexed many. In his fourth chapter, the Apostle, who has just informed us that the Lord, during His stay in Hades, preached to the spirits of the disobedient Antediluvians,³ returns to the same subject, and explains the mysterious incident in these words;—

“Who shall give account to Him Who is ready to judge the quick and dead.

¹ Psa. ix. 17.

² Rev. xiv. 10, 11.

³ 1 Pet. iii. 19, 20.

For unto this end was the Gospel preached to dead persons also, that, as regards flesh, they might, indeed, bear their judgment—literally ‘have been judged’¹—according to men; but, as regards spirit, might live on according to God.”

Now, from the close connection of these two verses, it is evident that the Greek word for “dead persons” in the sixth verse must be taken in its literal sense of “dead” as regards the body, because its context in the fifth verse compels us so to understand it there.

The conjunction “for,” in the sixth verse, introduces the reason why Christ may be expected to judge dead as well as living persons.

For we know, that He will finally judge the whole human race by the same rule, assigning everlasting life to those whom He shall find believing in Himself, and casting into the Lake of Fire and Brimstone, without hope of deliverance, all who shall have wilfully rejected His offers of salvation. But many persons, including all who died before His First Coming, did not have the Gospel presented to them during their earth-life, and, therefore, could not be consigned to a hopeless doom because they did not accept it. For how could they have believed on Him of Whom they had not heard?

To meet this difficulty the Gospel is preached to some among the dead, as well as to the living, an example of which Peter has just given us.² And those who hear of Christ's salvation for the first time in

¹ The aorist *κριθῶσι* refers to something which had taken place before the preaching. The Greek idiom can scarcely be expressed in a literal rendering: we have, therefore, attempted to present the sense by means of a paraphrase.

² 1 Pet. iii. 19, 20.

not all - Some dwelled
heard of God's Coming One, &
rejected Him then.

Some dwelled in
the world before
the coming of
Christ (Note by
P.M.)

Hades, while they must yet for a season remain subject to the sentence of bodily death, passed upon all sinful men, may, nevertheless, if they accept the Gospel, live on, in that part of their being which is still left to them, after the Divinely prescribed manner, and so escape the fearful Wrath-to-Come.

This passage is most important; for it proves conclusively, that God condemns no man to everlasting death without first affording him a gracious opportunity of pardon through the Blood of the Lamb.

Let it, however, be carefully noted, that this truth does not in any way affect our practical theology. As to ourselves, we have seen the Light, and, if we reject it, must endure the Judgment. And those with whom we come into contact are in the same circumstances: at least, if they be not, God may require of us a reason for their ignorance.

Moreover, let no one imagine that this truth can be made to excuse his negligence in missionary effort, on the ground that every man will have an opportunity of accepting the Gospel after his death, if he has not heard of it during his earth-life. We may not so trifle with the commands of the Almighty God: if we be His servants, our duty is, not to criticize His orders, or to fritter away reverence by speculating upon them, but to do them with all possible expedition. The circumstance, that we cannot at present discover their intention, must by no means interfere with our prompt obedience: we have never yet heard the secret counsel of God; and, if we think that any of His directions are superfluous or unprofitable, we shall before long be taught—and, perhaps, with no small pain to ourselves—that the foolishness of God is wiser than men. It is the business of a private soldier to fight well in his own

Very
Interesting

Interesting

rank, and it is quite unnecessary that he should understand the plans of his General. And so, our first or paramount aim in mission-work must be, not even to save our fellow men, but to obey the Lord Who bought us with His Own Blood. And, so long as we confine ourselves to His simple orders, we shall never be in any difficulty as to what we ought to do; for His bidding is, that we go to all the nations, and that, after making disciples by the preaching of the Gospel, we first baptize, and then teach them whatsoever things He has commanded us.

Keeping in mind, then, the Three Ages described above, and the Scriptural truth, that final condemnation is pronounced upon no man, until he has intelligently and wilfully rejected the Lord Jesus, we shall be able to investigate whatever Biblical hints we may find respecting the judgments of the Ages that are past.

Now, of those who lived in the first Age, Enoch did not die, but was translated alive into the Presence of God, before the fearful days of Noah had set in. His removal from earth answers to that which is predicted for the Firstfruits at the end of the present Age.

The family of Noah was preserved in safety through the Judgment, in order that they might repeople the earth. Their case is analogous to that of the Jewish remnant and the spared Gentiles at the Lord's Second Coming.

The wicked inhabitants of the earth were swept away by the Flood, and their disembodied spirits were conducted to the great Prison in the heart of the earth, there to remain, at least, until the First Advent of the Lord.

At the close of the Second Age, the Lord descended into Hades, and preached there to the imprisoned

spirits of the Antediluvians. Subsequently, when He rose from the dead, He declared Himself to be the Son of God with power by commanding "a resurrection of dead persons,"¹ who ascended from Hades in His train! These, probably, included Abraham Isaac and Jacob, and the Antediluvians, or some of them, to whom he had just been preaching. And if so, the latter were released, after a confinement in the darkness of Hades during the whole Age which succeeded their own—presumably, because they had repented.

In considering the close of the second period, in the times of Christ's First Coming, we have to remember the changed circumstances. For the Lord was no longer carrying on special dealings with the whole earth, as in the previous Age, but only with the Jewish people whom He had chosen out of it. Consequently, at this crisis, no world-wide catastrophe swept away the human race. But a special and visible Judgment fell only upon the Jews, who were in great part cut off in the wars waged against them by Titus and Hadrian: while the miserable survivors were either sold into slavery or scattered in exile over the whole face of the earth. This was intended both as a discipline for them, and, at the same time, as the manner in which they were appointed to preserve the continuity of their race upon the earth.

Those among them who had lived and died in the

¹ This translation is literal, and gives the only possible meaning of the last clause in Rom. i. 4, which both of our Versions have altogether missed. The reference is, of course, to the raising of many saints by the Lord immediately after His Own resurrection, as narrated in Matth. xxvii 52, 53. By this exhibition of power He proved His Divine Sonship, in accordance with His Own words in John v. 21.

*Yes,
The...*

fear of the Lord, according to His higher standard, were, probably, delivered from the power of death by the resurrection which took place when He rose from Hades.¹ This event seems to correspond to the First Resurrection at the close of our Age.

But, for the great body of the nation, which had passed away under the Law, it was appointed that they should remain in the dwellings of the dead, throughout the whole of the present Age, which has followed their own. Then they, also, except such of them as were cut off from their people, shall be raised up from their graves, and led into the Land of Israel.²

As to the other nations of the Second Age, it would appear that their dead, also, will abide in Hades till this Dispensation is ended, just as the Antediluvians had to remain there from the Flood to the First Advent. This, at least, is what we may fairly infer from the interesting particulars which are revealed to us concerning one group of them. The sinful inhabitants of Sodom and of the other Cities of the Plain were removed to Hades by a sudden and appalling judgment, and, of course, remained there during the rest of their own Age. But, when that period had passed by, they were mentioned again in the New Testament; for Jude says;—

“Even as Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities about them, having, in like manner with these, given themselves over to fornication, and gone after strange flesh, are set forth as an example, suffering the punishment of an age-long fire.”³

Now, it may be asked, Why change the usual translation, “eternal” or “everlasting,” into “age-long”?

¹ Matth. xxvii. 52, 53.

² Ezek. xxxvii. 12-14.

³ Jude 7.

Very interesting

And the answer is, We do so for three reasons ;—First, because the Greek word *αἰώνιος* admits the latter rendering quite as readily as the former ; secondly, because the latter brings this statement into harmony with what is revealed of two other Dispensations ; and, thirdly, because another Scripture compels us so to do.

For the word *αἰώνιος* is an adjective formed from *αἰών*, which last, being derived from the Greek for “always,” signifies the whole time during which a person, thing, or state, exists. Hence, if it be used of a person, it expresses his whole life, or life-time ; if of a succession of generations, of history, or of the state of a people or the world, an age ; if of the universe, or of anything that lasts for ever, eternity. The adjective, of course, follows the meanings of its noun ; and may, therefore, be rendered either by “age-long,” or by “everlasting,” according to the indication of the context.

We have, however, already seen that disobedient spirits of the First and Third Ages are confined in realms of the dead during the whole of the Dispensation that follows their own. It is, therefore, probable that the same fate was appointed, also, for disobedient spirits of the Second Age.

But we are not left to the uncertainty of conjecture. For Ezekiel, when speaking of the sins of Judah, characterizes them as worse than those of either of her two “sisters,” Sodom and Samaria, and then adds ;—

“And I will turn again their captivity, the captivity of Sodom and her daughters, and the captivity of Samaria and her daughters, and the captivity of thy captives in the midst of them. . . . And thy sisters, Sodom and her daughters, shall return to their former estate, and Samaria and her daughters shall return to their former

Instruct level

estate, and thou and thy daughters shall return to your former estate."¹

Very manifest, then, is God's purpose to restore Sodom, and the other Cities of the Plain, when He brings the whole House of Israel again into their own Land; that is, in the times of the Second Advent. And an illustration of this fact may be found in the words of the Lord, when, taking up the declaration of Ezekiel, He says;—

“If the mighty works had been done in Sodom which were done in thee, it would have remained until this day.”²

There is, then, hope, that even Sodom will stretch out her hands toward God when she hears, for the first time, of the ransom which He has found to deliver her from the pit: and He Who desires not the death of a sinner, but rather that he turn from his wickedness and live, will yet be willing to receive her. She shall know, that He is love, and that He spared not His Own Son, but gave Him up for her: and it may be that she, too, will look on Him Whom her sins pierced, and mourn for Him as one that mourneth for his only son.

Such, then, are some of the deeply interesting particulars which the Word of God reveals concerning His dealings with the dead, in connection with the first two of the Judgment-Dispensations.

Their complexity and variety—which seem to have been altogether overlooked for centuries by the great body of believers—may help much to reconcile us to fresh discoveries in Divine revelation respecting the close of our own Age; while their striking analogies to the things predicted for the future are very significant.

¹ Ezek. xvi. 53, 55.

² Matth. xi. 23.

Moreover, a study of them would certainly enable us to present to the outside world a far clearer view of God's justice. And, although we shall never in this Dispensation be able to arrive at a complete understanding of the whole counsel of God, yet, without doubt, many stumbling-blocks have been cast in the way of the weak, or the unconverted, through ignorance, on the part of believers, of things that are revealed.

The Law of Divorce

31. "It was said also, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement.

32. But I say unto you, that every one that putteth away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, maketh her an adulteress: and whosoever shall marry her when she is put away committeth adultery."

From the law against adultery and the awful lessons connected with it, the Lord passes on to the Mosaic injunction concerning divorce, which, also, had been perverted by the Jewish leaders. Moses was, indeed, directed to allow divorce in a case of adultery, for the prevention of worse things. But that which had been no more than a temporary concession to the hardness of men's hearts had been changed by the Pharisees into something very like a command; and they had contrived so to misinterpret the words of their Lawgiver as to extort from them a license for the indulgence of their own selfish wishes. The great school of Hillel actually taught, that it was lawful to put away a wife, if she over-salted, or over-cooked, her husband's food, if she were smitten dumb or sottish by a stroke of God, or even

if her husband should see another woman whom he preferred to her. And yet, hypocrites as they were, they made a great parade of obeying the Mosaic precept in regard to the bill of dismissal. For the Talmudical writers, while they take but little trouble to discuss the justice of a divorce, are ridiculously careful in regard to the form of the bill, insisting, among other absurdities, that it must be written in twelve lines, neither more nor less.

But the Lord's "I say unto you" brought forth the pure Word of God from beneath the rubbish with which they had covered it, and declared, that divorce is permissible only in the case of that one sin by which, in God's sight, the marriage-contract is dissolved. Nor even then was it commanded, but only allowed. And had the Jews considered the touching appeals to their nation in the Old Testament, when God speaks of Israel under the figure of an unfaithful wife who is intreated to return to her lawful husband, had they meditated upon the first three chapters of Hosea, they could scarcely have failed to infer, that He would wish His people to imitate His Own mercy and absolutely unselfish love.

The Jewish practice of divorce was, therefore, unlawful, and a perpetual cause of offence against the Seventh Commandment. For he that gave a bill of divorcement exposed himself to the temptation of marrying another woman, which the Lord pronounced to be adultery: at the same time, he brought the repudiated wife into a similar danger, and made her new husband, also, if she had one, guilty before God.

Such is the Lord's teaching in reference to divorce: what must be His judgment on the practice of it in Christendom to-day!

The Law of Oaths

33. "Again, ye heard that it was said to them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shall perform unto the Lord thine oaths.

34. But I say unto you, Swear not at all: neither by the heaven, for it is the Throne of God;

35. Nor by the earth, for it is the footstool of His Feet: nor by Jerusalem, for it is the City of the Great King.

36. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, for thou canst not make one hair white or black.

37. But let your speech be Yea, yea; Nay, nay; and whatsoever is more than these is of the Evil One."

As regards this fourth example, Moses had given the command;—

"Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God; and Him shalt thou serve, and shalt swear by His name."¹

For it was the appeal to the dread Name, which, by awakening the spirit of the swearer to a consciousness of the awful Presence and cognizance of God, gave all its sanctity and power to the oath. And then, for every one who had so sworn, there was the solemn warning of the Third Commandment, "The Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh His Name in vain."²

Hence it should have been perfectly clear, that Israelites were permitted to swear only by the Name of Jehovah; and that, if they had once done so, they must neither change their mind, nor in any way fail to perform their oath. And, accordingly, when the Psalmist is enumerating those who shall sojourn in the

¹ Deut. vi. 13.

² Exod. xx. 7.

Lord's Tabernacle and dwell in His Holy Hill, we find, in his list of the blessed ones, him "that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not."¹

From what has been said, it will be evident, that the Mosaic Law had a strong tendency to check the practice of oath-taking, and to restrict it to the most solemn occasions.

But the Pharisees were not slow to find a way by which even this perfect law of God might be perverted, and turned to evil. It was, probably, presented by them just as the Lord has quoted it; for the precise combination of His words is not found in the Old Testament, though its sense embraces nothing that is additional or contrary to the earlier revelation.

Nevertheless, from the second clause, "but shall perform unto the Lord thine oaths," they drew the wicked inference, that oaths, although they must be kept if made in the Name of the Lord, were not binding unless that Name had been expressly mentioned. Thus, by suggesting other forms of oaths, they ignored the command, that Israelites should swear only by the Name of Jehovah, and so dispelled the awe with which an oath should be surrounded.

Now, such teaching as this was not only dishonest and demoralizing in itself, but was sure also to bring about an utter disregard of the Third Commandment. For, since other oaths were so lightly esteemed, men would often find themselves under the necessity of confirming the most trivial promises by an oath in the Name of Jehovah.

The Lord, then, strikes at the root of all this mischief by requiring from His followers truth in their every

¹ Psa. xv. 4.

word. I, He says, do not merely forbid you to swear falsely, but command you not to swear at all. For what need have you to swear—you, who as servants of the God That cannot lie, as disciples of Myself Who am the Truth as well as the Way and the Life, must speak the truth in every utterance of your lips?

Know, too, that, if you do swear, you cannot by any subterfuge escape the fearful responsibility of an oath. You may omit the mention of the Great Name; but it is the Name of the Creator and Owner of all things, and, therefore, is involved in all things. If you swear by Heaven, as the Pharisees advise you, that is His Throne;¹ and so it is really Himself Whom you summon as a witness to your integrity: if by the earth, that is the footstool of His Feet: if by Jerusalem, that is His Capital upon earth, the City from which His Son, the Great King, will presently rule over all mankind: if by your own head, that also belongs to Him; for He made and has the sole disposal of it—a statement easy of proof; for you are unable to control the colour of a single hair upon it.

But here a somewhat difficult question awaits us. When the Lord says, "Swear not at all," does He absolutely forbid His people either to take or to recognize an oath in any circumstance whatever? And, therefore, are the Society of Friends, and others, justified in refusing to witness upon oath, even when they are called upon to do so by the rulers of the land?

¹ Since the Greek for Heaven is here in the singular number, the Heaven of our earth must be meant. Hence, most appropriately, the reference is, not to the Throne in the Highest Heavens but to the judicial Throne in the First Heaven, upon which God sits to decide the affairs of our world. The latter is mentioned in Isa. vi. i, 1 Kings xxii. 19, Dan. vii. 9, and Rev. iv. 2.

Were we to confine ourselves to the saying of the Lord now under our consideration, such objectors would certainly seem to be in the right. But in nothing is "a little learning" a more "dangerous thing" than in the study of the Bible. By its own directions we are forbidden to accept any of its utterances as of private, or peculiar, interpretation:¹ we can only penetrate to its true meaning by "comparing spiritual things with spiritual."²

And, in this case, if we examine the New Testament, we shall find, that even the Almighty God, in His compassion for the weakness of His sinful creatures, condescends to swear by Himself.³ So, too, in the Apocalypse, we read of a mighty Angel, who, in attesting his message, "sware by Him That liveth for ever and ever."⁴ Moreover, our Lord's Own "Verily, verily," is more than "Yea, yea." Hence we might be led to infer, that, upon a very special occasion, a preacher of righteousness might imitate these examples, and, for the sake of his hearers, confirm his testimony by a solemn oath, calling God for a witness upon his soul. And this is just what we find Paul doing in his Epistle to the Corinthians,⁵ and, also, in those which he wrote to the Galatians⁶ and Philippians.⁷

Again, in the matter of judicial oaths, the Lord Himself set us an example, when He was standing before the Sanhedrim. For, although He had previously refused to answer either His accusers or the High Priest, He immediately responded when Caiaphas said, "I adjure Thee by the Living God!"⁸

¹ 2 Pet. i. 20-1.

² 1 Cor. ii. 13.

³ Heb. vi. 13-18; vii. 20-2.

⁴ Rev. x. 6.

⁵ 2 Cor. i. 23. See also ver. 18.

⁶ Gal. i. 20.

⁷ Phil. i. 8.

⁸ Matth xxvi. 63-4.

How, then, can we reconcile the apparent discrepancy between these instances of swearing and the Lord's prohibition? Somewhat, perhaps, in the following way. Every aspirant to the Kingdom is, while here below, compelled to lead, as it were, a twofold life, to act in two distinct Spheres. For, while he strives with all his heart to attain to the ideal which the Lord has set before him, he, nevertheless, must not do this with a reckless disregard of his neighbours and existing circumstances. His own spirit and desires must ever be found within the Sphere of the Kingdom; and, consequently, in matters which concern only himself and those who are walking in the same path as himself, he must accept the command, not to swear at all, as absolute.

But he will not be able to avoid intercourse with the outside world, with which he cannot deal upon the principles of the Kingdom, principles which they neither appreciate nor even understand. Hence in his relations with such as these, he is permitted to make certain concessions, but only in things that are not evil in themselves, though they may have originated in evil.

Thus the assertions of the Lord's disciples in their intercourse with one another must be no more than simple statements of facts, without any oath or extravagant protestation. Believers must give a plain Yes or No, obeying at once the direct command of the Lord and the precept given through His servant James, who says;—¹

“ But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by the Heaven, nor by the earth, nor by

^a James v. 12.

any other oath ;¹ but let your Yea, be yea, and your Nay, nay, that ye fall not under judgment.”²

And, in their intercourse with the world, they must observe the same rule, so far as it is possible to do so, and appeal to God as their witness only if they feel that they will thereby impress those to whom they are preaching the Gospel, or if they are required by the rulers of the land in which they dwell to substantiate their evidence by oath.

For whatever is more than “Yea” or “Nay,” though in many cases it may not be evil in itself, nevertheless, originates with Satan and not with God, being a result of the general depravity and untruthfulness of men : therefore, it cannot be admitted into the circle of the Kingdom, though the children of the Kingdom may use it, when necessary, in dealing with the sinful world. For the Lord does not say that an oath is intrinsically evil, but only that it comes from an evil source and evil circumstances.

The Law of Retaliation

38. “Ye heard that it was said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.

39. But I say unto you, Resist not him that is evil : but whosoever smiteth thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.

¹ That is, by any other frivolous or evasive oath of the same class as the two which are quoted. For James does not mention the oath by the Name of Jehovah, which was permitted upon sufficiently solemn occasions, but only those trifling and insincere oaths which caused men, through very shame, to avoid the Name of the Almighty God, although they were really swearing by it.

² That is, Lest ye should fall under the judgment of God for idle, foolish, or even blasphemous words.

40. And if any man would go to law with thee, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also.

41. And whosoever shall compel thee to go one mile, go with him twain.

42. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away."

In this paragraph, the Lord advances still further in His teaching, and shows, that, beside truth in our words, there must, also, be love in our conduct, and that, even toward those who wrong and oppress us. And, first, He speaks of passive, then of active love, to which latter he who attains will come nearest to the great standard of loving as God loves. "For He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust."

As His fifth example, then, the Lord selects the Mosaic law of retaliation, which the Pharisees had succeeded in corrupting just as it stood in the text, without either adding to or taking from it. This they had effected by perverting a just and terrible principle of God into a mere incitement to human vindictiveness and revenge; and had so prepared themselves for the abominable sentiment, with which the Lord presently deals, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy."

The words, "An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth," occur three times in the Law,¹ and, undoubtedly, embody the great principle upon which God dispenses justice to the human race.

But in using them as a plea whereby to justify the cravings of revenge, the Pharisees had overlooked an

¹ Exod. xxi. 24; Lev. xxiv. 20; Deut. xix. 21.

all-important fact. In God there is neither offence nor sin ; so that, even upon this ground, and apart from His rights as the Creator of all men and things, He is entitled to judge us upon principles of absolute justice. But let us beware of claiming His Divine prerogative ; for we are fallen creatures, who by our many transgressions and rebellions against Him have forfeited our own lives. Hence, by the simplest principle of right, we may not demand strict justice upon those who have done a wrong to ourselves, unless we are ready, also, to acquiesce in the immediate exaction of the same for our own shortcomings and offences against God. But woe to him who is so blinded by self-concentration that he can see only the misdeeds of others, and is wholly unconscious of his own !

These considerations would soon dispel all thought of pleading—that is, for purposes of revenge and hatred—a justice such as God Alone is able to require. Nay, they would do much more : they would force every honest man to feel that he could not, even as a magistrate, exact punishment for crime from his fellow-men without exposing himself to the anger of God, had he not received a Divine command to do so.

During the first Dispensation after the Fall, no such command was given ; but men were put upon their trial, and allowed to recover from the effects of sin, if they could, without law : crime might not be punished by those who themselves were guilty of rebellion, and even the murderer must escape the sword of justice. But the consequences of this experiment were appalling : all flesh corrupted its way upon the earth, and the earth was filled with violence and bloodshed. Therefore, as soon as that generation had been swept away in the Flood, the conditions of human life were changed.

Governments were sanctioned : the sword was placed in the hand of the magistrate, that, by the punishment of death, he might stay the spreading of lawlessness and violence : and the command went forth, "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed."

This law must remain valid, until the Lord returns to take the Kingdom. And one of the most significant features of our time, and a sure token that the world is fast becoming as it was in the days of Noah, may be seen in the general repugnance to the punishment of death, and the increasing tendency to condone or excuse crimes, which, prevalent as they now are, would, were the terror of the law removed, quickly increase, until the life of every man would hang in doubt before his eyes. But this spirit of the Age is altogether antagonistic to that of the New Testament, in which it is expressly said, that the magistrate, who exacts the penalties of crime, "beareth not the sword in vain ; for he is a minister of God, an avenger for wrath to him that doeth evil."¹

Thus, although themselves guilty before God, men are, nevertheless, commanded to act as magistrates, upon fixed laws, for the suppression of outward crime, while the deep corruption within is reserved for the Judgment of the Great White Throne. But woe to the magistrate that judges with a feeling of superiority to, or resentment against, those whom he justly condemns : rather should he, whenever a prisoner is brought before him, be humbled by the thought, Thus had I been, but for the grace of God !

By His strictures, then, upon this commandment, the Lord forbids His disciples to infer from the decrees of

*Instructive
as to the
Place of
Human
Government
in the Divine
Plan.*

¹ Rom. xiii. 4.

God, and the necessary laws of human government, that they themselves, also, would be justified in wresting what they believe to be their rights from their fellow-men, whether by force or by law, or in exacting a vengeful punishment for ill treatment. They must forgive others, even as God for Christ's sake forgave them.

And so, in direct opposition to the law of retaliation, Christian believers are charged not to resist him that is evil. They are not to struggle against him, or to return like for like, no, not even in self-defence: they are to take joyfully the spoiling of their goods, and to regard the traces of ill treatment upon their bodies as the marks of the Lord Jesus.¹ For, by "him that is evil,"² we are, of course, to understand, not the sinner generally, but only, as the context indicates, one who openly manifests his sin in violence or fraud. And this meaning is illustrated by three examples—one of personal violence, another of spoliation of property, and a third of compulsion to public service.

As regards the first example, smiting on the cheek seems to be adduced as a typical act of insult.³ So Jeremiah mentions as a fitting characteristic of the man who has seen affliction, and borne the yoke in his youth, that he should "give his cheek to him that smiteth him."⁴

The words, "turn to him the other also," are not, of course, to be taken in a barely literal sense. For, to offer the left cheek to a man who has just smitten the right, would be to provoke a repetition of the insult. What the Lord means is, that, if we receive an insult,

¹ Gal. vi. 17.

² The Greek might, also, be rendered by "that which is evil."

³ Job xvi. 10; 2 Cor. xi. 20.

⁴ Lam. iii. 30.

we must not only bear it in love and without resentment, but must also prepare ourselves to endure another in the same spirit.

His own actions are, however, always the best comment upon His words. Isaiah had predicted of Him, that He should give His back to the smiters, and His cheeks to them that plucked off the hair.¹ And, accordingly, we find Him meekly submitting to an officer who smote Him,² and so showing, that He would present no cup to His disciples which He had not Himself first drained to the dregs. But so far was He from literally turning the other cheek to His assailant that, for the good of the officer, He even offered a gentle remonstrance ;—" If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil : but if well, why smitest thou Me ? "

Hence, in the passage before us, He is speaking of the inward feeling to which we must attain, and in the spirit of which we must act : and His command is utterly opposed to the way of this world. For His servant, if he be insulted, must not deem it a point of honour to retaliate and exact vengeance ; but, pitying his angry foe as one blinded by Satan, must quietly bear the injury, and use his best endeavours to avoid provoking the other, and so causing him to add sin to sin.

And, remembering the dread Judgment-to-Come which has been revealed to himself, but of which the other either knows not, or still worse, has not a care, his thoughts will lead him to frame an excuse for his persecutor like that of his Lord, Who prayed even for those who were nailing Him to the tree ;—" Father, forgive them ; for they know not what they do ! " ³

¹ Isa. I. 6.

² John xviii. 22-3.

³ Luke xxiii. 34.

The second illustration, in the fortieth verse, seems somewhat strange at first sight; for we should have expected the cloak, or loose outer garment, to be first taken, and then the coat, or close-fitting tunic—as, indeed, is the case in the parallel passage of Luke.¹ The latter, however, speaks of the actual seizure of the clothes, in which, of course, the outer garment must be the first to be taken. Moreover, Luke wrote for Gentile converts, who were not acquainted with the writings of Moses; and here the reference is to an oppressive lawsuit for the possession of that article of a man's dress which might legally be taken from him, that is, his under-garment. For the Law, wondrous in its humane provisions, did not suffer him to be deprived of his outer-garment, because it was that in which he also slept,² but only sanctioned its detention for a few hours, commanding that it should be restored to him at sunset.³

Hence the meaning of our Lord's injunction is obvious. In bidding His disciples not merely to give up their coats, which might be legally taken from them, but also their cloaks which might not, He intimates, that they are not only to endure hardships which are inflicted with a show of legality, but even those that spring from downright lawlessness.

In what stronger terms could He press the injunction, that they were not to resist evil-doers? And His

¹ Luke vi. 29.

² Just as the Bedouins the Arabs and the Kabyles do now in Asia and Northern Africa. All of these would appreciate the words of the Law respecting the outer-garment in this use, "It is his garment for his skin;" for they are well aware of the danger of sleeping in the open air with the body uncovered.

³ Exod. xxii. 26, 27.

l. e. for themselves. They are also ~~opposed~~ to
witness to others, preach the Gospel &c.

reason for so pressing it is manifest. When conversion has once taken place, the sole object for which His saved ones are left in the world is discipline or sanctification. For they have themselves broken the Law of God, and have, perhaps, continued in disobedience for a long time. Yet He bore with them, and, instead of destroying them, actually found means to reconcile them to Himself. Just, then, as He has dealt tenderly with them, so must they do with other men: they must endeavour to imitate His gracious love in all their dealings with their fellows. For, if we desire peace and communion with our Father Who is in the Heavens, we must strive and pray, that our disposition, and our mind, may become conformed to His.

The Lord's third illustration is taken from the custom of impressing men and horses into the service of the royal courier-post, of the origin and manner of which Herodotus gives the following account;—

“Nothing mortal travels so fast as these Persian messengers. The entire plan is a Persian invention; and this is the method of it. Along the whole line of road, there are men—they say—stationed with horses, in number equal to the number of days which the journey takes, allowing a man and a horse to each day: and these men will not be hindered from accomplishing, at their best speed, the distance which they have to go, either by snow, or rain, or heat, or by the darkness of night. The first rider delivers his despatch to the second, and the second passes it on to the third; and so it is borne from hand to hand along the whole line, like the light in the torch-race which the Greeks celebrate to Vulcan. The

Persians give the riding post in this manner the name of 'Angarum.'" ¹

Now, this Persian custom had been adopted in Palestine, as well as in other countries, and the Jews had an intense aversion to the compulsory service which it entailed. And, indeed, it is easy to see how seriously such a service, involving as it did the impressment of men and horses, must have interfered with agriculture, business, and personal freedom. But it was the duty of the disciple to obey the authorities, and to submit to this inconvenience without murmuring or complaining; nay, to do cheerfully even more than the man who had impressed him required. And so, by his willing and unstinted service, he might possibly soften the heart of the courier, and gain an opportunity of preaching Christ to him. The Lord could illustrate His precepts only by things which were of common occurrence in the times of His earth-life; but we shall not have much difficulty in applying the case of the courier to many circumstances, in which we may find ourselves in these latter days.

Such, then, are the commands of Him Whom we recognize as Saviour and Lord. Ordinary "Christians," and not a few real believers, pay but scanty attention to them, on the ground that such precepts are altogether unsuited to the present state of the world, and must either have been spoken in a figurative sense, or have been intended for a time still in the future, and, perhaps, for the Millennium. ²

But the Lord's words are always to be understood in

¹ Herod. viii. 98. The Persian *Angarum* is, of course, the root of the Greek *ἀγγαρεύω*, to press into courier-service, the word used by Matthew in the verse which we are expounding.

² For a discussion of this objection see pp. 58-62.

their simplest and most literal acceptance, unless they exhibit manifest signs of a figurative meaning. Mystery and darkness that provoke a curiosity which they never satisfy, do, indeed, characterize the oracles of Satan, but the revelations of God come in simplicity and light.

And, again, believers will not be subjected to smiting on the cheek, to the spoiling of their goods, or to governmental oppression, when a King is ruling in righteousness, and He no other than the King of Glory and the Prince of Peace. Vain, therefore, is the attempt to defer obedience to these unwelcome precepts, until a time when there will be no need of them, no circumstances to bring them into play.

Nor is it likely that the Lord, at His First Coming, would have given precepts for the guidance of men in a far distant Age. Nay, the New Dispensation which He had come to introduce was then the great object of His care ; when He comes again, there will be ample opportunity to issue such special laws as may be necessary for the Millennial nations.

Let us, then, cease our hypocritical apologies for disobedience to these commands : they are intended for us, and not for the generations of a distant future : for this Age, and not for that which is to come.

And, if we need further testimony to the literality of this passage, let us glance at the life of the God-Teacher Himself—that life which we all acknowledge to be the only perfect model for our own.

With how great pain did He submit to personal insult and violence when He gave His back to the smiters, and His cheeks to them that plucked off the hair, and hid not His face from shame and spitting !

How wonderfully did He obey the second precept, when He gave up His Godhead, His Throne, and His

Glory, and, for our sakes, became a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, hungering and thirsting, and not having where to lay His head; and still more literally, though in a very minor degree, when He suffered His garments to be taken from Him, and divided among the soldiers!

And how faithfully did He remember the third, when He exposed Himself to hatred by insisting that tribute must be paid to Cæsar, and when He submitted without a murmur to be unjustly condemned, and put to a cruel death, by the rulers of His country!

These facts are His answers to those who call His commandments hard and intolerable, to those who think it strange concerning the fiery trial that comes upon them to prove them, as though some strange thing were happening unto them. "A disciple is not above his master, nor a bond-servant above his lord. It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the bond-servant as his lord."¹

And our Lord when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, threatened not; though He was well aware that He had but to speak the word, and the whole earth would have been filled with the glory of His angelic legions!

What, then, will become of those professed believers, who have not merely scorned the command to endure evil, but have actually drawn their swords against it? In the Great Day, how will it fare with such as have rendered themselves notorious by their unqualified resistance to authority, by deeds of daring and bloodshed, by violently shattering the throne of the oppressor, and that in the Name of Christ!

¹ Matth. x. 24-5.

What will be the fate of those who are ceaselessly going to and fro, in order to persuade the contented that they are down-trodden, to sow disaffection and sedition among those that are quiet, to incite men to loathe honest toil, and rancorously and recklessly to contend for what are called their rights, to stir them up against taxation and the restrictions of law, to teach them to despise dominion, and to make them not afraid to speak evil of dignities; and all this in the pretended cause of Him Who forbade us to resist evil!

O that those who are now active in such labours could be induced to reflect upon their conduct, before the time allowed for repentance has gone by! Of what use is it to argue, against logic and common sense, that the Lord's words do not apply to their particular case? We may easily surround ourselves with illusions that seem to afford sufficient protection for the present. This, however, is not a day of decision and judgment; but a time will come when all the refuges of lies will be swept away. And then many who will have passed for useful servants of Christ upon earth; nay, will have believed themselves to be so, to such an extent, indeed, that, even at the Judgment, they will cry, "Lord, Lord, have we not done mighty works in Thy Name!"—many such will feel, as it were, scales dropping from their eyes, and will at length see, that, while they were talking of service to Christ, they were merely following their own will, feeding their own envy and ambition. For, in answer to their plea, the stern sentence will go forth, "I never knew you: depart from Me, ye that work lawlessness."¹

In the last of His three examples, the Lord has

¹ See the exposition of this verse further on.

bidden us to do, and to exceed, that to which a man would compel us, just as if we were doing it unasked and out of pure love. In the next verse, He goes still further, and tells us, that, if any man should ask of us, who has no power, and, perhaps, no wish, to compel, we must give freely to him, also, of such things as we have. For we must by no means content ourselves with making a virtue of necessity.

Of course, the persons whom the Lord has chiefly in mind when He speaks of those who ask, are the poor, the needy who shall never cease out of the land. And yet sometimes it may be well for us to give up that upon which another has set his heart, even when he cannot properly be said to have need of it, that we may thus save him from the sin of Ahab. For, although we do not better the condition of an irrepentant sinner by the mere prevention of sinful emotions, yet we may keep him from becoming worse, we may check the process of hardening which is going on in his heart, and which is greatly accelerated by the petrifying effects of each single sin.

But there is one other thing which we must remember. Asking is not confined to the tongue. Wherever we see need, there, if we be children of God, we are called upon to relieve it to the uttermost of our ability. For as the beloved Apostle powerfully urges ;—

“Whoso hath the world’s goods, and beholdeth his brother in need, and shutteth up his compassion from him, how doth the love of God abide in him ?”¹

The added clause in reference to borrowing does not merely forbid us to refuse if we are asked, but enjoins,

¹ 1 John iii. 17.

that, if we should suspect any one of coming to us for the purpose of borrowing, we must not turn aside, or endeavour to keep out of his way.

And so, the Lord closes his comment upon the law of retaliation. As soon, however, as we begin to consider the conduct which He here proposes to His people, we cannot but feel bewildered at its utter opposition to our own ideas and inclinations, and may be ready to exclaim, Who is sufficient for these things? Yet let us remember the prayer of the disciples, when the Lord had overwhelmed them with the command to forgive a repentant brother, even if he had sinned against them seven times in the day. For their thoughts took a right course when they cried, "Lord, increase our faith!"¹

If this petition be ours, and it go forth from a pure heart, we shall presently find ourselves able to say with Paul, "I can do all things through Christ Which strengtheneth me."

All-embracing Love and Perfection

43. "Ye heard that it was said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy.

44, 45. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, and pray for them that persecute you, that ye may be sons of your Father Which is in the Heavens: for He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust.

46. For if ye love them that love you, what reward have ye? Do not even the publicans the same?

47. And if ye salute your brethren only, what

¹ Luke xvii. 4, 5.

do ye more than others? Do not even the Gentiles the same?

48. Ye, therefore, shall be perfect, as your Heavenly Father is perfect."

In these verses, the Lord deals with the most daring, perhaps, of all the Jewish corruptions of the Law. God had said;—

"Thou shalt not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people; but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the Lord."¹

And the Pharisees, taking up the clause, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour," had, in opposition to the whole spirit of Divine revelation, added the fiendish inference, "and hate thine enemy." They might easily have discovered, that, in the Old Testament, the term "neighbour," or "friend," was intended to include every one with whom a man comes into contact. For, in more than one passage of the Law, even the adversary in a law-suit is described as a neighbour, and, therefore, as one to be loved. For instance, Moses, in his explanation to Jethro, says;—

"When they have a matter, they come unto me; and I judge between a man and his neighbour."²

Hence the inference of the Pharisees should have been, "Thou shalt love all men, even those who are seeking to injure thee." And how easily might such a conclusion have been justified by passages such as the following;—

"If thou meet thine adversary's ox or his ass going astray, thou shalt surely bring it back to him again."³

¹ Lev. xix. 18.

² Exod. xviii. 16.

³ Exod. xxiii. 4.

“ Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth ;
And let not thine heart be glad when he is
overthrown.”¹

“ If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to
eat ;
And if he be thirsty, give him water to
drink.”²

From these quotations we see, that our Lord’s “ I say unto you,” opposed as it is to the teachings of the Pharisees and of the world, is in perfect accord with both the letter and the spirit of the Old Testament. And His bidding is, that we return love for hatred ; and should that hatred develop into actual persecution, He would have us to lift up holy hands to Heaven in intercession for those who are injuring us.

And the reason which He gives for urging such conduct upon us is, that we may become sons of our Father Who is in the Heavens. But we cannot be His children, unless we are ever meditating upon His actions, and earnestly desiring to be transformed, from one degree of glory to another, into the same image. And how prominent among His characteristics His love for all men is, we may see even in His everyday dealings with them, to say nothing of His stupendous act of mercy in offering them pardon and reconciliation through the sacrifice of His Own Beloved Son—the only way by which He could satisfy at once His justice and His love.

For does not His sun rise upon evil and good men alike—a daily proof of His care for all mankind ? And does not His rain fertilize the fields of the unjust as well as those of the just ?

¹ Prov. xxiv. 17.

² Prov. xxv. 21.

But how fearful an example of the incorrigible enmity of the carnal mind we have in the fact, that this very benevolence is wrested by multitudes, practically if not avowedly, to prove, either that there is no God, or that, if there is, He does not concern Himself with the affairs of men! The very season of His grace and display of tender mercy turned into an occasion of unbelief! But there will never be wanting men to maintain the Bible-character of the fool, by supposing that there is no God, because they do not find Him to be altogether such a one as themselves.

In the next verse, the Lord strips the spurious affection of this world of all its disguise, and presents it to us in its own and real form. So far is it from being universal and inexhaustible, like the love of God, that it actually becomes hatred to its enemies: it is cold and hostile to those who are indifferent to itself: and it loves, though the word seems a pure irony in such a connection, only those of whose congeniality and devotion it is assured. In fine, this so-called love is mere selfishness, and not love at all—as if a man should love his brother only because he is his brother, and so, as it were, a part of himself.

Nevertheless, a natural love for relations is not in itself opposed to the love which the Lord commands: it is only inferior to it, and should, so far as it goes, be both good and holy. But a man must not imagine himself to be distinctively Christ's merely because he exhibits that love; for it is no more than a natural feeling, and is found in the publican and the sinner; nay, in some degree, at least, it belongs even to the brute creation.

Christian love, then, as distinguished from the love of the world, must embrace not only the natural affec-

tions, but also very much more. It yearns to imitate the Great Father Who is in the Heavens, to be neither selfish nor exclusive, but universal, freely bestowing itself upon every one, whether friend or foe, for whom Christ died.

Of course, there is here no hint that we can ever attain to such perfection in the present life; but we must be ever pressing toward it, and must be satisfied with nothing less. We must be continually saying with Paul;—

“Not that I have already obtained, or am already made perfect; but I press on, if so be that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus.”¹

Such an earnest pressing on is what the Lord means by that hunger and thirst after righteousness which He has pledged Himself to satisfy to the full, in due time. For, if we endure with Him unto the end, we shall ultimately attain to unselfish love, like that of our Heavenly Father. The time is not far distant when even perfection shall be ours, through Him That loved us and gave Himself for us; and how glorious is the vista which this fact reveals to us!

To become perfect even as God is perfect, holy as He is holy: like Him to be love, not merely to have or to practise it: to be it in essence, so that we shall be absolutely incapable of thought word or deed which does not spring from it! And to be this for ever: to be so enfolded in the Everlasting Arms that none can ever again thrust us out of the ineffable light into this outside darkness, from which we are now being gently led!

Surely, with the aid of the gracious Spirit of God,

¹ Phil. iii. 12.

we may draw from such thoughts a good courage to face the temptations of the world the flesh and the Devil, and to count all things as dross, if we may but win Christ, and attain to the resurrection out from among the dead.

Acts of Righteousness

VI. 1. "Take heed that ye do not your righteousness before men, to be seen of them : else ye have no reward with your Father Which is in the Heavens."

Having thus ended His comments upon the Law, the Lord now proceeds to remark upon the three acts of alms-giving prayer and fasting, which, in all the notable religions and systems of men, have been regarded as the chief means of salvation, and as the greatest proofs of righteousness and sanctity. For, provided any of these acts be reckoned as something done for salvation, the idea is intelligible and reasonable to fallen men, who, unless they be absolutely insane, cannot but feel that they are fallen. Hence, in their more serious moments, at least, they are ready to practise some degree of self-denial, or to perform some definite task, in the hope that they may thereby appease the Great God, of Whose wrath they are conscious.

In the teaching of Mohammed, prayer fasting and alms are the practical duties of the Mussulman. Prayer, it is said, will carry a man half-way to Paradise, fasting will bring him to the gates, and alms will gain him admittance.

What prominence the Church of Rome assigns to alms-giving—especially when the alms are bestowed upon herself and her hierarchical legions—to the senseless repetition of prayers, and to fasting and bodily

mortification, is well known. And similar ideas are found among the Buddhists, in Lamaism with its prayer-wheels, and in many other religions.

But the Lord shows, that, as mere formal works, these acts are useless ; that they can avail with Jehovah, only when they are done spontaneously, from an earnest desire to respond to the love of God, and to seek His Kingdom and righteousness. For, in itself, the service or the gift is as nothing to Him, seeing that He has millions of glorious beings ever waiting to do His will, and owns, not only the earth and its fulness, but also the whole of the vast universe. His object in all that He has commanded is, not to exact anything from us, but to wean and purify us from our selfishness, pride, and hatred of dependence, and so to make us fit to stand before Him as the ministers of His love. Therefore, He will accept from us neither service nor gift, if it be merely formal, or if it be forced out of us by superstitious fear : for that only is pleasing to Him which springs from a heart moved by gratitude and love.

The so-called acts of righteousness are, however, specially offensive in His sight when they are paraded by one who would thereby procure himself a reputation of sanctity among his fellows. Hence the Lord warns us not to do our acts of righteousness,¹ or good

¹ Literally, "your righteousness;" for undoubtedly, this is the true reading in the first verse of the sixth chapter, and not "alms," which was adopted by the translators of the Authorized Version. Probably, the latter was originally a mistaken gloss, intended to explain righteousness, and so found its way into the text. But "righteousness" here evidently includes the three acts of righteousness of which the Lord proceeds to speak. It is an instance of the use of an abstract noun in a concrete sense, which would ordinarily be expressed in Greek by putting the abstract noun into the plural number. Thus it is really equivalent in meaning to "righteous," or "good works," and is similarly used in Matth. iii. 15 and v. 20.

works, "before men, to be seen of them." By these words we are not, of course, forbidden to do good works if others should happen to be looking on. Such a prohibition would often be a hindrance to us; and would, moreover, deprive others of the benefit of our example, and of seeing in our reflected light the glory of our Heavenly Father. Nay, if what we did were always hidden, our conduct might even be used as a pretext by one who is ashamed of his Lord.

The key to the precept lies, then, in the words "to be seen of them." We may do good in the sight of men; but, if our object be to be seen and approved by them, let us not be so foolish as to hope, also, for the approval of God. And, even if our motive be mixed, and, while really wishing to please God, we are also eager for the praise of our fellows, we may not look for acceptance with Him. "I receive not glory from men,"¹ said the Lord: and presently He continued, "How can ye believe, which receive glory one of another."²

In the great type of devotion which He has given to us, the Burnt Offering, the animal, after it had been first bared of its skin, and divided into its pieces—so that no blemish even in its inward parts or joints might escape notice—was then placed entire upon the altar, and ascended in smoke to the Lord. So we, if we would please Him, must follow Him wholly, as Joshua and Caleb did, and must give Him all our heart.

Hence, what He here bids us is, that we should do our deeds of righteousness in a natural way, just as they are presented to us, neither seeking nor shunning the face of men, but ever praying and watching against any desire for, or even thought of, their commendation.

¹ John v. 41.

² John v. 44.

Of course, in saying, "When thou givest alms," or "prayest," or "fastest," the Lord very evidently takes for granted that His disciples will do all these things. For, otherwise, how could they follow in the steps of a Master Who never sent those that came to Him away empty; Who, in the days of His flesh, offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying unto Him That was able to save Him from death; and Who so often found His only meat and drink in doing His Father's will?

Alms-giving

2. "When, therefore, thou doest alms, sound not a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have received their reward.

3, 4. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth, that thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father Which seeth in secret shall recompense thee."

The words, "sound not a trumpet before thee," may very possibly allude to a custom of the Pharisees at the time, although no trace of it seems hitherto to have been discovered. Or the expression may be proverbial, with a reference to the use of trumpets for summoning assemblies, or for calling people together to some grand spectacle.

The word "hypocrite" is very significant, since it properly denotes an actor who wears a mask, and plays his part from behind it. And so, the hypocrites of which the Lord spoke were no sincere worshippers of God or lovers of their fellows, but only wished, for

their own selfish ends, to appear as such before men. Hence they chose the synagogues and the streets as the places in which to give their alms, and used every effort and artifice to attract the attention of others to their feigned generosity. In many cases they were, doubtless, successful, and in receiving the applause of the bystanders had their reward in full—such is the literal meaning of the Greek : so that there would be nothing more reserved for them on the Great Day.

If, then, we would please Him, it is not for us to put a trumpet to our mouth with the left hand, while we are feeding or otherwise helping the needy with our right : nay, our left hand must not even know what our right hand is doing. As soon as we have been enabled to effect any work for Christ, we must, from that moment, dismiss all thought of it from our mind, and press on to what is before us. So may our alms be truly in secret, and our heart be kept pure from worldly considerations. And, although we may altogether forget what we have done, we need not fear that our Heavenly Father will do so : for He sees our most secret actions, and fails not to write them in the Book of His Remembrance. And, when that Book is opened for judgment, we shall know the full meaning of the words, “He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the Lord : and his good deed will He pay him again.”¹

Prayer

5. “And when ye pray, ye shall not be as the hypocrites : for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that

¹ Prov. xix. 17.

they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have received their reward.

6. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thine inner chamber, and having shut thy door, pray to thy Father Which is in secret, and thy Father Which seeth in secret shall recompense thee.

7. And, in praying, use not vain repetitions, as the Gentiles do ; for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.

8. Be not, therefore, like unto them ; for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask Him."

Such are the Lord's precepts concerning prayer, and well worthy are they of our most careful attention. First of all, He warns us not to pray for mere ostentation, to be seen of men, as the hypocrites do. Neither the synagogues—or, as we should now say, the churches and chapels—nor the corners of the streets, are suitable places for private devotion. In churches, or chapels, or other convenient rooms, we must, of course, meet at fixed times for congregational and public worship : but what a rebuke does the Lord here administer to those who would keep churches perpetually open, on the ground that men ought to use them for private prayer in preference to their own inner chambers. As if churches were nearer to the Throne of Grace than other places ! As if Paul had not declared, that the "Lord of Heaven and Earth dwelleth not in temples made with hands," but "is not far from each one of us!"¹ As if the Lord Jesus had not abolished all localization of worship, when He said to the woman of Samaria ;—

¹ Acts xvii. 24, 27.

“Woman, believe Me, the hour cometh, when neither in this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, shall ye worship the Father But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth: for such doth the Father seek to be His worshippers.”¹

If, then, a church be left open during the week solely for the convenience of those who have no private chamber of their own, there is little to be urged against such a practice, provided it be distinctly understood, that no peculiar sanctity attaches to a “consecrated” building, and that prayer in such a place is no more efficacious than elsewhere.

Yet experience teaches us, that even this concession is inexpedient, and should be avoided if possible: for it is certain to be abused before long. The Lord’s direction to worship the Father in spirit, because He is Spirit, is a hard saying to flesh and blood; and carnal men, finding themselves swept out of their depth by such a command, are prone to catch at any straw of materialism that floats by them, to recognize a “consecrated” building as a privileged temple of God; and an image, or a cross, as a visible and intelligible object through which to worship Him.

To return, then, to our subject, we must not go into public places to pray, and love to hear men whispering, “What a holy, what a devout man!” Or, if we will do so, we must be prepared for the result: we may, perhaps, obtain the praises of men which we desire, but shall therein receive our reward in full: there will be nothing more reserved for us. For when the Lord returns, bringing His reward with Him, the hope of

¹ John iv. 21, 23.

the insincere shall perish. How terrible will be the disclosures of That Day, when the counsels and motives of men shall be revealed, and that not only to others, but, in many cases, even to themselves. For, if any one cares not to retain God in his heart, he is given up to a working of error, so that he actually believes his own lie.

To the true disciple, then, the Lord says, But, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, if thou hast one; or, otherwise, find some secret place where the eye of man cannot see thee, and where thou mayest be affected as little as possible by material surroundings. And there pray to thy Father, Who, though He fills all things, is also Himself hidden from the senses of men, and Whose Presence can only be felt when the body and soul are more or less paralysed by the withdrawal of the sights and sounds of this world, so that the spirit, gaining for a moment its rightful ascendancy, can thrill our whole being with its pantings after God, even the Living God.

So must we pray, unseen by our fellows, but seen by the invisible Father, Who will not forget our prayers and aspirations on That Day for which all creation is groaning, when the Sons of God, now unknown and indistinguishable, shall be manifested, and shine forth as the sun in the Kingdom of their Father.

Then, again, in prayer we must not use those unspiritual repetitions which are so common in man-made religions. We must not imitate the Buddhist with his interminable *Om mani padme aum*, nor the Roman Catholic reiterating his Pater Nosters and Ave Marias, and carefully recording their number with his beads, as if so senseless a process could bring down the blessing of God upon his head. Those who practise

such things would, perhaps, fear to lie upon their beds, unless they had first gone through some habitual form of words, the mere repetition of which satisfies them. For they, virtually at least, regard prayer as a kind of mechanical service required of them, and know nothing of the living spirit's aspiration to the God from Whom it came. And yet, if this aspiration be wanting, words are but a useless babbling: nor, indeed, are they absolutely essential to prayer.

Do not, then, the Lord continues, be like the Gentiles, that is, the Pagan or unbelieving nations: do not recite formularies over and over again, vainly imagining that, if they be repeated so many times, they must be efficacious. And, finally, do not make long and elaborate prayers, explaining too minutely the circumstances of your request; for your Father knows all before you begin to speak, and does not require a long-drawn account of your matters, but only an earnest, and at the same time submissive, appeal for His aid. Assume, then, His foreknowledge, just as the Lord Jesus did in Gethsemane, when He said;—

“O My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass away from Me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt.”¹

That prayer was, indeed, repeated three times: but the Lord had forbidden only *vain* repetitions, not those that are wrung from us by the agony of our desire. In such a case, there is no need to check either repetitions or lengthened prayers; no, not even if we be sustained, as the Master sometimes was, to pray all the night. For, although He does, indeed, forbid much speaking, He has never forbidden much praying.

¹ Matth. xxvi. 39.

In the words, "For your Father knoweth," we may find an answer to all the objections urged against prayer on the ground, that God cannot upset the order of His universe at the request of any one who asks Him to do so. For not only are all our needs, future as well as present, known to Him, but even before He sent us into the world, He knew what we were, what discipline we needed, and whether or not it would avail in the case of each one of us. This is why we find Him declaring of the children of Rebecca, before they were born, or had done anything good or bad, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated." For such predestination, as both Peter and Paul declare,¹ is founded upon His perfect foreknowledge of the spirit which He is clothing with flesh, and of the effect which will be produced upon it by the succession of events through which, in His wisdom, He has foredetermined to guide it.

And, since this succession of events has been framed by One faultless in wisdom, almighty in power, and with absolutely perfect foreknowledge, there must be in it provision for every possible contingency, including arrangements for its due answer to every real and acceptable prayer which the spirit will offer during its earth-life. For, otherwise, God could never have pledged Himself to grant the prayer of the humble.

But, if any one should further object, that it is impossible for God to foreknow every minute incident which is to happen to every living soul upon earth; we could only reply, that such an objector neither understands what God is, nor believes in Him. Otherwise, how could he dare to limit the capabilities of the Supreme Creator and Lord of all things by the con-

¹ 1 Pet. i. 1, 2; Rom. viii. 29.

ception of his own little mind! For little it must be, indeed, seeing that he is, not merely a created and finite being, confined by the bounds of a very small world, but has also fallen from his first estate, and lost he knows not how much of those powers which, had neither his first father nor himself ever sinned, he would have possessed as his own natural birthright.

His conduct, then, shows, that he has not the faintest conception of what God is: he has never even learned that the things which are impossible with men are possible with God.

The Lord's Prayer

9. "After this manner, therefore, pray ye;—
Our Father, Which art in the Heavens,
Hallowed be Thy Name.
10. Thy Kingdom come.
Thy will be done, as in Heaven,¹ so on earth.
11. Give us this day our needful bread.
12. And forgive us our debts, as we also forgave² our debtors.
13. And bring us not into temptation; but deliver us from the Evil One.
For Thine is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for the Ages. Amen.
14. For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you.
15. But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Heavenly Father forgive your trespasses."

¹ ἐν οὐρανῷ in the singular number. Hence the reference must be to the First Heaven, which is immediately above us.

² ἀφήκαμεν.

Bearing in mind, then, what the Lord has already said, using neither vain repetitions nor much speaking, and remembering, that our Father knoweth what things we need before we ask Him; so must we pray. He does not, however, bid us to pray in the very words which He uttered, but only "after this manner:" for He would by no means confine us to the letter of His model-prayer—the variations in the texts of Matthew and Luke warn us against such a conclusion as that. But its spirit is to be our pattern, its simplicity, and the character of the petitions which it contains. How necessary it is, then, that we should thoroughly understand it, especially since, having been taught to repeat its words from our childhood, we can scarcely avoid a tendency to use them mechanically, without realizing what we are saying.

Indeed, many go through them merely because they have been trained to do so, little suspecting, that a response to their requests would bring down ruin upon their heads, and, perhaps, close the door of hope upon them for ever.

For the prayer was not intended to be used indiscriminately, but only by the saved children of God. Hence it entreats for the coming of the Kingdom, an event which will bring the present order of things to an end, and cause the destruction of the godless world.

And, again, it contains no petition for the forgiveness of sin; but only entreats for the pardon of those daily transgressions, which, even in the case of the redeemed, are the painful consequence of our sojourn in the body of this death.

And for those who have been thus washed from their sin, so that they are clean every whit, and need not save to wash their feet, how appropriate is the whole prayer!

For what are the circumstances of one whose eyes have been opened by the Spirit of God? Such a one perceives, that he is placed in a world estranged from, and hostile to, his Heavenly Father, which, through sin, is separated from the pure and happy regions of the Universe, and kept in a perpetual fever of uncertainty unrest and pain. He sees, that his fellows around him are continually increasing the evil in which they are involved, by a spirit of proud rebellion against their Creator, and an attitude of contemptuous apathy, if not of fierce hostility, toward His offers of reconciliation and love. He finds, too, the workings of sin in his own body; so that often, to his grief, he is led into transgression by his fleshly lusts, by the influence of his fellows or his circumstances, or directly by the invisible Power of Darkness.

What, then, would be the feelings naturally aroused in him by such experiences? Would not his first impulse be an earnest, nay a passionate yearning for the fulfilment of God's promise to put an end to the fearful reign of Satan, and to establish the Kingdom of His Own Beloved Son?

And, if he could see no sign of the immediate realization of this glorious change, would not his first aspiration be followed by a humble entreaty for the supply of his necessities during the interval, for the forgiveness of his daily sins, and for his preservation from the evil within and without himself, until the time of the Kingdom should be come? And this is precisely the line of thought which we shall find worked out in the Lord's Prayer.

Addressing the Great God as Our Father Who is in the Heavens, it goes on to urge, in three petitions, that the restoration of this fallen world may be hastened

through its predicted stages, until the will of God be done absolutely and perfectly both in the earth beneath and in its own heaven above it. Then follow four other petitions, for sustenance bodily and spiritual, for the forgiveness of daily trespasses, for the avoidance of temptation, and for deliverance from the Evil One, during the time which the believer has yet to spend in the present world.

Lastly, in the doxology—which, for reasons presently to be given, we prefer to retain—the disciple testifies to his loyalty. For, although the usurper still sits on the throne of this world, and gives its good things to whomsoever he wills, yet the rightful sovereignty is declared to belong to God Alone. Moreover, the power, also, is ascribed to Him, both the power to take to Himself the Kingdom in His Own time, and, till then, to sustain and protect His people, and to lead them in safety through the land of the Enemy. Finally, the glory of the earth, now claimed by Satan and humanity, likewise belongs to Him, and to Him Alone.

Such, then, seems to be the general meaning of the Lord's Prayer: we must now examine in detail the petitions of which it is composed.

The first words, "Our Father," plainly indicate for whose use the prayer is intended. It is for those only who have received the spirit of adoption, so that they can cry, "Abba Father;" for those who have accepted the salvation of God with lowly and thankful hearts, and feel that He Who has done such great things for them must, indeed, be their Father, in Whom, as little children, they can implicitly and unreservedly trust.

And, how great is the certainty of acceptance which this word "Father" involves! How, even before we begin to pray, does it strengthen our faith by the

suggestion, that He Who stands in so intimate a relation to us will withhold no good thing from us ! And so, in helping us to believe that we shall receive that for which we ask—provided it be expedient for us—it enables us to fulfil the condition upon which the Lord has promised an answer.¹

It is to be observed, that we are not directed to say “My Father,” but “Our Father.” For we can approach the Throne of Grace only through the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the same privilege is accorded, for the same reason, to every member of the invisible Church. Therefore, we must recognize the communion of saints, the fact that we are all one in Christ, all members of His Body.

The clause, “Who art in the Heavens,” at once sweeps away those Pantheistic notions which would identify God with nature, or creation. For it sets Him before us as a Personal Being, dwelling in a defined locality, that is, in the Heaven of Heavens, and calls upon us to lift our hearts, with our hands, thitherwards. Nor need we be discouraged when we think of the vast distance from us of His abode : for His Spirit pervades all things, and Himself tells us, that, although He inhabits eternity and dwells in the High and Holy Place, He, nevertheless, condescends to abide “with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.”²

The plural of the Greck word for Heaven here signifies—as it always, or nearly always, does in the New Testament—the system of sinless Heavens in which God dwells. In the third petition of this prayer,

¹ Mark xi. 24.

² Isa. lvii. 15.

the singular of the same word denotes the Heaven which surrounds and belongs to the earth.

Now, if we sincerely regard God as our Father, we cannot but desire, that He should, also, be recognized and honoured as such by all mankind; while the thought, that His Glorious Person is far distant in the Heavens, and can never tabernacle with men until sin and death be removed from the earth, should remind us, that we live in an estranged and rebellious world, and even in ourselves retain too much of its unruly spirit. And so, our first cry must be, May the holiness of Thy Name be realized both by us and by all the fallen children of men upon earth. Thus the prayer begins with no selfish petition, but with a yearning for the glory of God. For, although its request does, indeed, embrace holiness for ourselves, yet it does not do so directly, but entreats that both ourselves and others may be enabled to acknowledge and reverence the holiness of God, in doing which we cannot but become gradually assimilated to that which we reverence in Him: and so, in His light, we shall ourselves see light.

From this desire for the recognition of our Heavenly Father's holiness, we are led on to ask, that the whole race of mankind, and the earth itself, may be delivered out of the hands of Satan, its present evil Prince, and be placed under the direct rule of the Heavens. But so glorious a consummation can never be brought about by any human efforts, however sincere and zealous they may be: it can be effected only by the return of the Lord Jesus, and His reign in righteousness, that is, by the establishment of the Kingdom, or Sovereignty, of the Heavens.

Now, this Kingdom is not, as many seem to think,

the present divided and much erring visible body which men call "the Church;" nor is it even those elect ones now upon earth, whom the Lord Himself would recognize as members of His Body. But it is the Spiritual Government, which, from the Heaven above, will rule this world in the next Age, acting in close union with the Fifth Empire of Nebuchadnezzar's vision, which will form its Sphere upon earth. It is the Kingdom of "the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel,"¹ which neither appeared at the First Advent, when the Fourth or Roman Empire was one and undivided, nor even in later years, when the same had been riven, and become two distinct Empires, the Eastern and the Western, as represented by the Legs of the Image. But the whole Roman Empire will shortly be meted out to Ten Kings, who are represented by the Ten Iron-clay Toes of the Image, and whose Kingdoms will be partly monarchical and partly democratic. "And, in the days of those Kings, will the God of the Heavens set up a Kingdom that shall never be destroyed." Upon the Iron-clay Feet will the Stone suddenly descend with such might that the whole Image will be ground to powder, and so be carried away by the wind, like the chaff of the summer threshing-floor. And it is not until the demolition is completed that the Stone begins to grow, and, finally, becomes a great mountain and fills the whole earth.

The interpretation of this latter part of the vision is very simple. For, when the appointed years of Gentile supremacy have come to their end, God will look down, as He did before the Flood; and, finding that the world has altogether forgotten Jehovah, that evil men and

¹ Gen. xlix. 24.

seducers are waxing worse and worse, and that the earth is corrupt and filled with violence and bloodshed, He will cause the Son of Man to be invested with dominion and glory, and send Him forth to destroy the evil powers, to set up His Own Kingdom, and so to restore order peace and righteousness.¹

Then, at length, the Child That was born unto Israel, the Son That was given to him, nineteen hundred years ago, will take the government upon His shoulder.² And so will be fulfilled those words ;—

“ Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and He shall reign as King and deal wisely, and shall execute judgment and justice in the Land.”³

Then, too, those who have loved the Lord, and kept His commandments in the long night of the present Age, shall be made priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him, from the Heaven above, for a thousand years.⁴

How glorious a change will then be effected ! The whole earth will be at rest, and be quiet ; they will break forth into singing.⁵ Who can wonder when he reads, that the fir trees and the cedars of Lebanon will rejoice at the return of the Lord to rule in righteousness ; that the floods will clap their hands, and the hills be joyful together.

Thus in the words, “ Thy Kingdom come ! ” that for which we are bidden to pray is the great Sabbath-rest that remains for the people of God, the Millennial reign. And we must not only pray, but must also use every effort to spread the Gospel among all those who may at

¹ Dan. vii. 13, 14.

² Isa. ix. 6.

³ Jer. xxiii. 5.

⁴ Rev. xx. 6.

⁵ Isa. xiv. 7.

any time be within our reach. For, until every member of the Body which is to reign with Christ in the First Heaven be gathered in, it is impossible for the glorious change to take place on the earth. Hence, whenever the Spirit of God gives us grace to turn a sinner from the evil of his ways, we may have removed an obstacle to the coming of the Kingdom, and to the disappearance of the sin and misery which are now polluting the face of the earth.

But, glorious as will be the times of the Kingdom, they will not be absolutely faultless. For, although the Heaven will have been completely purified, and the Lord and His redeemed have taken the place of Satan and his angels, there will not be perfect harmony upon earth. Every man will, indeed, know the Lord; and sin will only lurk in the caves and holes of the earth, not daring to come out except in the dark. It will not, however, be completely extirpated; and so, death will not be altogether banished from the world, and the curse, though scarcely distinguishable, will not be entirely removed. Therefore, the Father will still remain in the Heavens; for He cannot dwell where sin and death are found.

And hence the believer is taught to yearn for still greater things than those of which we have just spoken, even for the final consummation of redemption, when obedience will be rendered as perfectly on the earth beneath as it will have been, since the Millennial Eve, in the Heaven above it. For Christ "must reign, till He hath put *all* His enemies under His feet."¹ He must subdue the Postmillennial and last of all rebellions. He must sit in judgment upon the Great White Throne,

¹ 1 Cor. xv. 25.

and cast Satan Death and Hades into the Lake of Fire and Brimstone.

“And when all things have been subjected unto Him, then shall the Son also Himself be subjected to Him That did subject all things unto Him, that God may be all in all.”¹

For then, at last, will the earth and its inhabitants be for ever cleansed from the taint of sin, and the will of God be done on the earth, as well as in the Heaven that belongs to it. And, every hindrance having been thus removed, the Father Himself will leave the Heavens, and come down to the now restored and ever blessed earth; and a great voice will be heard out of the Throne, saying;—

“Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He shall dwell with them, and they shall be His peoples, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God.”²

To so remote a future does the third petition reach; and we may now notice, that the three clauses, which we have already considered, refer successively to the present Dispensation, to the Millennium, and to the final and Eternal State.

How powerfully does such a contemplation, if it be directed by the Holy Spirit, tend to nerve the believer for whatever trials he may have to encounter during the short pilgrimage of pain and peril which lies between him and the Heavenly Glory. And so, after he has been first reminded of it and strengthened by the joy of the future, he is in a better condition to consider his present needs sins and dangers. He has prayed, that the Kingdom may come, and that both earth and its

¹ 1 Cor. xv. 28.

² Rev. xxi. 3.

Heaven may be made perfectly obedient to God : now he must intreat, that his whole spirit soul and body may be so preserved as to be found blameless at the Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.¹

In the fourth place, then, with a view to the preservation of his body, he is to ask, that his daily bread may be given to him, and his water made sure—a petition which would, probably, have been the first in the prayer of the natural man, but must not be so with him.

“ Seek ye first His Kingdom, and His righteousness ; and all these things shall be added unto you.”²

We are, however, permitted to ask for bodily sustenance, also, in its proper place ; for, unless we receive it, we can do no active work for our God, and our earth-life itself must come to a speedy end.

But the Lord does not allow us to ask for superabundance or riches : that point He has been careful to guard by the adjective by which He has qualified “ bread,” and which undoubtedly means, not “ daily,” but “ needful for sustenance,” or “ sufficient for our needs.”³ The petition is, therefore, in exact accord with that of Agur ;—

“ Remove far from me vanity and lies ;
Give me neither poverty nor riches :
Feed me with the food that is needful for
me.”⁴

¹ 1 Thess. v. 23.

² Matth. vi. 33.

³ Ἐπιούσιος, from the preposition ἐπί and οὐσία which means existence or subsistence (Luke xv. 12). Hence upon the analogy of ἐπιγάμος “ fit for marriage,” etc., we may understand ἐπιούσιος to mean fit, proper, or sufficient, for subsistence. The objections to this derivation can be easily refuted,

⁴ Prov. xxx. 8.

Let us, however, observe, that what we are to ask for is "our bread." But we must not emasculate this expression by explaining it as if it meant "the bread that was created for us, and so properly belongs to us." No, it points to something far more practical, which is well illustrated by Paul's command to the Thessalonians, "that with quietness they should work, and eat their own bread;"¹ and by his rule, "If any will not work, neither let him eat."²

And, of course, this rule applies to the rich man just as much as to the poor: for he who is under no necessity to labour for his own food is none the less subject to the sentence "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread,"³ and must work, in the Lord's service, for the benefit of his fellows. But, in the present Dispensation, God often leaves men to choose whether they will obey His commands or not. Such, however, will not be His way of dealing with them after death, when all who, for the sake of ease or indulgence, have refused to work upon earth will realize the meaning of those words of doom;—

"Son, remember, that thou in thy life-time receivedst thy good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things: but now here he is comforted, and thou art in anguish."⁴

Lastly, to the enlightened believer this petition will express much more than the desire for bodily sustenance. It will, also, mean, Give us this day such spiritual food as will be sufficient for our needs, that we may be strengthened with might in the inner man!

The next words, "Forgive us our debts," are not the

¹ 2 Thess. iii. 12.

³ Gen. iii. 19.

² 2 Thess. iii. 10.

⁴ Luke xvi. 25.

cry of an unpardoned sinner who has realized his lost condition. For such a one requires, not only the forgiveness of sinful acts, but, also, deliverance from his sinful nature: nor can he pray for others, until he has himself been accepted. Forgive me my sin, would have been the first petition, had the prayer been intended for him.

Here, then, we have the intreaty of one already saved, that the daily transgressions of his still imperfect condition, and the many short-comings of his service to the Lord Jesus, may be graciously pardoned. And the prayer should check anything like presumption or spiritual pride, reminding us, as it does, how continually we need the cleansing Blood to wash away the stains of our oft-repeated trespasses.

The clause, "as we forgave," is by no means intended to imply merit on our part for the act, but is added to warn us, that God will not forgive us, unless we ourselves, also, are willing to forgive others. For we cannot be allowed to ask from Him that which we refuse to our fellows. And so, by the introduction of this clause, the believer is constrained, whenever he would use the prayer, to cast away every feeling of anger and revenge, and to abide in love with all men. For, unless he can forgive wrongs done to himself, he may not dare to utter the words prescribed by his Lord, lest they should ascend to God in the awful form, "Forgive me not my debts; for I will not forgive my debtors."

Thus, in the fifth petition, we ask for the pardon of our daily transgressions; but, in the sixth, we go further, and pray that the Lord will be pleased to keep us from that which causes us to commit them, namely, from temptation.

Now the very fact, that we are directed to pray for

the avoidance of temptation, sets vividly before us the perils of the world in which we live, ever exposed, as we are, to evil suggestions, enticements, and deceptions, from within and from without. For our bodily senses, our depraved appetites and desires, our selfishly biased minds, and, in more advanced enlightenment, our proneness to spiritual pride and presumption, are all as so much inflammable matter, ready to burst into a blaze as soon as they are touched by one of the fiery darts of Satan.

Of course, we must understand, "Lead us not into temptation," to mean, Suffer us not to be led into temptation; for, as James warns us;—

"Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, and He Himself tempteth no man.

But each man is tempted, when he is drawn away by his own lust, and enticed."¹

A glance at the connection between this petition and the one which precedes it will, however, readily disclose the meaning of the words now under our consideration. If we do not repent of our daily trespasses, and intreat for their forgiveness, they will rise up one after another, like thick clouds, between us and our God; and we shall gradually lose our consciousness of, and become estranged from, Him. Then His unseen protection, which wards off the spiritual influences of evil, will be withdrawn, and the hedge that is set about us will be removed. And so, for a time, we may be tempted still further into iniquity by the triumphant spirits of the air, until, at last, we begin to feel that the way of transgressors is hard, and to send up an anguished cry to the Heavens for pardon and deliverance.

¹ James i. 13, 14.

Thus the sense of the two petitions seems to be, "Blot out, O Lord, the guilt, and destroy the power over us, of our daily trespasses, that Thou mayest save us from further temptation!"

Finally, in the seventh petition, we are bidden to ask for deliverance from the Evil One, the great source of temptation sin and misery, the organizer and leader of all the evil Principalities, Powers, and World-rulers of this Darkness, and of the Innumerable Spiritual Hosts of Wickedness in the Heavenly Places. For both he and all that pertain to him are bent upon the destruction of our race, and wield a power far beyond our capabilities of resistance, if we be left to carry on the conflict alone.

Hence our only hope is in the help of God, Who sends forth His angels as ministering spirits, to minister unto them that shall be heirs of salvation, to encamp round about the righteous, and to deliver him.

Of the conflicts of these angels with the hierarchy of Satan, the Bible does not leave us in ignorance. See, for instance, the tenth chapter of Daniel, the episode of Elisha and his servant in the city of Dothan,¹ and the predicted war in Heaven, which will end with the expulsion of Satan, the Deceiver of the whole world, by the Archangel Michael.²

Some idea of the way in which the Power of Darkness works against true believers in God may be drawn from the stories of Job Peter and Paul. But, in each case, the Almighty and Over-ruling God turned that which was planned and carried out in malice into blessing to its intended victim—even as all things must

¹ 2 Kings vi. 8-23.

² Rev. xii. 7-12.

“work together for good to them that love God, and are the called according to His purpose.”

One notable incident in Paul's life, that bears upon this subject, has been often misunderstood, and a brief explanation of it may, perhaps, be useful. Wondrous visions and revelations had been vouchsafed to the Apostle, and he, consequently, fell into a danger, of which he speaks thus;—

“And by reason of the exceeding greatness of the revelations—wherefore, that I should not be exalted overmuch, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, an angel of Satan to buffet me, that I should not be exalted overmuch.”¹

Now, countless pages of comment have been written upon this “thorn in the flesh,” which has been supposed to be bad eyes, epileptic fits, and various other afflictions, but without any certain conclusion. Let us, however, cease to burden and obscure the sacred text by reading human notions into it, but accept rather its own simple and plain words. We shall then see, that the thorn in the flesh was no mere disease or infirmity, but precisely what it is said to have been, that is, an angel of Satan sent to buffet the Apostle. This ever-active foe would be perpetually assailing him with the many hindrances and annoyances, which are so well known to the true servant of Christ; would often be whispering in his ear incongruous, evil, and even foul thoughts, certain, should he fail to cast them off before they became his own, to check the inflow of spiritual power from the Holy Ghost; would sometimes draw over him a feeling of nervous lassitude, a weariness and feebleness of body and mind, just at the critical

¹ 2 Cor. xii. 7.

moment when it was necessary that he should be strong; would bring about disconcerting incidents, craftily devised to shake his faith, or to irritate his temper; and, in short, would baffle and thwart him at every turn, taking the fullest advantage of any circumstance that could be used for his discomfort and discouragement. Henceforth, then, this dread spirit would be ever hovering near the Apostle, who would be able to do the work for which he had been sent forth, only by dint of ceaseless prayer and a humble walk before his God—a life of peril and danger, of creeping ever, as it were, along the brink of a precipice, which must have powerfully counteracted any tendency to undue elation.

Thus a comprehension of this instructive incident throws much light upon the hindering and damaging influence which Satan is able to exercise against true believers. And, if any reader should now be trembling beneath such an influence, let him take courage as he remembers, that he is suffering only that which Paul endured in much greater severity; and that all power in Heaven and upon earth is given to our Great Lord, Who will soon make every faithful disciple more than conqueror, even as He did His beloved Apostle Paul.

After the seventh and last petition, intreating for deliverance from the great Adversary, a doxology completes the Prayer, which, otherwise, would end abruptly, and contain no ascription of praise.

But, in our hypercritical age, it is usual to regard this final clause as indisputably spurious, and so, to dismiss it with the remark, that it was, probably, foisted in the sacred text, during the Fourth Century, from some ecclesiastical liturgy.

The main reason given for this judgment is, that

the doxology does not appear in the earlier Uncial Manuscripts—two of which are supposed to belong to the Fourth Century; moreover, it is not found in the Vulgate, nor is it quoted by the early Latin Fathers. And, undoubtedly, these are facts hard to explain. But, on the other hand, a doxology is found in the Peshito Version of the Second Century, the oldest known Version in the world; and, also, in "The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles," which scholars agree in referring to the latter part of the First Century.

It would thus seem, that a doxology was not wanting in some copies, at least, of the Lord's Prayer, which were being circulated in the First and Second Centuries.

Other reasons for its omission may be easily met, and a careful survey of the evidence on both sides—the details of which would be out of place in the present volume—makes us feel, with Scrivener, that we may, at least, "be excused for regarding the indictment against the last clause of the Lord's Prayer as hitherto unproven." And so, we venture to retain it.

Its sentiments are in perfect harmony with that which precedes. In asking for protection from the reigning but rebel Prince of This World, we have implied that the Lord is the rightful Sovereign, and so, naturally proceed to make an enthusiastic profession of loyalty to Him, even while we are in the midst of His enemies, and still under the sway of the Usurper. It is as though we said, The Kingdom belongs to Thee, and not to him. Yea, and, at any moment, Thou art able to take to Thyself Thy great power and reign. And the glory of earth, as well as that of Heaven and of the Heaven of Heavens, is Thine, and shall ere long be concentrated upon Thee.

Here, then, the Prayer reverts to the great hope of all the saints—whether they belong to the Church or to Israel—to the Millennial Age of rest and reward, when the Glory of the Lord shall be revealed, “and all flesh shall see the Salvation of God;”¹ when the great words shall be an accomplished fact;—

“All the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord:”²

when the prophetic present tense of the Seraphim,

“Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of Hosts,
Filling the whole earth is His glory!”³

shall have become a literal and visible present.

And so, the Prayer ends appropriately with a fervent ascription of praise, involving, also, the brightest hope to him who offers it. Nevertheless, something additional seems to be rendered necessary by one of the Lord's last words: for, on the night before He suffered, He told His disciples, that whatsoever they should ask, the Father would give them in His Name. Here the concluding words manifestly imply, that the Name of the Lord Jesus was to be, as it were, the element in which all communication between God and man must be made. And then follows the memorable utterance;—

“Hitherto ye asked nothing in My Name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be fulfilled.”⁴

Now, this command would, of course, apply to the Lord's Prayer as much as to any other appeal to the Father. If, then, we use the exact words as recorded in either Gospel, it would seem that we ought to add as a final clause, “In the Name of the Lord Jesus, we ask it!” or something similar.

¹ Luke iii. 6.

² Num. xiv. 21.

³ Isa. vi. 3.

⁴ John xvi. 24.

The Lord selects the fifth petition only for comment ; probably, because the duty enforced in it is the most painful of all to flesh and blood. Yet, unless a man can do it, he himself is not in a condition to receive the mercy of God. Unless his pride be so broken by a sense of his own sins that he is not merely willing to forgive others, but rejoices in an opportunity of exercising, in some insignificant degree, at least, that loving-kindness which he himself needs from God, he is not really penitent, and, therefore, cannot receive pardon.

But to the truly contrite, who mourn for their own sins, and tremble at the thought that they have violated the law of the Most High—to such the Lord's declaration brings much comfort, showing as it does, that if they themselves are able to forgive, they need not fear. For God's love is not inferior to theirs : if the creature can forgive, much more shall the Creator abundantly pardon.

The Law of Fasting

16. "Moreover, when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance : for they disfigure their faces, that they may be seen of men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have received their reward.

17, 18. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face : that thou be not seen of men to fast, but of thy Father Which is in secret : and thy Father, Which seeth in secret, shall recompense thee."

From these words we see, that the Lord by no means discourages the practice of fasting, though He never directly commands it. He insists, however, that, to be of avail, it must not be suffered to minister to human

vanity, but must be a secret known only to the believer and his God, a willing self-denial, undertaken because of a deep conviction of its necessity, or utility, at the time.

Hence all public fasts on set days, or by formal prescription, are precluded: unless, indeed, a common calamity, such as war, famine, pestilence, or some appalling convulsion of nature, should be either threatening or already affecting a whole community; so that all men, with one accord, were impelled to afflict their souls before God, and to coerce and tame their bodies, with a view to more sincere humiliation and more earnest prayer.

Only in such circumstances would a general and prescribed fast be allowable: but, that individual believers will sometimes fast, in order to prepare themselves for closer communion with God, the Lord here assumes. Still further, He elsewhere affirms, that it is absolutely necessary to add fasting to prayer, if we would obtain power to deal with certain mightier ones among the spirits of evil.¹ And, yet again, He told the disciples of John, that His Own followers, also, would fast during the many and sorrowful days of their Lord's absence; for that they then would have good cause for so doing.²

But, if at any time we be led of the Spirit to fast, we must not put on sanctimonious looks of suffering after the manner of hypocrites, and love to hear men saying, How pious! How devout! otherwise, the full measure of our reward will be given to us in the worthless and quickly forgotten praise which we receive from

¹ Matth. xvii. 21. The Revised Version omits this verse; but, as it seems to us, without adequate reason—a remark which we should also apply to its omission of “and fasting” in Mark ix. 29.

² Matth. ix. 15.

them. Hence, too, we must not fast at fixed and known times, but only when we feel that such a course would enable us to keep under the body, and help the stifled spirit to breathe more freely, and aspire to the God from Whom it came.

But men must see no difference in us, when we are fasting before God : we must not exchange our ordinary cheerfulness of face for sour looks ; nor must we neglect the cleanliness and neatness of our body, and obliterate the natural appearance of our features by unremoved dust tear-stains and ashes. For all these things the Pharisees did, and were found unworthy of the Kingdom of the Heavens, although it was offered to them before all other men. And of such things Paul says, that they "have, indeed, a show of wisdom in will-worship and humility and severity to the body ; but are not of any value against the indulgence of the flesh."¹

Yet, at the same time, we should remember, that Scriptural fasting means either total abstinence from food for a short season ; or, at least, the "eating of no pleasant bread."² It is the merest hypocrisy to talk of fasting, when all we do is to turn from one dainty to another, from flesh to more delicate fish, or to appetizing egg-omelettes. Indeed, such an idea of fasting is so strange and incongruous that curiosity impels one to inquire for an explanation. And, since there is none to be found in the Bible, we must have recourse to ancient Paganism, in which we shall soon meet with a solution of the mystery.

Fish, from their shape, their fecundity, and probably, also, from the fact that they live in water,³ were sacred

¹ Col. ii. 23.

² Dan. x. 3.

³ In nature-worship, water is the feminine element, as fire is the male.

to the Great Goddess under all her many names, whether she was worshipped as Ish-tar, Aphrodite, Venus, Diana of the Ephesians, or by any other title. Hence they were eaten in her honour on the day that was specially dedicated to her, that is, on Friday. It is scarcely necessary to add, that her Scandinavian name was Friga, from which our Frigaday, or Friday, is derived. And it is equally well known, that her attributes and prerogatives have now been transferred to the Roman Madonna.

With the same goddess the egg, also, is connected, as will be seen in the following extract ;—

“The Classic poets are full of the mystic egg of the Babylonians; and thus its tale is told by Hyginus, the Egyptian, the learned keeper of the Palatine library at Rome in the time of Augustus, who was skilled in all the wisdom of his native country ;—‘An egg of wondrous size is said to have fallen from heaven into the river Euphrates. The fishes rolled it to the bank, where the doves having settled upon it, and hatched it, out came Venus, who afterwards was called the Syrian Goddess’—that is, Astarte. Hence the egg became one of the symbols of Astarte or Easter: and, accordingly, in Cyprus, one of the chosen seats of the worship of Venus or Astarte, the egg of wondrous size was represented on a grand scale.”¹

We may not, however, practise fasting to such an extent as to impair our bodily or mental strength: for these, having been given to us for the Lord’s service, must not be deliberately injured, but are to be preserved for whatever duty He may be pleased to assign to us.

¹ Hislop’s *Two Babylons*, Sixth Edition, pp. 175-6.

Otherwise, when called to an arduous labour, for which God, indeed, had given sufficient strength, we may be found incapable through our own folly; and so, with remorseful grief, may behold the enemy triumphant against our part of the line, though we ought to have been able to repel him.

Our fastings must, therefore, be moderate as well as secret; and then, although they may be unnoticed at the time, a due reward will certainly be given to us hereafter by our Heavenly Father.

Having now shown us, that all our acts of righteousness must be done, as before God, in earnest sincerity of heart, and without the slightest craving for the praises of men, the Lord presses the matter still further. For even sincere acts of righteousness are not in themselves sufficient, unless our whole lives are devoted to God; so that all our aspirations and anxieties may be for His glory, and all our energies be put forth to do His will. And this He enforces by three special injunctions.

First, we must seek only those Heavenly treasures which God is waiting to give us, and not hanker after the quickly perishing gifts of the Prince of This World. Secondly, our vision must be single, and fixed only upon the Heavenly treasures; for we must not attempt to serve both God and Satan. And, thirdly, we must not be unduly anxious, even in regard to the bare necessities of the present life; but, while we agonize for the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, must leave all other cares to Him.

The Believer's Treasures

19. "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon the earth, where moth and rust doth consume, and where thieves break through and steal.

20. But lay up for yourselves treasures in Heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth consume, and where thieves do not break through nor steal.

21. For where thy treasure is, there will thy heart be also."

The Lord begins this section of His discourse by forbidding us to lay up treasures upon earth, and condescends to add two plain reasons for the prohibition. First, the rapid and often sudden and unexpected passing away of all that is earthly. And, secondly, the fact that our affections will always rest where our treasures are lying: and, therefore, that we must deposit the latter where our heart ought to be.

As regards the first reason, what true satisfaction can there be in possessions which are subject to consumption, decay, and violence? It is, perhaps, the most obvious proof of the hallucination in which we all live, of the diseased mind of the whole human race, that we find such extreme difficulty in realizing this truth—so far, at least, as to let it influence our actions.

The Lord illustrates the corruption and uncertainty of worldly property by three examples, showing that it is liable to destruction by innumerable and ubiquitous living creatures, or from the inherent decay which pertains to every thing earthly; and, also, that our goods may, at any time, be taken away from us by fraud or violence.

Have we a large store of apparel? In secrecy and silence, the moth may be marring it. Do we possess other precious things? Time will soon wear away and consume them: they will be dimmed with tarnish: the rust will creep over and eat into them. Nay, we may not retain our precious things long enough to lose

them in either of these ways : this very night, thieves may break into our little treasures, and carry off that upon which we have set our hearts.

The Greek word which is rendered by "rust" has properly a more general meaning, that of consumption, the action of any kind of natural decay or wear and tear of time, which eats into and destroys all things. And this general rust will, as James tells us, not only devour possessions, but, at last, eat like fire into the very flesh of the possessors.¹

Therefore, it is in Heaven that we must store up our treasures, and whatever we deposit there will be ours for eternity; for, in the celestial abodes, there is neither moth to deface, nor rust to consume, nor thief to break through and steal.

But the question naturally arises, How can we lay up treasures in Heaven? The answer is simple and easy to give, but hard, indeed, to put into practice. For to do the latter, we must aim at nothing less than to follow in the steps of our Saviour and Lord. He laid aside His glory, and came from the ineffable light into the region of sin and gloom, not to please Himself, but to save others, to "deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." And this He did, because He pitied and loved us, though we had never loved Him.

Such is our Leader. And, if we would partake of His incorruptible treasures, we, also, snatched, as we have been, from the everlasting burnings by His love, must imitate that love, for His sake, in our own conduct toward others, and sacrifice ourselves for them. We must pray to be so moved by the mighty workings

¹ James v. 3.

of His Spirit within us that we may be willing to deny ourselves, to give up the rights and pleasures of this short life, nay, should it be required of us, to lose even life itself, if by any means we may be suffered to bring salvation, or to render help, to any of those for whom He died.

Is not the New Testament full of directions and suggestions for such a life as this ?

“Blessed are the merciful : for they shall obtain mercy.”¹

“Give to him that asketh thee, and, from him that would borrow of thee, turn not thou away.”²

“The Lord loveth a cheerful giver.”³

“It is more blessed to give than to receive.”⁴

“God is not unrighteous to forget your work and the love which ye showed toward His Name, in that ye ministered unto the saints, and still do minister.”⁵

“And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only, in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward.”⁶

“And every one that hath left houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or children, or lands, for My Name’s sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and shall inherit eternal life.”⁷

“Choosing rather to be evil entreated with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.”⁸

¹ Matth. v. 7.

⁴ Acts xx. 35.

⁷ Matth. xix. 29

² Matth. v. 42.

⁵ Heb. vi. 10.

⁸ Heb. xi. 25.

³ 2 Cor. ix. 7.

⁶ Matth. x. 42.

Now, in these and other passages, we find, that God has undertaken to reward, in the next age, all acts of self-denial that are done for His sake in the present time; and, indeed, to do so a hundredfold. Hence, to give up for His service the good things, the luxuries, the indulgences, the peace, and the repose, of this world, is to lay up treasure for the World-to-Come—treasure to be enjoyed when the Church, under Christ, shall be ruling over the earth from the Heaven above it. Whenever, then, we deny ourselves to feed the hungry saints, are content to dress plainly that we may be enabled to clothe the naked, overcome indulgence to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, or those who are sick or in prison, whenever we turn away from much-loved pursuits, or forsake our own interests, and devote all our time and efforts to the work of preaching the Gospel and of teaching and strengthening believers—by all such deeds, if their motive be the glory of God, we are adding to our Heavenly deposit.

We must, however, expect no praise here for that which we may be graciously allowed to do: neither the Lord Jesus, nor any of His true disciples, received honour from men.¹ But, hereafter, our accumulated treasure will be unlocked and displayed to the wondering gaze of ourselves and our fellow heirs of salvation. Let us, then, be ever mindful of Him through Whose sufferings and death we have obtained the right and the power to earn this incorruptible treasure. Far from rewarding our insignificant and sin-marred service, God could only have punished us for our infinite shortcomings, had not One offered to Him a perfect obedience in our stead.

¹ John v. 41, 44.

For by the unspeakable love of our Heavenly Father, the spotless earthly life of His Only Begotten Son is reckoned to us, His righteousness is accounted to be ours, so that we are regarded as perfect in Him, as having done all that is demanded of us in the Person of our Substitute. Hence, if we are in Him, not a single act of our own is required to complete our righteousness in the sight of God: and so, as soon as the faultless purity of Christ has been imputed to us, God is able even to reward us for any miserable service of our own, after it has been cleansed by the Blood of the Lamb, just as if it were a work done over and above our duty. We have accepted the Gift, and may now contend for the Prize.

In the strength of the Lord, then, and with a hope that will not disappoint us, we may strive to lay up our Heavenly treasure, and commit it with confidence to our Heavenly Father, until we have attained to our majority, and have been so trained in sorrow and trial that we are fit to be entrusted with our own.

And how great is the present advantage of so doing! For, if we lay up treasures upon earth, upon earth will our heart and all our expectations be fixed: we shall become so engrossed with things below, with raking to ourselves the bits of stick and straw scattered upon the face of the ground, that we shall never be disposed to raise our eyes upward, and behold the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him. If, however, our treasure be in Heaven, our heart will be there also; and our thoughts, soaring far above the illusions of the present life, will gladden us by their contemplation of the eternal realities.

The Single and the Evil Eye

22. "The lamp of the body is the eye : if, therefore, thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light.

23. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If, therefore, the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is the darkness !"

Where the heart is, thither will the eye, also, be turned. And so the Lord proceeds in a striking figure to urge, that our undivided gaze must be fixed upon the things that are above : for that, unless this be so, we shall be in danger of altogether losing our power to discern them.

He describes the eye as the lamp of the body—a most apt figure, since that organ has no light whatever in itself. The great source of light to the physical world, and all the things that are in it, is the sun. Yet the sun cannot illumine the body without the eye as a medium. For the eye is the receptacle of its light, and, by means of the rays which flow into it, gives light to the body. And, although there are really two eyes, we, nevertheless, often speak of them in the singular as "the eye ;" for they are closely connected, and, in their normal condition, form one complete organ of sight. Hence, to see the same object at the same instant with both eyes is a great proof of soundness of vision ; while to begin to see double, or to look at a different object, or different parts of an object, with each eye is a token that our visual organs are defective, and, in some circumstances, a premonitory symptom of blindness. And, from the context in this passage, it would appear, that the seeing double is what is meant by "evil" in contrast with "single."

Now, this physical fact is applied by the Lord to spiritual things ; for, as it is with the eyes of the body, so it is with the eyes of the spirit or inner man. They, too, have no light in themselves, but must be illumined from without, and filled with rays flowing from the Spirit of God. And, if they can rest upon spiritual things with an undivided gaze, our spiritual sight is sound, and we shall be able, without distraction, to follow after that one object on which our eyes are fixed. But, if the desires of the flesh and of the carnal mind so overpower us that we find ourselves, as it were, beginning to cast one eye upon earthly things, while the other continues to gaze Heavenwards, it is high time to see to it : our spiritual vision is deranged : we are threatened with total blindness.

We must, then, hasten to the Great Physician, before it be too late, and buy of Him eye-salve to anoint our eyes,¹ that they may be restored. For if they once become incapable of receiving the light of Christ, our lamp will be turned into a receptacle of darkness, which we may still think to be light, but which will hide from us the love of God, the salvation of the Lord Jesus, and the glorious things which He has prepared for them that love Him.

Here, then, is a solemn warning for us. No compromise is possible for those who would attain to the Kingdom of God and His Righteousness. They can have nothing to do with making the best of both worlds : to think of such a thing would be to move one of their eyes away from Christ, and to fix it upon the things that are on the earth ; and such a course would quickly destroy their spiritual vision. They must turn away

¹ Rev. iii. 18.

from all those craftily devised baits by which Satan, in the guise of an angel of light, is ever striving to entice the minds of believers to, at least, semi-earthly aims and aspirations. They must decline teetotal and anti-opium crusades, together with all attempts to spread the faith, or keep it pure, by political means, or to Christianize and improve the world by the aid of any arm of flesh.

They must simply obey orders with the most scrupulous precision ; and the Lord has not indicated any of the things mentioned above in His enumeration of required services. They have to go to all nations, including their own, with the purpose, first of converting and making disciples of men ; secondly, of baptizing them ; and, thirdly, of teaching them whatsoever things the Lord has commanded, and nothing more. In the case of individuals, they are to strike at sin, not at particular sins : their axe, sharpened by the Spirit of God, must smite through the root, and the leaves will soon wither and fall off. As to the great communities of the world, they have no commission to improve these : the Lord Jesus Alone can do that, and will do it when He comes with power and great glory ; but the present duty of His disciples does not aim directly at the improvement of the world, but rather seeks to draw out of it as many lost souls as possible. Nevertheless, what they are commanded to preach will, wherever it is received, save men, by the power of God, from drunkenness, opium, tobacco, fornication, and every other of those fleshly lusts that war against the soul, as well as from all intellectual aberrations, which, like the *ignis fatuus*, allure men away from the safe and firm Highroad of the Word into the mists and swamps of perdition.

Such is the work which is now required of aspirants to the Kingdom : but their Lord will soon return, and then, if they shall have been found faithful in this very little, they will be called upon to assist Him in bringing about such a reformation of the whole world as the heart of unregenerate man has never even conceived.

The Two Masters

24. "No man can serve two masters : for either he will hate the one, and love the other ; or else he will hold to one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and Mammon."

Our hearts, then, must be given to the Lord, wholly and without reserve, and the eyes of our expectation must be fixed upon Him Alone. For no man can with sincerity serve two masters of directly contrasted character,¹ whose wishes and plans are ever opposed. In such circumstances, he must either hate the first and love the second, or hold to the first, and despise the second. And, just so, it is impossible for us to serve both God and Satan.

Here, then, we go a little further into the subject of the previous verses, and see why it is that spiritual blindness must supervene if both our eyes are not fixed upon Heavenly things. A man cannot long continue to divide his feelings ; and, if he attempts to love the things of earth as well as those of Christ, will quickly lose the latter altogether, and feel himself more and more opposed to the Lord Who bids him forsake the real desire of his heart.

¹ That they are understood to be so in this case is indicated, in the Greek, by the use of *ετερος* for "the other"—that word always signifying another of a different kind, and not another of the same kind, which would be *αλλος*.

Mammon is a Syriac word, signifying "riches," or the good things of this world. But the facts, that Mammon is here opposed to God, that the figure is that of two masters, and that one can scarcely be said to serve inanimate things, all point to a personification. In this passage, then, we must understand Mammon to be the god of riches, or, of the good things of this world, that is, Satan, who has the present disposal of them. And the love of what he has to give is really the worship of himself.

But he is the great enemy of the God Who willeth that all men should be saved; and his object is to ensnare us, by means of the pleasures and cares of this brief soul-life, into a neglect of the spirit-life which will continue for ever. He is the god of this Age, ~~but will not be the god of the Age-to-Come~~; and so, would have us, as his obedient and contented subjects, to fix all our thoughts on the good things which he can give, until his appointed time shall have passed by. And, if he can prevail, the future Kingdom of the Heavens will seem to us more and more like to an unsubstantial dream, until, at length, it will have disappeared from our view, and its place will have become completely filled by the ever-multiplying pleasures and cares of the life that now is.

Prohibition of Distracting Care

25. "Therefore, I say unto you, be not anxious for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than the food, and the body than the raiment?"

Therefore, says the Lord, "take no distracting thought"—such is the literal force of *μεριμνάω*—for

the things of this life. Some thought is, of course, necessary, and is implied by all those precepts in which toil is enjoined upon us; but, whenever we find that our care becomes distracting, and tends to lead our hearts away from God, we must instantly dismiss it at any cost.

The Lord divides the cares of this life into two classes—care for the soul, that is, the animal life, which must be sustained by eating and drinking; and care for the body, which requires clothing to cover and protect it. These things are, indeed, necessities: yet we must not suffer the Prince of Darkness to ensnare us into anxiety concerning them. And, to the believer, what reason can there be for such an anxiety. Did not God give us the soul, the animal life; and did He not bestow our bodies upon us? Is not, then, the life of a man far more important than the meat and drink whose sole use is to sustain it? And is not the body far more valuable than the clothing which merely serves for its covering and protection? Surely, then, if God has given us the more excellent gifts, He will not fail to add, also, those smaller favours which are necessary for the comfort, and, indeed, for the very existence of the others.

26. "Behold, the birds of the Heaven, that they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; and your Heavenly Father feedeth them. Are not ye of much more value than they?"

Do we ask for further assurance, that God will supply our needs? We have but to look up at the fowls of the air: they are not even expected to go through the labour which is enjoined as a duty upon us, they are not commanded to eat in the sweat of their face, and yet our Heavenly Father feeds them. And, if He thus

cares for creatures whom He made to be inferior and subject to man, shall He not much more care for us whom He has promised to adopt as the sons and daughters of the Lord God Almighty? ¹ How small is our faith in His goodness and love, if we cannot feel abundantly sure of so much!

27. "And which of you by being anxious can add one cubit to his life?"

In this verse, it is very strange to find the Revised Version repeating an obvious mistake of the Authorized by the rendering "stature." For the logic of the passage is, that anxiety is not only foolish, but also useless; because, however intense it may be, it is unable to produce the *smallest* effect upon what God has determined. Now, to add a cubit—that is, a foot and a half—to one's height, would be by no means a small matter, but a very marvellous achievement. Moreover, people do not often torment themselves with anxiety to increase their stature. Nor is there any idea of growth suggested by the context, but rather that of sustaining and prolonging life by proper food and clothing.

It is, therefore, far better to adopt the other and more common meaning of *ἡλικία*, that is, "age," or "time of life." The sense will then be, that all our anxiety as to what we shall eat, or drink, or put on, is futile; for that no man is able, by any amount of thought, to prolong his life, even for a moment, beyond the time allotted to him by God.

But the phrase, "to add a cubit to one's life," may seem a strange one for the expression of such an idea. In the Bible, however, measures of space are sometimes applied to time. Job, for instance, exclaims;—

¹ 2 Cor. vi. 18.

“Now my days are swifter than a courier :
They flee away, they see no good.”¹

Here life is represented by the stage which the courier had to run. Again, when John the Baptist is spoken of as fulfilling his course,² or when Paul says, “I have finished my course,”³ the length of life is compared to a stadium, or race-course; and, if we understand that to be the figure in the passage before us, it will be evident that a cubit would be a very insignificant addition to such a course.

28. “And why are ye anxious concerning raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they toil not, neither do they spin.”⁴

29. Yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

30. But, if God doth so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven; shall He not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?”

Just as the sight of God's care for the improvident birds should make us feel quite sure that He will, also, sustain our lives; so, if we consider the wild flowers of the country, we shall see good reason to believe that He will provide our bodies with clothing.

The lilies of the field are, perhaps, contrasted with those of the garden, because they grow of themselves without any human aid, even as the grass amid which they spring. We cannot name the particular lily to which reference is made. For a long time it was supposed to be the Crown Imperial, but later travellers have made other suggestions. All, however, that we

¹ Job ix. 25.

² Acts xiii. 25.

³ 2 Tim. iv. 7.

⁴ Toil may, perhaps, indicate the work of men, spinning that of women

can say is, that, from the comparison with Solomon's glory, it must have been a wild flower of stately appearance and gorgeous hue : and the Lord bids us mark, that it neither toiled nor spun to obtain its fair array.

"I say unto you," is a formula often used by the Lord when He is about to utter a sentence of peculiar solemnity, or one from which we are to extract more than the surface-meaning. The glory of Solomon was proverbial among the Jews as an ideal of magnificence. And, apparently, the difference between his splendour and that of the lilies is the deep thought to which the Lord would direct our attention. The point would thus seem to be, not so much that the lily is clothed in a robe of texture finer than any man-made fabric ; but that, while all Solomon's glory was put on from without, the adornment of the flower silently grows from within, and is, therefore, no foreign drapery covering its shame, but an essential part of the lily itself, a development and result of what it really is.

So should it be with us, and shall be hereafter, if only we be deemed worthy of the First Resurrection and the Kingdom. For the light which the Spirit of God kindles in our spirit—which is the innermost part of our being, enclosed, as it were, within two cases, the soul and the body—will silently develop until it has illumined our soul, sanctifying both intellect and emotions. But, at the Resurrection, it will break even through the new body, and envelop it in splendour, "For then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the Kingdom of their Father :"¹ "they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever."²

¹ Matth. xiii. 43.

² Dan. xii. 3.

Such will be the manifestation of the Sons of God : so will the Children of Light be, at last, unmistakably distinguished from the Children of Darkness.

But the flowers of the field are of little account, and are quickly cut down with the grass amid which they grow, and cast into the oven—for cut grass, which speedily dries in a hot climate, is used in the East as fuel. If, then, the Lord urges, God so gloriously clothes these existences of a day, shall He not much more clothe you !—you, in whose heart¹ He has set eternity, for whom He made the earth and all that is therein ; nay, for whose salvation He gave up His Own Beloved Son !

31. “ Be not, therefore, anxious, saying, What shall we eat ? or, What shall we drink ? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed ?

32. For after all these things do the Gentiles seek ; for your Heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.

33. But seek ye first His Kingdom, and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.”

The believer, then, must have faith in God, and not suffer Satan to distract him with anxious care for present necessities, for the sustenance of his life and the clothing of his body. The Gentiles, who are children of this world, do, indeed, diligently seek after such things, and their anxiety respecting them is not strange ; for they know of no Heavenly Father to Whose love they may commit themselves. But what

¹ Eccles. iii. 11. Both of the English Versions read, “ Hath set the world in their heart.” But we have no doubt whatever that the rendering given above is correct.

excuse have we for imitating their conduct—we who do recognize a Father of Mercies and God of All Comfort, and are well aware that He not only loves us, but is also fully acquainted with our needs, and has all power to supply them.

We must remember, that, in the New Testament, the Gentiles are contrasted with the Church just as strongly as they are with Israel in the Old. For, in the New Testament, the inhabitants of earth are divided, not into two, but into three great classes, the Jew, the Gentile, and the Church of God.

Do you, then, continues the Lord, make the attainment of the Kingdom your first and greatest care. And let all your aspirations and efforts be directed to hasten the glad time when you shall assist Me in My reign over a reconciled world ; when the now rebellious earth shall be once more united to the blessed and ever-
rejoicing Empire of God.

And, if you are longing for the Kingdom of God, seek, also, both for yourselves and others, His righteousness. Aim ever at that perfection of holiness which cannot, indeed, be completely attained in this life ; but to which you must, under the influence and with the help of the Holy Spirit, struggle as near as possible. And pray always, that your walk may convince those with whom you are brought into contact, that you are being rapidly transformed into a citizen of that City, through the gates of which only the righteous and true, those who are called and faithful and chosen, may pass.

As to the things of this life, we are bidden to leave them to God, with a promise that whatever is needful for the present time shall be added to the glories that await us in the future. And, indeed, so much might

be manifestly inferred from His intentions respecting us ; for, if He is leading us to a City of Habitation, He will surely not neglect to provide us with food and clothing by the way.

Anxiety for the Morrow Forbidden

34. " Be not, therefore, anxious for the morrow : for the morrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."

Do not, then, suffer your anxieties to extend to the morrow. Bear with cheerfulness and hope the burden of to-day ; for that God has assigned to you ; and, therefore, according to His promise, He will see that you have strength sufficient for it. But, if you add to it the imaginary burden of to-morrow, and, perhaps, of the yet more remote future, you are foolishly loading yourself with cares which God has not laid upon you, and have neither reason for wonder, nor ground for complaint, if you should be crushed beneath the self-imposed weight. Beside which, your anguish may prove to have been altogether causeless ; for, to change the figure, the clouds of God are often big only with mercies, and presently discharge, not the fierce tempest which we have been dreading, but a fertilizing shower.

Again—and this is a very solemn thought—you may be wasting your last hours upon earth in fretting and troubling over a morrow which you are not destined to see. There is but a step between us and death, and many a one begins, in full-blooded life, a day which he will end in the company of disembodied spirits.

And, once more, at any moment the Children of the Kingdom may be summoned into the Presence of the King, in order that the Judgment-seat may be set, and they may have their places assigned in the glittering

armies that will follow Him, when He comes forth with the many diadems upon His head. How appalling, should we at that critical moment be found distracted with cares for the morrow, and so immersed in earthly things that we could not respond to His call!

If, however, the dreaded morrow does come, it will, the Lord assures us, take thought for its own circumstances. And how can this be, except in the sense that He, in Whose hands it is, will arrange its cares, and so adjust them, that they shall not be too heavy for us. "God is faithful, Who will not suffer you to be tried above that ye are able."¹ And what more do we want to know?

Thus, it is sufficient for to-day to bear the evil of to-day; and this is all that we can do without being thrown off our balance. Let us, therefore, confine ourselves to it, casting even its burden upon the Lord, Who will strengthen us to bear, not only this evil, but also that of the morrow, if, perchance, the morrow should come.

The Greek word here rendered "evil"² is significant, in that, while it denotes the calamities and afflictions of life, its derivation also intimates their origin in sin. Hence the word forms a connecting link between this and the following portion of the discourse. For the Lord is now about to instruct us in regard to our conduct toward those among whom we dwell, when this evil, and its disorganizing consequences, are apparent in them; and, should we cease to pray and humble ourselves before God, would be so in ourselves also. He has just been speaking of our inner life, and now proceeds to show what should be our outward behaviour in this world of abounding evil.

¹ 1 Cor. x. 13.

² κακία.

A Censorious Spirit must be Restrained

VII. 1. "Judge not, that ye be not judged.

2. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged : and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured unto you."

The Great Adversary, perfect in his knowledge of our natural depravity, displays wondrous skill in adapting his temptations to the several dispositions and circumstances of those whom he would seduce. Hence, if any one has become separated from the world, and is amazed at its wickedness, the Tempter forthwith stirs up within him a censorious spirit towards its children ; and, as the Lord presently hints, will soon contrive to extend this feeling to brethren also. Thus believers, and more especially the young and inexperienced converts, come into danger of lapsing into Pharisaism, of sinking into a debased religion which shews little fruit, save in an affected separation from, and a real contempt for, their fellow men. It is a sad fact, that, as soon as we get some glimpse of the rule of right, our vicious nature prompts us to apply it to our neighbours, and not, as we should do, to ourselves.

Sin, we ought, of course, always to discern and judge, whether it be in ourselves or in others : that is our duty. But we must not condemn the sinner, seeing that we are, at least, liable to, and perhaps, actually guilty of, the same sins. Or, if not of the same sins, we are certainly guilty of sins, and can charge our neighbour with no more.

But, still further, while God's time of grace continues, it is not our part to condemn ; nor would it be, even if we ourselves were guiltless. For He Alone is the Judge, as James solemnly declares ;—

“ One Only is the Lawgiver and Judge, even He Who is able to save and to destroy : but who art thou that judgest thy neighbour ? ”¹

With the words, “ that ye be not judged,” we must, of course, understand “ by God,” Whose righteous standard, “ An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth,” is immediately brought into action, if we do not forgive as we have been forgiven, if we do not refrain from judging others, even as God, for Christ’s sake, has refrained from judging us. “ For with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured unto you.”

The Mote and the Beam

3. “ And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother’s eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye ?

4. Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me cast out the mote out of thine eye ; and, lo, the beam is in thine own eye ?

5. Thou hypocrite, cast out first the beam out of thine own eye ; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother’s eye.”

Passing on from general censoriousness, the Lord now deals with the feeling as exercised toward brethren, that is, toward those that are of the household of faith. For the circumstance, that, in this case, the eye is not altogether blind, but merely contains some impurities, seems to indicate that the term “ brother ” is not used in its widest acceptation.

The proverb of the mote and beam is of frequent occurrence in Rabbinical teachings. Of course, there

¹ James iv. 12.

is a monstrous difference between a minute particle of dry stick or straw and a beam ; but such violent contrasts are common in proverbs, and are intended to infuse a more striking force. And it must be remembered, that a proverb, though obviously impossible in the world of fact, may, nevertheless, be literally true in its application.

In assigning the mote to the person who is censured, and the beam to the one who so readily detects his brother's fault, the Lord seems to hint at a difference, which ought to be manifest, between His disciples and the children of this world. For, while the latter are prone to magnify the defects of their neighbours, and to extenuate their own, we, on the contrary, should see only motes in the eyes of our brethren, but beams in our own. "For every one that exalteth himself shall be humbled, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."¹

Now, the eye may be perfectly sound in itself, though it be damaged for a while by the presence of a mote. Hence the Lord's words may be intended to warn us against too great eagerness in denouncing the inward condition and bent of a brother's heart, because of some outward act, which may be but the temporary result of neglect in watching and prayer, followed by a consequent temptation from without.

Very careful, then, must we be not to search for faults in a brother, until we have thoroughly investigated our own condition before God. And after such a process, if it be honestly carried out with the Spirit's aid, we shall be more likely to speak with our fellow disciple in gentleness and love. We should, however, give earnest

¹ Luke xiv. 11.

heed to this precept of the Lord ; for the vice of fallen nature strenuously impels us to disobey it. Indeed, strange as it may appear, we often find that the slave of some particular sin will be very anxious to point out and censure the same thing in another person, as though he were seeking to hide his own crime by a severe condemnation of his brother's indulgence in it.

Dogs and Swine

6. "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast your pearls before the swine, lest haply they trample them under their feet, and turn and rend you."

When we have humbled ourselves before God under the burden of our sins, and have been taught of Him, that we are redeemed from all our iniquities by the Blood of the Lamb, we begin to understand the precepts of love contained in His Word, and they become to us as holy things, even as pearls in our hands. But we must by no means pass them on to others indiscriminately. Precious as they may be to ourselves, they will be received only by those who have also been forgiven much, and whose hearts the Holy Spirit has cleansed and purified : and there are many dogs and swine upon the earth. To them we must by no means communicate the secrets of love which the Lord has revealed to us. For such persons will either avail themselves, without scruple, of what they have heard for the furthering of their own wicked purposes ; or, provoked, when they would otherwise have remained quiet, by the strangeness of that which is offered to them, will be impelled by their scorn and hatred to do us a mischief.

In the expression, "that which is holy," there is doubtless, a reference to the flesh of the peace-offerings, which no stranger nor unclean person might touch. And whatever of it remained uneaten was to be consumed by fire, and so saved from profanation.

In the East, dogs and swine are often used as figures of shameless and impure persons. And the passage in Peter, in which there is mention of the vomit of the dog and the wallowing in mire of the sow, seems to make the former beast represent the inwardly impure, the latter the outwardly and openly unclean.¹

Again, the Jews were wont to speak of those who had no part in the Covenant of Israel as dogs, and had the proverb, "Without are dogs." Hence the Lord used the figure in its common acceptance, when He tried the faith of the Syro-Phoenician woman. And so, in the present Dispensation, the term might, perhaps, denote those who have no part in the Covenant of Grace, who have never believed in the Lord Jesus, and have, consequently, never been cleansed by His Blood or sanctified by His Spirit.

But the figure seems to reach further than this. For dogs are ready to devour anything that comes in their way, whether it be the choicest dainty or the filthiest offal. Hence they seem to represent men who willingly hear and talk of heavenly things, but merely for their own entertainment or worldly profit, without any spiritual apprehension of them: at the same time they will take an equal, and, probably, much greater pleasure in that which is not of the Father, but of the world. And so, while they are, perhaps, nominally reckoned with Christian believers, they are only among them, but not

¹ 2 Pet. ii. 22.

of them, and, like the mixed multitude that went up out of Egypt, bring in evil habits, errors, and idolatry.

Against such men Paul raises a warning cry in his admonition to the Philippians, "Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the concision."¹ And their end is described by John, who, after telling us of those who shall enter into the gates of the Heavenly City, adds that "without are the dogs, and the sorcerers, and the fornicators, and the murderers, and the idolaters, and every one that loveth and maketh a lie."²

Now, if the holy flesh of the sacrifices had been thrown to dogs, they, despising the sacrilege, would not have hesitated to devour it; and so, likewise, would those act who are represented by them. For if you speak to them of love as it is in Christ Jesus, they will readily listen, and then forthwith proceed to take what advantage they can of your disclosures. They will have no scruple in wronging you for profit, if they understand that they can do so with impunity.

But those who are pictured in the swine seem to be the openly and shamelessly unclean. If you offer your pearls of love to them, they may, possibly, be tempted to look at them, thinking that love must mean license. But, finding that which attracted them to be neither peas nor acorns—for they have no desire, save for the satisfying of flesh—they will be disappointed and irritated. And so, treading your pearls beneath their feet, they will rush blindly upon you, to do you whatever harm lies in their power.

In preaching, then, to those who are represented by

¹ Phil. iii. 2.

² Rev. xxii. 15.

dogs and swine, we must confine ourselves to three subjects. We must speak of the fall and utter ruin of men ; of the fiery indignation which will shortly overtake them ; and of the one way of escape that lies open before them, through faith in the Blood of the Lord Jesus.

Believing Prayer is Sure of an Answer

7. "Ask, and it shall be given you : seek, and ye shall find : knock, and it shall be opened unto you.

8. For every one that asketh receiveth : and he that seeketh findeth : and to him that knocketh it shall be opened."

The heart of a listening disciple may well be depressed by the precepts which we have been considering. For how can he possibly keep his eyes ever fixed upon the coming Kingdom of the Heavens ! How can he refuse to turn away from it even for a moment, not only when his temptation to do so arises from such pleasures as the Prince of This World can offer, but, also, if he be more strongly appealed to by the very necessity of his life and body ! And how can he become wondrous in wisdom, so as to steer safely between such apparently contradictory commands as, "Judge not," and, "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs" ?

But, in the verse now before us, the answer to this reasonable perplexity is provided, just where it is needed. For the Lord knows our frame, and remembers that we are but dust. He is well aware that, in our own wisdom and our own strength, we are altogether incapable of keeping His commandments :

but the things that are ordinarily impossible to men can be made possible to them by God. Therefore, He bids us ask, whether what we need be an increased faith whereby we may resist temptation, or the wisdom that comes down from above, to guide us in the way.

He does not prescribe that for which we are to ask ; for he that needs information on such a point has read the foregoing portion of the discourse to very little purpose. Nor does He think it necessary to mention the One of Whom we must ask, the Heavenly Father, from Whom cometh every good and perfect gift. Thus His command is rendered far more sublime and comprehensive in its simplicity than the words of His servant James ;—

“If any of you lacketh wisdom, let him ask of God, Who giveth to all liberally and upbraideth not ; and it shall be given him.”¹

His injunction is, moreover, emphasized by its three-fold form, which seems to denote three progressive stages. Do you feel anxious to find yourself within the borders of the Kingdom in Mystery, in order that you may become one of those wise ones who shall hereafter shine forth as the brightness of the firmament, when the Kingdom is revealed? Ask earnestly of God, and you shall receive power to seek the way. Use that power : seek diligently, and you shall find the way which will lead you to the gate of admittance. Knock perseveringly, and the gate shall be opened unto you.

And, if the Spirit of God moves you to strive, you may feel certain of success : for with wondrous grace the Lord adds, that, without exception, without reference to previous conduct or to anything else, “every

¹ James i. 5.

one that asketh receiveth ; and he that seeketh findeth ; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened."

We must, however, beware of stopping short at the asking, but must persevere, also, in the seeking and knocking ; or we may after all lose the Kingdom. And "when once the Master of the House is risen up," who will be so miserable as he that is standing nearest to the threshold, at the moment when the crash of the closing door announces his hopeless exclusion from the joy of his Lord ?

9. "Or what man is there of you, who, if his son shall ask him for a loaf, will give him a stone ?

10. Or, if he shall ask for a fish, will give him a serpent ?

11. If ye, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father Which is in the Heavens give good things unto them that ask Him !"

In the ninth verse, the Lord continues to press the certainty of an answer to trustful prayer. Do you still doubt ? Look around you, then, upon the evil world in which you live. Do you see any one who would mock his own starving children by giving them useless and even hurtful things, when they are crying to him for bread or fish wherewith to sustain life ?

And, if ye, men "conceived in sin and shapen in iniquity," know how to give good gifts to your children, how can you doubt that your Heavenly Father, Who is good, will give good things to His sons when they cry unto Him !

In the words, "ye being evil," how utterly does the Lord abase the pride of men as, in this cursory manner, but with the unerring judgment of God, He declares

the general depravity and corruption of our whole race. And yet, He is here addressing the very persons whom He elsewhere calls the children of God. With what confidence and love do His words inspire us ! For He was not deceived, when He came down from above. He knew the worst of us, and yet deliberately resolved to save us from that very worst. Nothing could be more pure and unselfish than His love ; and, if we put our trust in it, we may rest assured, that no wickedness in the past, no feebleness nor failure in the present, will cause Him to abandon us to destruction.

All good things, then, our Heavenly Father will freely give to us, in accordance with His Own Holy Nature. But, should the children see the stone or the serpent, and should they, in their ignorance believing it to be bread or fish, cry for it, then His Fatherly love would compel Him to refuse that which would, at best, be useless, and, perhaps, positively injurious.

The Golden Rule

12. " All things, therefore, whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, even so do ye also unto them : for this is the Law and the Prophets."

Seeing, then, that God gives good things to them that ask Him, so let it be your care, also, to do good to all fellow-creatures who come within the circle of your influence. And, if you ask how you are to know what would be good for them, take this for your rule ;— Whatsoever you would desire and think best for yourself in similar circumstances, that is what you must do unto other men. And, if you carry out this rule in sincerity of heart, you will fulfil all the requirements of the Law that relate to the dealings of man with man, and all that the Prophets have uttered concerning the

same duties. For every precept that refers to them, whether it be found in the Law or the Prophets, is directed against the ever-varying forms of one sin, that is, against the selfishness of man's fallen nature, which prompts him to render to other men things which he himself would not care to receive.

With this brief summary of the Second Table, the Lord closes His exposition of the Law. And, after having thus indicated their duty to the Children of the Kingdom, He solemnly warns them to enter into the way which He has pointed out, and to persevere in it, notwithstanding the countless false prophets, and false teachers, who will strive to draw them into one of the many by-paths that lead off to the Devil's highway.

He then portrays the inexorable doom of the false prophet, and the unexpected and bitter disappointment of such believers as will be found to have been ensnared and misled by Satan disguised as an angel of light. And, finally, He concludes His discourse with an impressive warning, that merely to have heard His words will protect no one in the awful hour of trial. For that, unless a man obeys His commandments after listening to them, the storm of judgment will bring down the house that has been founded upon sand, and so cause its builder to be disproved and rejected.

The Two Ways

13. "Enter ye in by the narrow gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many be they that enter in thereby. For narrow is the gate, and straitened the way, that leadeth unto life, and few be they that find it."

The usual interpretation of these verses makes the strait gate lead into the narrow way; so that the gate

signifies conversion, and the way the principles and conduct of a converted man. But such an exposition cannot be admitted by one who has grasped the circumstances and the aim of the discourse. For the Lord was not speaking to the unconverted world, but to His Own disciples, who were assumed to be already in the narrow way, since they were following Him whithersoever He went, and were being led by Him away from the Mosaic pens toward a fold which He had prepared for them.

Hence, in this address, we meet with no reference to salvation by faith; but are taught how the believer must follow in the steps of his Lord, and what he must do if he would win the Prize of the Heavenly Calling. No doubt, the disciples understood but little of what He said to them, and must have deemed many of His precepts impracticable in such a world as this, if they had attempted to think them out at the time. As yet, however, His great work had not been accomplished, and He could not tell them all. But they should know it before long; for, as soon as He had returned to His Father, He would send the Spirit to unfold all things unto them, and would show them whence they could obtain power to do what is, indeed, impossible for unaided men.

We may, also, remark that the roads of this world usually lead to gates, not gates to roads; and when one has reached the gate, he is at the end of his journey. It would, therefore, be natural, in a figure taken from roads and gates, to present them in their ordinary and characteristic relations.

It is true, indeed, that the Lord mentions the gate first, but He, probably, does so merely because He assumes that His disciples are already in the way,

and, therefore, only require to be cautioned, lest they should allow themselves to be enticed out of it into some by-path, before they reach the narrow gate of the Heavenly Kingdom. And, again, He begins His exhortation with the words, "Enter ye in by the narrow gate," because His glance comprehends at once both the road and its termination. He sees, with a vividness such as we cannot realize, how each moment of journeying on the road is bringing us ever nearer to the gate, to pass through which is the sole object of our toilsome progress. He bids us enter the gate; for it is not enough to listen to teachings concerning the road, nor to study its finger posts. No: we must labour on, however painfully, and lift up holy hands to Heaven, that the Spirit's influence may work mightily in us, enabling us to free our thoughts more and more from this corrupting world, and to fix them with ever-increasing steadiness on the distant gleam of the City of God.

Now, these ways, one of which "leads off"¹ to life and the other to destruction, must, also, lead out of some place. And hence the picture which the Lord here sets before us would seem to be the City of Wickedness, out of which two roads are seen to proceed in diverse directions.

One of them, however, which is vastly broader and smoother than the other, looks very like a continuation of the City itself. For it is lined on either side with fair villas, brilliant shops, club-houses, hotels, restaurants, garages, theatres, and assembly-rooms; while the rows of buildings are often diversified by pleasant gardens, parks, golf-links, race-courses, and other resorts for the

¹ ἀπάγειν.

killing of time. Moreover, amid these alluring objects, there arises, at no very long intervals, the spire, tower, or pediment, of some stately church or chapel. And, as one might expect, so attractive a road is thronged with the crowds that are passing along it.

But, if we persist in tracing it out to its end, terrors await us. A correspondingly Wide Gate does, indeed, lead out of the Broad Way; but the question, Whither? is not so pleasantly answered. For the land into which the Gate opens is overspread with darkness.

The other Way is Narrow, rough, and continually ascending: so toilsome, indeed, that travellers often grow tired of their exertions, and turn aside to seek for some level place, where they may rest awhile—a purpose which frequently ends in disaster, and not seldom in the missing of the road. For, by reason of its extreme narrowness, and the tall vegetation, or forest land, through which from time to time it passes the straggler has some difficulty in keeping it in sight, when his feet are no longer upon it; and that the more, if he be feeling disposed for freer motion, and some relief from the monotony of always marching straight before him.

But those who persevere to the end find themselves, at last, standing before a Narrow Gate, a sufficiently suitable exit from the Straited Way, but opening into a spacious and beautiful region, filled with light of the whitest and most glorious appearance.

Yet, notwithstanding the rumours of its brilliant and mysterious termination, which might well raise the fairest hopes, the Straited Way is trodden only by a few. Here and there it may be that two or three are walking in company; but more often a solitary, and perhaps dejected, pilgrim is seen to journey by. For

the vast majority, even of those who have some desire for safety, do not trouble to make diligent inquiry, but have allowed their inclinations to persuade them, that they will obtain salvation just as certainly by the Broad as by the Straitened Way, and with much less inconvenience and discomfort.

It thus appears, that the travellers on both roads have, at least, some more or less vague idea of a Wrath-to-Come, which they would fain evade; and that all of them regard escape as impossible, except by a separation of some kind, even if it be only by profession, from the City of Wickedness. But there is a very serious diversity, between the views of the gay crowds who are walking at ease on their downward-sloping road and those of the few toilers, who are here and there dotting the steeps that lead to the Narrow Gate. And the Lord would have us to understand what that difference is, that we may avoid the appalling disappointment, which, as we shall presently see, will overwhelm so many on the Great Day.

What, then, are the meanings of the Narrow Gate and Straitened Way and the Wide Gate and Broad Way; and why do so few find the former, and so many enter in at the latter? Moreover, what is the relation of these two verses to the preceding portion of the discourse?

The "Straitsened," or, more literally still, "the Pressed in Way," is the manner of life, the walk and conduct, marked out by the Lord for His disciples in these three chapters. And the epithet is deeply significant; for the Way is said to be "pressed in," as it were, and made continually narrower by the precepts of the discourse as they become understood and recognized.

In brief, then, this Way is the Way of strict obedience to all laws laid down by the Lord—an obedience which never regards any of His commandments as least, or as of little importance, but prays and strives for grace to fulfil *all* righteousness, that is, every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.

To find this Way, men must have a real consciousness of their deplorable condition before God; so that they may become willing to give up all things, if they may but be delivered from it, and admitted into communion with the Father of Goodness and Love, and with His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. If they be brought to this state of mind, they will eagerly avail themselves of all the helps which His mercy has bestowed upon them. With them, the Bible will no longer be a Book to be praised and laid aside: they know well, that, if the Spirit will but vitalize it, they will be able to draw from it words of life and power. By meditating upon it day and night, and by that means alone, will they succeed in ejecting from their hearts and heads all the foul and deadly teachings of the World the Flesh and the Devil, and become more and more conformed in their minds to the Mind of God. And, as they increase in the knowledge of His principles and commandments, they will feel more and more strongly that they must show their love for Him by keeping them. Thus they will become anxious, and cautious, in their walk, praying ceaselessly, that they may not offend even in the very least thing; and will be scrupulous, not only to do what their Lord has bidden them, but, also, to do it in the precise manner in which He has directed it to be done.

Now, in pursuing such a course, they find their way greatly straitened and pressed in by His requirements, often so different from that which their own will, or the

adulterated teachings of earthly churches and sects, would dictate. Nevertheless, He upholds them, throughout the whole time of their obedience, with such mighty power that they can always say with rejoicing;—"His commandments are not grievous!"

We cannot, however, better describe those who are moving on toward the "Narrow Gate" than by calling them followers, though with faltering steps, of their Great Lord, Who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears unto Him That was able to save Him from death, "was heard for His godly fear." Or, perhaps better, "for His caution," or "His cautious walk." For the Lord's two chief characteristics, during His earth-life as a man, were His ceaseless and earnest supplications to His Heavenly Father, and His never-slackening caution, lest at any time He should offend. ?

And these same are also the characteristics of those who are walking in the Straitened Way; only that the latter are not always able, as their Lord was, to keep themselves void of offence. He could say, "Which of you convinceth Me of sin?" "The Prince of This World cometh, and hath nothing in Me." But, if they say that they have no sin, they deceive themselves, and the truth is not in them.

Nevertheless, implicit obedience, arising from gratitude, love and adoration, is the rule which they set ever before them; and they do not strive to keep it by following a code of bare outward laws, but by working out in their hearts these two great principles;—"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind," and "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."

Turning now to the Broad Way, we shall have little

One cannot admit, nor do I think we believe with intended to convey the implication of these words. One

difficulty in discovering what the figure means. For here, again, we have presented to us a kind of religious system, and not an avowed ungodliness, as many think. And as the first was the Way of Obedience, so this is the Way of Compromise, Lawlessness, and Disobedience.

Those who are found in it in such large numbers do not like, and will not endure, confined ways, but must have room for the free exercise of their own will and their sensuous and selfish desires. They do, indeed, wish to escape the Wrath-to-Come, and are usually willing to believe, or at least to express their belief, in the expiation of their sins through the Blood of the Lord Jesus: but they will not entertain the thought of following His steps in their daily life. They could not possibly live as He did—an Outcast from society, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief! Why, God sent them into the world to be happy, and loves to see them so! No: they will discuss with you the readiest and easiest way of making the best of both worlds; but that must be recognized as the limit of their concessions.

Such persons will see no necessity for carefulness in the matter of obedience or of doctrine; for they are accustomed to act as if God had given no written revelation of His will, and, according to their bent of mind, to put either themselves or their church into His place of authority. And, whether it be avowed or not, the rule which they really follow is, that whatever seems right to a man must also be right in the sight of God, and that He will never find fault with one who acts in accordance with his "conscience." For, owing to their characteristic indifference, they have overlooked the passages in His Word which tell us, that conscience

may become "weak," "defiled," "seared with a hot iron," or even positively "evil." So completely do they push themselves into the place of God, so forgetful are they of the fact, that they are fallen beings who have lost their spiritual perceptions, and whose very intellect is marred by a selfish bias! So heedless are they of their Creator's warnings, that "the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God," that "there is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death"!

To men of this kind, who do not feel themselves pledged to every precept of the Bible, it matters not whether the Lord said, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved," or "He that is baptized and believeth:" they will settle such a matter for themselves, or, perhaps, accept the tradition of their favourite Church. The Scriptures in describing the Church of Christ may altogether omit the priest—except in the sense that all her real members, men women and children, are priests unto God—and may give the most conclusive reasons for the omission; but, if the mind of such men inclines in that direction, they will have, not only a great caste of priests, but even a hierarchy of bishops and archbishops, and, perhaps, also of Patriarchs or Popes. Or, to give one other example, Apostles may be inspired to forbid the public teaching of spiritual things by women, unless those who are taught be either of their own sex or children; but on the Broad Way some give out that God has blessed the violation of His Own law; and, therefore, that it must be as right as it is natural to violate it!

Surely, all who do these and like things are in no small danger of finding themselves, in the Great Day, among the many who, when they claim to have been

servants of the Lord, will receive the stern and paralyzing answer, "I never knew you : depart from Me, ye that work lawlessness."

They do not meditate in the Law of God day and night : they do not spend their time partly in prayer and praise, partly in earnest labour on behalf of those for whom the Lord died. Hence their minds must be filled with something ; and literature, philosophy, science, politics, novel-reading, balls, entertainments, golf, bridge, and a vast diversity of other occupations or amusements, are taken up for this purpose. And so, the gossamer ties which once attached them to earth are found to have swollen and hardened into steel fetters.

Meanwhile, their religion, also, naturally becomes more and more earthly, and sometimes withers into a dull formality, is sometimes transformed into an ambition or an amusement, and sometimes bursts into the fiery-scarlet petals of sectarianism and partisan-bitterness.

But we must cease : for even to enumerate the varied pursuits and manners of those who tread the Broad Way would require much time, and effect no useful purpose. Suffice it, then, to repeat, that they are those who, while they may wish to escape the Wrath-to-Come, may be willing to believe the Gospel, and may even have some little love for the Lord, yet do not love Him with all their heart and soul and strength, and are, consequently, unwilling to follow Him through privation inconvenience and trouble, refuse to surrender their own will and bias, and, if they do not absolutely ignore His laws, will, at least, show themselves inexact and indifferent in keeping them.

How sharp a rebuke, then, do these two verses administer to the easy-going Christianity of the day,

which, with a strange heedlessness of the Lord's words, commends "broad" views, and stigmatizes every effort to show the narrowness of the Way as illiberal and uncharitable, regarding self-denial as fanaticism, and earnestness of purpose as a foolish enthusiasm.

Each Way leads off to its own goal: the Broad to a destruction, not necessarily irrevocable, but it may be to that Age-long gloom, into which some, who have failed to attain to the First Resurrection, will depart from the Judgment-seat of Christ, and of which we have written elsewhere.¹ But the Straited Gate we may regard as that of the First Resurrection, which opens directly upon the full fruition of Everlasting Life and the Glory of the Kingdom.

False Prophets and how to Detect Them

15. "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravening wolves."

Too often men are allured into the Broad Way by those who are professing to be teachers of the Truth and ministers of Christ, although they have not His Spirit, and, therefore, are none of His. For Satan can work far more effectually by counterfeiting truth than by openly denying it: therefore, false prophets have always abounded. We find frequent allusion to them in the Old Testament, where "the prophet that teacheth lies" is indignantly denounced as being, in God's sight, the very tail and refuse of society.² And his general characteristic is, that he speaks smooth things,³ and says "Peace, peace, when there is no peace."⁴

¹ See pp. 102-5, 110-6, 229-49.

² Isa. ix. 15.

³ Isa. xxx. 10.

⁴ Jer. vi. 14.

Let us not, however, imagine that such deceivers passed away with the times of Israel; for the Lord warns us, that we, too, have reason to fear their fascination. And, indeed, He elsewhere predicts, that, in the closing years of the Age, they will not only increase in numbers, but also be empowered by Satan to work great signs and wonders, the object of their mission being to bewilder and mislead men in regard to the then impending return of the Lord.

But there are, also, ever with us false prophets of a minor order, who perform no miracles, but lead men astray by their plausible teaching and influence. Of these we have already mentioned two common types, namely, the man whose teaching is faultless, while his life is by no means in accord with it; and, again, the man whose life seems to be self-sacrificing, full of love, and saintly; but whose teaching leads his followers, however imperceptibly, away from the Lord Jesus, and gradually substitutes for Him, "the Church," "the priest, humanitarianism, intellect, literature, art, or some other idol." Nay, a preacher of this class, especially if he be of attractive personality, will not seldom establish himself as leader and virtual god of his hearers; so that they will not even care to inquire whence he draws his inspiration, or what the tendency of his doctrines may be: it will be sufficient that they have proceeded from his own mouth.

These last are the most dangerous of all the lying prophets, and it is by means of such agents that most of the false doctrines and religions are propagated. "So good a man must be right," is the frequent excuse of those who *will* follow error, provided it be arrayed in an attractive guise, that is, in a guise which is attractive to their particular idiosyncrasy.

And so, they despise these words of the Lord ; and give no heed to the warning of His Apostle, that the angels of Satan are wont to present themselves as angels of light. For it matters not how saintly the teacher may seem, or how greatly we may be affected by his personality, the only important question is, Can his teaching be confirmed in every particular by the Word of God ? There is absolutely no other test by which to try the spirits of the prophets ; but that one God has given into the hands of every man, and woe to us if we neglect to use it.

The false prophets are said to come to us ; for they are not sent of God, as are the true. Nevertheless, He permits them to come, in order that professing believers may be sifted, and the chaff separated from the wheat. He allows the voice of the stranger to be heard within the fold, and many of the flocks will arise and follow him. But the Lord's Own sheep will not do so : on the contrary, they will flee from the stranger ; for they know not his voice.

They are, moreover, described as coming to us in sheep's clothing—an expression which may be interpreted in either of two ways. It may mean that they come so covered as to resemble true sheep, and that, in such a guise, they gain admittance into the fold upon pretence of belonging to it, although, underneath their assumed wool, they are ravening wolves, seeking to devour the flock.

Such an explanation would not, however, be suitable to the context, which deals with shepherds rather than with sheep. Probably, therefore, the true sense will be, that they come clothed in sheep-skins, that is to say, dressed as shepherds, presenting themselves as ministers of the Lord Jesus, while they are really seducing agents of Satan.

16. "By their fruits ye shall know them. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?"

17. Even so, every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but the corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit.

18. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.

19. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

20. Therefore, by their fruits ye shall know them."

The class, to which these false prophets really belong, may be discovered, just as we detect the quality of trees, by their fruits. And the fruits for which we must look, are not only their doctrines, and the kind of disciples which they make—though both of these points are important items of the test—but, also, the manner of their life. We must carefully observe whether they walk in accordance with the precepts of this searching discourse; whether they exhibit in themselves the marks of discipleship herein laid down. And, if we ourselves have become penetrated with the Lord's words by both hearing and doing them, we shall have found out what it is to be real disciples, and so have little difficulty in detecting a false one. Thorns cannot produce grapes, nor can thistles bear figs; and so, we need not doubt, that, sooner or later, the fruits of the false prophet will betray him, provided only that we ourselves have had our senses exercised to discern good and evil, by a lowly walk before our God, and by a ceaseless desire to discover, and put away from us, all that is not well-pleasing to Him.

For every good tree produces good fruit, and by so doing proves itself to be good. But, until the time of

fruit comes, a final judgment is not possible. There may be vines which display the same leaf and appearance as good trees; and yet when we look for them to bring forth grapes, they may bring forth wild grapes;¹ they may prove to be evil and full of deadly venom, like degenerate Israel, of whom it was said;—

“For their vine is of the vine of Sodom,
And of the fields of Gomorrah:
Their grapes are grapes of gall,
Their clusters are bitter:
Their wine is the poison of dragons,
And the cruel venom of asps.”²

And since, in this discourse and elsewhere, the Lord, by declaring His just requirements, has shown us what the good fruit is, He thereby indicates, also, how we may discern the evil, and so reject the tree upon which it grows.

For, if we can decide what is the nature of the fruit, we may be sure of our judgment upon the tree. No good tree produces evil fruit, nor can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. And just so, as John tells us, “Whosoever is begotten of God doth not commit sin;” that is, does not do so habitually and deliberately, which is expressed by the Greek tense. In like manner, he that is of the Devil can do no real good, though he may abound in philanthropic actions, and both display and communicate to others a religion of mere profession, or of sentiment, or of error mixed, it may be, as most false faiths are, with some amount of truth. In short, he may be lavish of leaves, but must be altogether barren of wholesome spiritual fruit.

The Lord brings this subject to an end by declaring,

¹ Isa. v. 2.

² Deut. xxxiii. 32, 33.

in the solemn words of His forerunner, the doom of the false prophet or disciple. For, just as the tree which will not respond to the efforts of the husbandman by bearing good fruit is cut down as useless, save for firewood ; so will the teacher of lies, however plausible he may seem to the world, be presently felled by the axe of death, and cast into the fire that cannot be quenched.

By their fruits, then, we shall know them : and a promise seems to be conveyed in the future tense. If we both hear and do the commandments of our Gracious Lord, He will give us wisdom to discern the fruit of those who would be our teachers, and by it to detect them if they be not sent of God.

*Sloth or Lawlessness will exclude disciples
from the Kingdom*

21. "Not every one that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of the Heavens ; but he that doeth the will of My Father Which is in the Heavens."

Besides the trees which openly exhibit bad fruit, and must be cast into the fire, there are, also, others which produce leaves in abundance, but little or no fruit, and with such the Lord now proceeds to deal.

But how overpowering a feeling of awe must have thrilled both disciples and multitude, as He uttered this and the two following verses ! He had just been speaking, as One Who had authority to do so, of the judgment of the false prophet, and of his final consignment to the Lake of Fire and Brimstone. And now He reveals Himself as the Lord of the Kingdom, and the Judge of the Quick and the Dead, and declares in majestic and dread-

inspiring words, that some, although they may have actually believed on Him, and professed much devotion to Him, shall, nevertheless, be disproved under His piercing scrutiny, as falling far short of His standard of sincerity and obedience. And the consideration of this truth He would press upon His Own disciples, lest, after having preached unto others, they themselves should be rejected.

“Not every one that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord :” so much, indeed, we have all done ; but—have our deeds really corresponded to our words ?

For it is a wanton mockery to call Him, Lord, while we continue to do only what is pleasing to ourselves ; to profess to obey Him, and, at the same time, to be ever breaking those commandments, the keeping of which alone can mark us as His servants, and distinguish us from the subjects of Satan. Such conduct is an open confession, that we are rebels, and deserve to be treated accordingly. “Why call ye Me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say ?” is His Own penetrating question.¹ The will of His Father, as revealed in this and other portions of Scripture, must be scrupulously obeyed ; and it is in vain that the would-be disciple strives to make up for the deficiency of his deeds by the fervour of his words.

We must not, however, omit to notice, that, in the verse before us, there is no reference to faith or everlasting life : the only matter in question is the Kingdom. Hence the Lord does not pronounce final condemnation upon this class ; for they have really believed on Him and are saved, though they have not walked worthily of their vocation. But, since they did not

¹ Luke vi. 46.

respond to His call to be labouring husbandmen in His vineyard;¹ since they were not willing to endure hardship as His good soldiers, and to suffer with Him here below; therefore, they may not reign with Him in the next Age. They must lose the great Prize of the Heavenly Calling, the First Resurrection and the Kingdom. Hence their case will have to be decided at the Judgment-seat of Christ, just before the commencement of the Millennial reign, when rewards or punishments will be assigned to the saved for the things done in the body. But the sentence of everlasting death will be pronounced only from the Great White Throne, after the Thousand Years and the subsequent rebellion have passed by.

22. "Many will say to Me in That Day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy by Thy Name, and by Thy Name cast out demons, and by Thy Name do many mighty works?"

23. And then will I confess unto them, I never knew you: depart from Me, ye that work lawlessness."

Since what is predicted in this passage is to occur "in That Day," the time indicated is evidently the same as that of the previous verse, and the scene will be realized before the Judgment-seat of Christ. And such a conclusion is confirmed by the fact, that here, also, there is no mention of faith, but only of works,

¹ "The husbandman that laboreth"—literally, "the labouring husbandman"—"must be the first to partake of the fruits" (2 Tim. ii. 6, R.V.). That is, as other Scriptures show us, that he only, whom the Spirit has empowered to gather fruit unto life everlasting, will have part in the First Resurrection, and so will rejoice together with the Sower a thousand years before his slothful brethren will be raised up on the Last Day (John iv. 36; vi. 40).

either in the plea or the sentence. Hence, even in this case, the Lord is revealing the fate, not of the absolutely lost, but of erring believers.

The "not every one" of the previous verse is ominously changed into "many." And how appalling a consideration does the fact suggest! For these "many" are not made up of the vast multitudes that abide heedlessly in the City of Wickedness, never attempting to enter, even upon the Broad Way. No: every one of them, posing as a disciple and follower of the Lord Jesus, has laboured in His Name, and that, in many cases, conspicuously, and with apparent power. But alas! their lack of strict obedience had enabled Satan to use them as his agents for the adulteration and enfeebling of the Word, and for the teaching of men's commandments in the place of God's.

How does the Narrow Way seem to grow more narrow as the Lord proceeds! How do the few that are in it seem still to be diminished! How, as we advance with trembling steps, does the warning cry peal forth with ever-increasing urgency, "Pass the time of your sojourning here in fear!"

The class of persons set before us in this passage would seem to be those who, after having really believed on the Lord, allow themselves to be taken in a snare of the Devil. Too content with the certainty, that all their past sins are forgiven through the Blood of the Lamb, they forget the present and the future, and do not pray, as they ought, for the indwelling and ceaseless guidance of God's Holy Spirit. Hence they do not walk before Him in strict obedience to His Word, and are, consequently, prone to grieve His Spirit and deprive themselves of His protection. Of

such an opportunity Satan does not fail to take advantage, and dire are the results which follow.

But the case which the Lord seems now to have specially in view is, perhaps, somewhat as follows;—The Adversary, seeing that his victim is, for the time, completely in his power, approaches him as an angel of light, incites him to continue his preaching and teaching of Christ, brightens, it may be, his intellect, intensifies his eloquence, and withal gives him a spiritual power which is felt by his followers, and may cause them to hail him as a prophet. Possibly, too, he may even be endowed with something like the powers of a spiritualistic medium, and so be regarded as a wonder-worker, either in healing or in some other imitation of the gifts of the Spirit.

Yet, while, under a baleful inspiration, he is exercising energies so dangerous, he still thinks that he is glorifying the Lord, and does not cease to believe on Him, at least as a Saviour from sin. And his delusion, as we are here told, may continue to blind him even until he stands before the Judgment-seat, and, astonished at finding himself rejected, utters the plea which the Lord puts into his mouth. For even then he will not see, that, although he quieted his conscience with the thought that he was doing service to the Lord Who died for him, he was really in the hands of the Devil, who was, all the time, flattering his vanity, imperceptibly changing his motives, whetting his appetite for the praise of men, and so causing him to speak smooth things to them, with the effect that their hearts, also, were filled with vanity. And that, too, in evil days, when he ought to have been striving to humble them to the ground for their forgetfulness of their Creator and Redeemer, their secret acts of disobedience

*I believe this
to be quite
possible.*

in thought word and deed, their insincerity and selfishness in their intercourse with their fellows, and their love of pleasure rather than of God.

But, while a mere personal ambition and general love of the world are to believers a frequent cause of stumbling and of neglecting the Word, there are, also, many particular motives which Satan suggests to draw them off from spiritual to carnal things, some of which have been already mentioned in our exposition of the Broad Way. Such motives, however, usually gravitate toward some scheme for the social betterment of the world, or some compromise with it, whereby the professed servants of the Lord hope to obtain help from an arm of flesh, and to attract increasing congregations.

And, in the case of all these worldly professors, there is nothing that more clearly reveals the extent of their apostasy from God than the fact, that, if any point be disputed among them, they rarely seek a solution of the difficulty in His Word, but rather turn to precedent, custom, the Canons or Traditions of the Church, the views of some supposed saint, or of a former leader or their particular sect; while they will not seldom appeal without shame or scruple, to the spirit of the present Age of which Satan is the god.

The desire for political power is another great snare; and it is a pitiful sight to see Nonconformists—who have often preserved the Light in times of darkness—forming themselves into a League of the Free Churches in order to secure it. Could they not have learnt a lesson from the Catholic and State Churches, which have ever been committing fornication with the Kings of the Earth, but with all their vast influence, have gathered very little fruit unto Life everlasting?

Yet a third snare, into which many are falling, is a desire for the exhibition of spiritual gifts. Certain minds have a great delight in such manifestations, and yet know nothing of that quiet communion with the Holy Spirit, through which alone power can be received from God.

It is, indeed, true that Paul bids us covet earnestly the best spiritual gifts, and especially that we may prophesy, or speak under the direct influence of the Spirit to the edification of others; for such a gift he declares to be greater than that of speaking with tongues. But, in still stronger terms, he urges us to follow after love, as a far more excellent way by which we may draw near unto God, and be made partakers of the Divine nature.

And, if we abound in that Heavenly virtue, as well as in faith and hope, we shall be in full communion with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ, and may then seek the spiritual gifts, also, in safety. For, if we would receive the latter, we must enter into the sphere of spiritual influences. And, unless we do so under the guidance and protection of the Spirit of God, we are venturing amidst the greatest perils; because the Canaanite is still in that land. It is no region of unreal phantoms, as many imagine; but the home of appalling spiritual energies, extreme in their hostility to the inhabitants of our planet, because they are well aware, that God is calling out and preparing a people from among us to go up and possess their place and Kingdom.

Now, of this elect body, every individual member must, in the regular course of his discipline, rise, at length, into the spiritual Canaan; and then his great conflict begins. In his lower struggles with flesh and

blood, he may have been finally victorious : even unregenerate men will often overcome these foes, if it be necessary to do so for the carrying out of their ambitions or self-willed plans. But the Principalities, the Powers, the World-rulers of this Age of Darkness, and the Spiritual Hosts of Wickedness in the Heavenly Places—these are adversaries of a very different kind. These may be beaten off, but they will certainly return, at what hour we know not : they never relax their efforts, or faint with weariness ; and, should they at any time cease to assail us, it is only for a season, by way of strategy, if, perchance, we may become careless, and they may presently take us unawares. With these we must wage continual and unyielding warfare during the whole of our life here, until the Great Deliverer come.

But, terrible as the struggle may be, we shall be supported in, and brought through it, provided we have committed our souls to the God Who bade us face the chastening trial. Ofttimes, indeed, we may be hardly bested ; but, like Paul, shall ever be able to cry ;—

“ Pressed on every side, yet not straitened ;
perplexed, yet not unto despair ; persecuted, yet
not forsaken ; smitten down, yet not destroyed ! ”

And, if in the strength of the Lord we endure, we know that, in the end, we shall come forth more than conquerors, through Him That loved us.

But, how shall it fare with one who has rashly ventured amid such dangers of his own free will, and with no call to do so from the Spirit of God ?

If he be not Christ's, he will be altogether in the power of evil spirits, and will soon be entangled in the coils of everlasting destruction.

If, however, he be a misguided believer, the demons know well that his final destruction is beyond their power. But they will, at least, do him what harm they can, and use him for their own purposes while they may. Disguised as ministers of Christ, and with marvellous cunning, they will bewilder his spiritual perceptions, until he accepts darkness for light and bitter for sweet. Then they will send him forth into the world as a teacher of the Gospel, forsooth; but with some neutralizing error in his mind, which will gradually obscure and efface the truth with which he began.

The particular kind of error to which our Lord primarily refers must be connected with supernatural powers and acts; for its accompaniments are prophesying, the casting out of devils, and mighty works. This fact may point to the teaching of extreme and one-sided teachers whose stronger senses are in regard to the Holy Spirit, by a collusion listening up their hearers to see, as mission symptoms are, the Alone distributes to wase, their pare to fear that, however, their minds are ill-balanced, and they are neither living nor teaching in strict obedience to the Lord's commands, they receive no answer from on High; but for such an opportunity demons are ever watching, and they are always prepared to seize it by bringing their own powers into play. Strange scenes follow—ecstasies, Dervish-like spinnings and exhaustions, bodies rolling on the ground, and so on. But the mad excitement passes, and leaves nothing satisfactory behind it—no permanent development of faith hope and love, no closer clinging to the Lord Jesus, no increased desire for the study of God's Word, no longing to discover its many still hidden mysteries, by a know-

ledge of which men's minds may become conformed to the Mind of God, and themselves prepared to stand before Him in His Heavenly Kingdom.

These remarks apply, also, to some of the movements called "revivals," which seem to have been mainly, if not altogether, produced by the same agency as the ecstasies just mentioned. For there is no influence of the Spirit of God upon earth which Satan does not attempt to counterfeit. Spurious revivals may, however, generally be detected by the presence of certain lawless phenomena which are not of God: such, for instance, as a wild enthusiasm and confusion, which could not be wrought by a God of order; an appearance of female speakers and leaders, which is not merely without precedent in the New Testament, but is actually forbidden by it; and an eagerness to be ever engaged in such work, which can be made to excite and stimulate the fleshly through emotions, coupled with an impatience of quietness to the Word of God. Whenever such a movement is prominent and general, we have reason to believe the movement is demon-inspired, at least to a considerable extent.

We must, however, remember, that not only such persons as we have endeavoured to describe, but also every one who, after having received grace to trust in the Lord, has neglected to go on to perfection, is in danger of falling into the condemnation of the twenty-third verse—the believing Ritualist, who has read his Bible with so little diligence, or so unfair a bias, that he has not discovered the inconsistency of his own teaching with it; the believing philanthropist, who may have done much for mankind, but has not been constrained to his benevolent deeds by the love of Christ; or the ordinary believer, who says that the simple

Gospel is enough for him, and will not search out the commandments of the Lord, in order that he may evince his love for Him by doing them.

The three acts for which merit is claimed are, from man's point of view, arranged in an ascending scale; but, if we wish to regard them as signs of true discipleship, that order must be reversed. For, in the eyes of men, preaching with power would be deemed an ordinary and comparatively unimportant proof; the casting out of demons might pass as something more striking; while the display of "many mighty works" would be recognized as the surest credential of all.

We, on the contrary, are warned, that mighty works will presently be exhibited by false prophets, also, through the power of Satan. Such works, therefore, cannot in themselves be accepted as a proof that a prophet has come from God. The casting out of demons is, perhaps, somewhat stronger evidence: but this, too, might be effected by a collusion with the evil spirits themselves, which, as missionaries tell us, are willing, even to-day, to cease their persecution of individuals or families, upon the condition that obedience, or worship, be rendered to themselves.

If, then, we would try a prophet, and discover whether he be from God or not, we must begin by testing his teaching. If he confesses Jesus Christ coming in flesh, and His Blood as the only expiation for the sins of men; if he contradicts nothing that has been already revealed, but in every respect strengthens and confirms the Scriptures, then we may thankfully recognize whatever acts of power he may exhibit as the seal of God to his testimony. But we must never allow that miracles can establish a doctrine not in accord with revelation. For, if we do so, it will be because we have been caught

in the great snare which Satan has spread for the Last Days.

In the Lord's reply, the expression, "Then will I confess unto them,"¹ is very significant. Hitherto they have been misled by the delusions of lying spirits and of their own self-deceit: now they must hear the plain truth from the lips of their Judge. In the preachings which they had imagined to be for His glory, in all the mighty works which they had done in His Name, He had neither recognized, nor had any connection with them. While men were admiring their supposed devotion to Him, He had not owned them: when eloquent periods were being poured from their mouths, He took no pleasure in what they said: it was not His Spirit That inspired them. A spirit of evil, crouching within their heart, threw up those fervid but false words, and the angel of Satan stood by.

Therefore, they must depart from His Presence: their earth-lives have not been passed in His service, and He cannot now suffer them to reign with Him. They must go to their own place, and tarry there under His displeasure, in gloom and darkness, until the Millennium of reward has gone by. And the reason of their rejection is, that they have been workers of lawlessness, instead of doers of righteousness. They have done what seemed good in their own eyes, have followed their own natural bent, and listened to the suggestions and teachings of demons, although the King's Code of Laws lay upon their shelves and tables, and they might at any time have corrected their way by means of it.

¹ Both of our Versions read "profess," but "confess" is much nearer to the meaning of ὁμολογεῖν.

"I will confess unto them" - night vision
 they hear that, in confession of
 the works which they had done
 He alone has confessed
 & recognized them.

The Wise and the Foolish Builder

24. "Every one, therefore, which heareth these words of Mine, and doeth them, shall be likened unto a wise man, which built his house upon the rock :

25. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house ; and it fell not : for it was founded upon the rock.

26. And every one that heareth these words of Mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand :

27. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and smote upon that house ; and it fell ; and great was the fall thereof."

The Lord now closes His solemn and searching discourse with a Parable of Judgment. In it He warns us of the Testing Ordeal through which all the saved must pass, and the result of which will decide whether we have won or lost the Prize of the Heavenly Calling ; whether we may go up forthwith into the Land to possess it, or must get us back again into the howling wilderness ; whether we may enter into the joy of our Lord, carrying all our talents with us, or, bereft even of those with which we should have traded, must be thrust into the outer darkness, as being unworthy to obtain that Age and the Resurrection out from among the dead.¹

For we may not trifle with Divine commands, nor

¹ Luke xx. 35.

alter them, even in the very smallest detail, in deference to Churches, Sects, or any human opinion. As the Great King, the Lord has given them to us in this and other discourses ; and, unless we have studied, prayed over, understood, and obeyed them, we are disloyal subjects, and must be exposed and punished as such.

Here the test is pictured as a hurricane of storm and flood ; that which is to be tested, as a house ; and the issue depends, not upon the structure or materials of the building, which are assumed to be unexceptional, but solely upon its foundation.

The word, "therefore," in the twenty-fourth verse, marks what follows as an inference from that which immediately precedes it. Hence the Lord is still dealing, as throughout the discourse, with the conduct and judgment of the saved, now regarded as aspirants to the Prize. And this conclusion is further confirmed by the fact, that we still find no reference to faith, but only to works and service, which will be passed in review before the Judgment-seat of Christ. For the test is applied to the houses, not to the builders.

Hence the rock does not here represent the Lord Jesus, as it certainly must have done had salvation by the Blood of the Lamb been the subject before us. Nevertheless, faith in Him as a Saviour from sin is manifestly indicated by the clause, "Every one that heareth these words of Mine."

With the way thus cleared, the logical interpretation of the rock and the sand is obvious. The former represents the combination of hearing and doing, the quality of one who, as soon as he has received instructions from the Lord, at once sets himself to carry them out ; while the sand depicts the insecure foundation-ground of those who hear, acquiesce in, and, perhaps,

even admire, His commandments, but do not obey them.

The houses raised upon these foundations represent the profession of the builders, that is, their system of doctrine and conduct ; and both of these systems are presumably correct, because both are framed from the words of the Lord. Hence no fault is found either with the structure or the materials of the houses : the critical difference lies in the foundation-ground.

Accordingly, when the hurricane strikes the buildings, and drives the floods against them, that which is fixed on the rock is able to withstand all the force of the storm, and so passes through the trial without injury, preserving, also, whatever is within it.

But the fate of that which was founded upon the sand is very different. Constructed as well, and with as good materials, as the other, it has presented a sufficiently brave appearance, while skies were blue, and sun or stars were shining. But, at the first fierce thud of the blast, it trembles ; and will evidently be quite unable to sustain the rush of the floods. The inmate is terrified, and, with palpitating heart, flits aimlessly from room to room. He sees that, unless he gets him quickly out of his house, he will certainly perish beneath its ruins. He opens the door, and plunges into the pitiless storm ; but is only a few steps from the threshold, when the cracks of the breaking walls, and the fearful crash which follows, tell him that his pleasant habitation, together with all that it contains, has collapsed into a chaotic heap. There is left to him neither shelter from the storm, nor refuge to which he may presently return.

Thus the Lord ends His discourse with a division of those who hear and receive His words into two sharply

defined classes. He who belongs to the first of them does not stop at hearing, but boldly confesses the Name of his Lord before men, and proceeds to do His commandments. And so, by becoming a doer as well as a hearer, he founds the house of his profession upon a rock, and it proves able to resist the violence of the storm. His life is shown to have corresponded with his profession, and he will receive his reward, and be accounted worthy to obtain the First Resurrection.

But he who hears, assents, and professes, but does not perform that which is required of him, is as though he had built upon shifting sand. His profession is what it should be, but has no foundation in fact. Hence, when the storm comes up, he feels the inadequacy of his building to withstand it: terrors seize upon him, and his work, which may have been praised by men, falls into shapeless ruins in the Presence of the Lord. He himself may, indeed, escape, because he has heard and believed, so far as salvation is concerned; and, accordingly, it is not said that he is buried beneath the ruins. But he will escape with no more than bare life: all his works are destroyed; and, since his profession has been proved to be untrue, into the outside darkness he must go.

With this passage we may profitably compare another, which presents a different aspect of the same subject, and may be found in the third chapter of the First Epistle to the Corinthians. The latter, however, deals with salvation as the basis of reward, and, consequently, the only possible foundation is Jesus Christ. If that be laid, the man who builds upon it must ultimately be saved; for it can never be moved. But the building, which, as the context will show, represents his teaching and the conduct that results therefrom,

depends for its safety upon the materials of which it is constructed—whether they be, as Paul has it, gold silver and costly stones, or wood hay and stubble. And in this case the Testing Ordeal is not storm and flood, but fire.

The probable origin of the figure which Paul uses is thus described by Dean Howson ;—

“ I believe that in such cities as Ephesus, where the letter was written, or Corinth, to which it was addressed, there was a signal difference—far greater than in modern European Cities—between the gorgeous splendour of the great public buildings and the meanness and squalor of those streets where the poor and the profligate resided. The former were constructed of marble and granite : the capitals of their columns and their roofs were richly decorated with silver and gold : the latter were mean structures, run up with boards for walls, with straw in the interstices, and thatch on the top.”¹

Now, it is quite possible that Paul may have witnessed an outbreak of fire in a row of these sordid buildings, and have noticed the rapid spread of the flames among the houses of wood hay and stubble—so rapid, indeed, that the inmates had no time to rescue their goods and furniture, but could only rush through the flames in their night-gear, and save no more than their bare life. As soon, however, as the fire reached a great public building, or the mansion of some wealthy citizen, its fury was checked : it could not lay hold of the granite or marble walls, and having speedily consumed its available fuel, died down and expired, leaving the stone edifice uninjured.

¹ *The Metaphors of St. Paul*, pp. 78-9.

But, whether the Apostle actually beheld such an incident or not, it will, at least, furnish an apt illustration of his meaning, to understand which we have now only to inquire what is indicated by the contrasted materials of which the houses are built. For we have already seen, that the superstructure upon the foundation represents the system of doctrines, based upon a correct view of the Lord's Person and work, which the builder professes and teaches.

Evidently, then, by the gold silver and costly stones the Apostle would have us understand pure doctrine, drawn directly and solely from the Word of God, by means of diligent study under the guidance of His Holy Spirit. For the teachings and conduct derived from such a source will bear His inspection, and pass unconsumed through His testing ordeal.

On the other hand, the building of wood hay and stubble points to defective doctrine, framed after a merely superficial reading of Scripture, and usually adulterated to a large extent by self-will, philanthropy, ecclesiasticism, philosophy, politics, or other human opinions and feelings. Now, no doubt, many teachings which are thus evolved prove useful enough in matters of the present life. But they are not distinctively Christian, and cannot be found among the Lord's "all things whatsoever I commanded you."¹ They may be helpful in this world, but they do not tend to the gathering of fruit unto life everlasting.² Hence, although they may have been appreciated here below, and have won honour from men, they will not be recognized by the Lord.

Such a contrast seems to be suggested by the very

¹ Matth. xxviii, 20.

² John iv. 36.

nature of the materials in the figure, as well as by the context of the passage. For, if all that a man seeks be wood hay and stubble, such things are common, of slight value, and may be procured, with comparative ease and little expense, from the surface of the earth. But he can construct with them nothing better than a miserable hovel, liable at any time to rapid and total destruction by fire.

If, however, he decides that he must have gold silver and costly stones, there is, indeed, much labour before him—toilsome searchings and minings and quarryings. But, when he has once secured his materials, they will take shape under his hands as a stately, spacious, and, above all, a permanent and fire-proof dwelling.

Now, in this passage, as well as in the other, the ordeal is represented as terribly severe. We know that the Lord Jesus will be revealed to the world in flaming fire: it is probable that He will appear in like manner to the saved who will stand before His Judgment-seat, and that their works will be tried by this same fire of His Presence. It would seem, too, from the figure, that they will have to approach Him with all that they have reckoned as their good works built, as it were, into a house around them. This may give some men a seemingly noble appearance as they enter the Presence. For believers often think far more highly of themselves than their Lord does; and will, consequently, have to suffer the additional pain and disgrace of being stripped of that which their foolish vanity has assumed. This might be avoided, if they would humbly and prayerfully judge themselves while yet in the body.

For they might then be permitted to detect, and obtain pardon for, the conceit which has so long blinded them to the essential selfishness and carnality of their actions.

If, however, they have neglected to do this, they may, as the Lord Himself reveals to us, proceed, so far, with unshaken confidence in what they have done. But, as each one draws nearer to the Judgment-seat, he will find himself encircled by the flames of the Presence, and in the midst of the fire which is to try his works.

Then, if those works should prove to have been done in the love and fear of the Lord, and in precise accord with His directions, the fire will not consume them, and will be to himself the quickening Breath of God, the ineffable Light in which the saints rejoice. He has contended lawfully,¹ in strict obedience to the rules for the conflict laid down by the King, and has won the Prize. And now he must be crowned, and made a pillar in the Temple of our God, from whence he shall go out no more for ever.²

But, if his service be tainted with selfish motives, and the love of God has not been shed abroad in his heart ; if he has been a law unto himself, and has not scrupulously observed the Lord's commands, the fire will seize upon his works, and consume them as unfit for the Presence of the King ; while the man himself, terrified by his appalling circumstances, will be constrained to rush through the flames for his life, abandoning everything, and to depart, naked and miserable, into the outer region of night and death !

These visions of Judgment, set before us by the Lord, and supplemented by His Apostle, should give anxious thought to believers, and act powerfully^{He} on them in, at least, three different ways. For the solemn^{bel} thoughts which they suggest should dispel the influence of the world, move us to self-judgment, and warn us

¹ 2 Tim. ii. 5.

² Rev. iii. 12.

against the danger of a simply superficial use of the Bible.

For, if we allow Satan's world so to ensnare us, that, for the sake of enjoying it, we consent to ignore the Lord's rules for separation from evil and for holiness of life, our discipline will not end at death: we shall have to face that disappointment which Paul dreaded, but avoided; ¹ after having preached to others, we shall ourselves be rejected: and, instead of rejoicing with the Lord during the Age-to-Come, shall have to suffer such temporary chastisements as He may see fit to impose upon us for evil done in the body. ²

Again, of the possibility of escaping the terrors of future judgment by judging ourselves now, we have spoken above. We should, therefore, ask the Lord to make us conscious of our acts of disobedience while we are yet in the flesh, that we may intreat Him to pardon them; and should have the words of David ever in our hearts and upon our lips;—

“Search me, O God, and know my heart:

Try me, and know my thoughts;

And see if there be any way of wickedness in me,

And lead me in the way everlasting!” ³

And, thirdly, it is certain that we cannot learn the will of God by superficial glances at the Bible. Yet there are but few believers whom we are able to describe as students of Scripture: the most of them are mere text-mongers. They will pick out some verse or isolated passage—which, taken by itself, seems to suit their condition of mind, or the ideas which they are desirous of propagating at the time—and apply it to

¹ 1 Cor. ix. 27.

² 2 Cor. v. 10.

³ Psa. cxxxix. 23, 24.

It is certainly right to ask God to make us conscious of our own disobedience; that we may judge & pardon them; but it seems unchristian to intreat Him to pardon them. Our heart is rebelliously to judge & not to be ashamed of the promises of I. 2. 1. 9.

themselves, or to others, without troubling to examine its context, and so, to make sure that the sense which they adopt is logically possible. Hence, although the wood hay and stubble, thus easily collected, may be of some little ethical use in the present world, it is not the Word of God, nor will it endure His testing fire.

For it is only by digging deeply, laboriously, and prayerfully, into the Scriptures, by a systematically minute and continuous study of entire books, that we can hope to bring up precious things, and to discover the whole counsel of God.

But desultory reading, and the constant repetition of isolated and misunderstood or distorted texts, are a frequent cause of stumbling and source of heresies.

Two or three notable instances of this might be cited from the seventh chapter of Matthew, and would be found to be the result of a blend of careless reading and human sentiment. For most believers, without any attempt to investigate the circumstances and aim of the discourse as a whole, or the internal evidence of the passage in question, and knowing no distinction between the Prize and the Gift, or between the Judgment-seat of Christ and the Great White Throne, apply the terrible revelations of Judgment to the unconverted, and thus deprive themselves of a merciful and much needed warning. Hence they are enabled to hurry carelessly through life, with little, if any, sense of their responsibility, and without making the slightest effort to avert the appalling disappointment that threatens them.

And yet they might be saved from the consequence of this self-deception, if they would only notice that the Lord's address contains no appeal to the unconverted, but deals with disciples alone; that it begins with a

gracious enumeration of the blessings promised to the progressive grades of discipleship, proceeds to expound the Lord's laws for the life and conduct of His followers, and ends with revelations of the fate of transgressors, when judgment begins at the House of God.

And, could they but understand, and seriously meditate upon, the third section, they might be startled out of their perilous apathy, and would need no further exposition of the motive which urged Paul to pray for Onesiphorus in the striking words ;—

“ The Lord grant unto him to find mercy of the Lord in That Day.”¹

¹ 2 Tim. i. 18.

CHAPTER V

THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW.—PART III

THE CREDENTIALS AND THEIR REJECTION

The Credentials

SUCH, then, were the words which fell upon the ears of the astonished Jews: never before had they heard anything like them. Their own leaders were accustomed to give wearisome, and often frivolous, expositions of the Law, full of references to the Rabbis upon whose wisdom the speaker depended: but how different was the glorious Being to Whom they had just listened! He had spoken with all the authority of the Living God, had commanded them to follow and obey Himself, and be ready to endure persecution for His sake; and, finally, had revealed Himself, in plain words, as the Lord and Judge of the Quick and the Dead!

Who, then, could This Man be? The testimony of John the Baptist to Him, and His Own mighty works and thrilling proclamation, that the long-desired Kingdom was now actually within their reach, had drawn them in crowds after Him; and what they had heard had deepened the mystery and intensified the interest which centred in Him. In awe-inspiring words, He had unfolded to them the laws and conditions under

which alone they could enter the Kingdom, and this He had done in such a manner as to claim their allegiance to Himself as the Great King Who must rule in righteousness.

Who, then, could He be That on His Own authority uttered such mighty words? Marvellous, indeed, was His speech: but what proof of its verity would He deign to give? By what credentials would He substantiate claims that were nothing less than Divine? O that Jehovah would show some sign to help His people, that they might neither reject a Mighty One from on High, nor, if they were in such a peril, be deceived by an emissary from the Power of Darkness!

For some such thoughts as these must have passed through the minds of many among the multitude; nor could the devout have failed to utter such a prayer as we have indicated. And swiftly and unmistakably came the answer.

Just as the Lord had descended to the foot of the mountain, the fixed gaze of the bystanders was diverted from Him by a noise as of confusion. A rift appeared in the crowd: men stood apart, and held themselves aloof from something that was passing through them. And soon the cry, "Beware of the leper," told what was taking place. A white-faced invalid, stricken by the terrible plague which God inflicted and none but God could heal, was making his way resolutely toward the spot where the Great Teacher stood, and the crowd was falling back to the right hand and to the left, in order to avoid pollution.

Probably, the sufferer had been listening to the discourse at a distance: and, having received grace to perceive that the Speaker could be none other than the Royal Messiah Himself, had, perhaps, remembered the

beautiful passage of Isaiah, in which the healing of all diseases is promised at the time of His coming.¹ And, possibly, the closing sentences of the discourse may have recalled to his mind the words, "And His Name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."² But, from whatever cause, a sudden hope, bright as lightning, flashed into his hitherto despairing heart. This One must be the Mighty God of Whom Isaiah had spoken: This One could heal even the most frightful and incurable of diseases! And so, as soon as the last words of the discourse had been spoken, he rose up and hurried through the yielding crowd toward the Great Light Which had appeared to him. When he found himself in the immediate Presence of the Lord, he fell on his knees before Him, and, without a moment's hesitation, cried, "Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou art able to make me clean!"

At this moment, the excitement of those who were within hearing must have been intense; for they could well understand the man's meaning. To utter such a prayer was frankly to recognize the Godhead of Him to Whom it was addressed; and the man's simple faith quickly proved that all things are, indeed, possible to them that believe.

Immediately the Lord put forth His hand, and, as He touched the pale sufferer, spoke the word of power, "I do will: be thou clean!" In an instant the disease had fled: a warm flow of blood thrilled the stagnant veins of the leper, and flushed into his white face, and he stood healed, sound, and strong, in the sight of the awe-struck multitude.

¹ Isa. xxxv. 3-6.

² Isa. ix. 6.

Thus the Lord exhibited an act of power involving the most convincing proof of His Godhead that could have been offered to the Jews. Yet this was but the beginning of the mighty works by which He was about to reveal Himself. In accomplishing it, He had indicated that He was far greater than His servants by touching the leper, a thing which, through fear of defilement, Elisha did not dare to do in the case of Naaman. But the Lord's touch, instead of bringing uncleanness upon Himself, had driven the foul disease for ever from the body of its victim.

By no means, however, was contact with the afflicted a condition necessary for the exercise of His Almighty powers. For viewless messengers, swift as the winds or the lightning, were ever at hand to perform His will. And so, in the next recorded miracle, He healed the Centurion's servant, who was lying at the point of death in a distant house, which He did not enter, or even approach.

There are, however, in these chapters of the credentials, one or two incidents of a different kind which must not be left unnoticed.

In expressing surprise at the faith of the Roman Centurion, the Lord said;—

“Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. And I say unto you, that many shall come from the East and the West, and shall sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the Kingdom of the Heavens: but the Sons of the Kingdom shall be cast forth into the outer darkness: there shall be the weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

Here the fact, that Abraham Isaac and Jacob will be

found in the Kingdom of the Heavens,¹ seems to reveal a mystery of which very little is said, although it is plainly corroborated by other Scriptures. This is, that the saved Israelites, like the believers of our own Age, will ultimately be found to consist of two classes, the one, and much the smaller, of which will dwell in the Heavenly City of God;² while the great bulk of the nation will, as Ezekiel tells us, be raised from their graves when the Lord returns, and be led back to the Land of Israel.³

But, since all those of whom Ezekiel speaks are to be restored to their own Land upon earth, it would seem that the few, who by their works of faith have won the Heavenly Kingdom, must already have experienced a change similar to that of the First Resurrection at the close of the present Age.⁴ Probably, they were found among those whom the Lord called out of their graves just after His Own Resurrection—an act whereby He was declared to be the Son of God with power.⁵

Hence His remarks upon the faith of the Centurion

¹ At this point, however, it may be well to remind ourselves of the fact, that Abraham Isaac and Jacob were never under the Law, but were saved by grace through faith, just as we are.

² Heb. xi. 10, 13-16.

³ Ezek. xxxvii. 12-14.

⁴ See pp. 121-2. We read that, after our Lord's Resurrection, "*many* bodies of the saints were raised," but not all. Evidently a selection is indicated, such as there will be at the close of the present Age. Acts ii. 34, however, shows us that David had no part in the Israelitish First Resurrection: it is difficult to see how he could have obtained such an honour, when one considers his last instructions to Solomon (1 Kings ii. 5-9). And, accordingly, he is mentioned by Ezekiel among those who will be raised at the Lord's return (Ezek. xxxvii. 24, 25); and, from that and four other passages, we learn, that, in the Age-to-Come, he will be the King of Israel upon earth.

⁵ Matth. xxvii. 52, 53; Rom. i. 4: compare John v. 20-22.

were intended as a warning to the Jews, that, since they persisted in refusing the proffered Heavenly Kingdom, His offer must soon be transferred to others who would accept it. And He added, that many a Gentile would come from the countries beyond the Eastern and Western boundaries of Palestine, and would sit down with Abraham Isaac and Jacob in the Kingdom of the Heavens; while the descendants of Jacob, the natural Sons of the Kingdom, designated in the Parable of the Marriage Supper as "those that were bidden," would be cast out into the external darkness.

The healing of Peter's wife's mother followed: the Lord touched her hand, and immediately the fever-demon relaxed his grasp. There was no convalescence: she rose forthwith, and proceeded to minister to Him. O that the many whom He is continually healing, or saving from peril, in our days would follow her example!

The day appears to have been the Sabbath, which ended at six o'clock in the evening; and so, it was not until after sunset that the Jews began to bring to Him many demon-possessed and diseased persons, all of whom He delivered. He had undertaken to suffer in expiation of their sins; and, therefore, had the right to relieve them of the consequences of those sins.

Other stupendous miracles were exhibited in rapid succession, testifying to His absolute sovereignty, not only over diseases, but also over the elements, the Spirits of Darkness, and even the King of Terrors himself.

Of course, these mighty works raised a boundless enthusiasm among the common people, and affected the minds of many who were of higher rank. But the Lord knew what was in their hearts, and was well aware

that what moved them was their ideal conception of the Kingdom, with carnal triumphs and carnal joys. And so, when a Scribe addressed Him with the, apparently, noble words, "Teacher, I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest," His only reply was;— "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the Heaven have nests; but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head." He had come into the world to be despised and rejected, and to be cut off from it without possessing any of its good things. And, as with the Teacher, so must it be with the disciples: they would obtain no desirable things of this life from Him, much less that participation in royal state which they were anticipating. His sole object in coming this time was to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.

Presently He spoke more plainly, and intimated that He must depart hence, and be absent a long time, before He could return to take to Himself His great power and reign. For in answer to the inquiry, why His disciples did not fast, He said;—

"Can the sons of the bride-chamber mourn so long as the Bridegroom is with them? But the days will come, when the Bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then will they fast."

Here was a second solemn warning to the Jews, that their opportunity was passing, that the offer of the Heavenly Kingdom would soon be withdrawn, and that then a long time of tribulation and darkness must ensue.

The last of the ten miracles, which we may describe as the Lord's credentials, seems to be significant of what will ultimately result from the travail of His soul.

He had just restored sight to two blind men, when a third afflicted one was brought to Him, who was dumb,

and was also possessed by an evil spirit. The Lord took no notice of the infirmity, but cast out the demon, and immediately the man found himself able to speak. For defects and diseases are produced, not only by natural causes, but also by the direct and malign influence of fallen spirits. And the speaking of the dumb man as soon as the demon had been expelled was an apt figure of the great future deliverance, when the Lord will cast Satan altogether out of this world, and confine him in the Abyss. For then will the dumb earth, which has so long withheld the praises of her Creator, break forth into singing, and be glad. Then shall the sea roar and the fulness thereof, the fields shall be joyful and all that is therein, and all the trees of the wood shall rejoice.¹

When the crowd saw this fresh proof of the Lord's Almighty power, they were amazed, and cried out, "It was never so seen in Israel!" But the Pharisees said, "By the Prince of the demons, casteth He out demons."

The Mission of the Twelve

It was thus clear, that there would be no national movement in favour of the Lord. Nevertheless, the people had for the time received Him; and, as He passed through the towns and villages, compassion was stirred in His loving heart at the sight of the throngs that met Him, because they were care-worn, and, like shepherdless flocks, scattered and exposed to the wolves. He would, therefore, give them another opportunity of avoiding the long time of trouble dispersion and exile which lay before them. And so, after bidding His

¹ Psa. xcvi. 11, 12.

disciples join Him in prayer to the Lord of the Harvest for more labourers, He called the Twelve to Himself, gave them instructions, and then sent them forth by two and two, to proclaim the good news that the Kingdom had come near.

Now, it must be observed, that their mission was exclusively Jewish, and cannot, therefore, be regarded as a model for Christian work. Of this fact we may find abundant proof.

For, in the first place, the proclamation, that the Kingdom had drawn near, would not be true in any times save those of the First and Second Advents.

Secondly, the disciples were forbidden to go into any way of the Gentiles, or to enter into any city of the Samaritans: they were to confine their teaching strictly to the lost sheep of the House of Israel; for, as yet, the offer of the Heavenly Kingdom was made to them alone.

Thirdly, they were to heal the sick, to raise the dead, and to cast out demons, by the power which the Lord had conferred upon them.

Fourthly, they were to make no provision for their journey; but were forbidden to take money with them, or food, or a change of coats or sandals, or an extra staff. Upon God Alone they were to rest for the supply of all their needs. This order was expressly cancelled by the Lord in His directions for the conduct of Gentile missions.¹

Fifthly, if they were not received in any city or house, they were to leave it, and shake its very dust from their feet, as a sign that its inhabitants had sundered themselves from the means of salvation, and

¹ Luke xxii. 35, 36.

were given over to a doom more appalling than that of Sodom and Gomorrah. But no such command as this is written for Christian missionaries—though Paul did act upon it twice in the case of blaspheming Jews—for it is altogether opposed to the longsuffering spirit of the Gospel.

Sixthly, the persecution which the disciples were warned to expect is specially connected with Synagogues and Sanhedrims, which, however, have had little to do with the oppression of the Church, save for a very short season, in its earliest days.

These reasons will probably suffice to show, that the injunctions of the charge are intended to apply only to Jewish missions carried on in Judaea, and that they differ in several particulars from those which were subsequently given to preachers of the Gospel of Grace.

Nevertheless, the settlement of this question forthwith raises another. For, after His Resurrection, the Lord commissioned His disciples to be His witnesses, not merely in Jerusalem and all Judaea, but also in Samaria, and to the uttermost part of the earth. And by this command He, of course, suspended the, exclusively Jewish mission, the characteristic message of which, namely, that the Kingdom had drawn nigh, had been previously withdrawn.¹

And yet, while His words to the end of the fifteenth verse may be readily applied to the missions of the Twelve and the Seventy, many of the subsequent injunctions appear to be altogether irrelevant to their circumstances.

For it is only in a restricted sense that, either the Twelve or the Seventy, could be said to have been

¹ Luke xix. 11-15.

Matthews
10: 5 - 15
then
16 - 23

sent forth as sheep among wolves ; since they met with no opposition or trouble. They were neither dragged before the Sanhedrim nor scourged in the Synagogues : they were not accused before Governors or Kings, nor driven from city to city. Neither were they hated of all men for Christ's sake. Moreover, they did not, in any sense, pass through a time so fearful as that of which the Lord spoke ; nor were they in any peril of death. On the contrary, all things went well with them, and they returned rejoicing. With what view, then, could the Lord have spoken to them of so many dangers which they were not destined to experience ?

A clue to this difficulty may be found in the twenty-third verse, which runs as follows ;—

“ But when they persecute you in this city, flee into the next : for verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone through the cities of Israel, till the Son of Man be come.”

Now, the last sentence cannot mean that the Lord was about to follow in the track of the Twelve, and would overtake them before they had finished their mission ; for, as a matter of fact, He did not follow them ; nor, indeed, did He in any way come to them : on the contrary, they returned to Him. Moreover, the expression, “ the coming of the Son of Man,” has a fixed doctrinal meaning, and always points to the Second Advent.

It would thus appear, that, in some way or other, the Jewish mission will be in full action in the closing days of the present Age ; and, since it was terminated by the Lord just before His death, it will evidently have to be resumed before the Second Advent, at a time when the Jews, restored to their own Land, are again being dealt with as the people of God.

Now, as we have already seen, a period fulfilling these conditions has been foretold by Moses and Daniel,¹ namely, the final Seven of Years, which will be closed by the descent of the Lord Jesus upon the Mount of Olives.

It is in this period, then, that the mission upon which the Twelve were sent forth will be resumed, and will, perhaps, be led and directed by the Two Witnesses.² But, in its second stage, it will be far more extended than it was in its first. For, in describing the events of the end, the Lord said ;—

“And this Gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in the whole world³ for a testimony unto all the nations, and then shall the End come.”

Thus the Lord's instructions for the mission to Jews follow the usual rule of Hebrew prophecy : they are in force until the close of the Sixty-ninth Seven, and are then suspended until the beginning of the Seventieth.¹ In other words, they do not belong to the present Church-period, during which it cannot be said that the Kingdom has drawn near. But, as soon as the Lord resumes His dealings with the Jews, and the Antichrist makes his covenant with them, then the servants of God will know, that in seven years the Kingdom must be revealed.

An examination of the discourse, from the sixteenth

¹ See *The Great Prophecies of the Centuries concerning Israel and the Gentiles*, chapp. ix., xvi., and xvii.

² Rev. xi. 3-13.

³ The peculiar word used here—*ἡ οἰκουμένη*—signifies the Roman world exclusively, as distinguished from those parts of the earth that were without its pale. Compare Luke ii. 1. Similarly “all the nations” are only all those that are included within the bounds of the Empire.

verse to the end, will show that this portion of it is full of allusions to such a condition of things as prophecy has assigned to the Time of the End. For, in the days of the Antichrist, believers will, indeed, be sent forth as sheep in the midst of wolves, and will have need to beware of men. They will suffer persecution through the councils of their own tribesmen, be scourged in the Synagogues, and be arraigned before Gentile governors and kings; nevertheless, the very persecution will help them to make known the Gospel of the Kingdom to all the nations, for a testimony unto them. And when they have thus accomplished the purpose of God, then will the End come. But they will have to stand forth as His witnesses in that fearful time, foretold by Micah, when the ties of kindred will be violated, and their nearest relations deliver up to death those who will be hated of all men for Christ's Name's sake—that is, through their testimony to Him as their only hope, and as the coming Messiah. Yet, in the midst of all this unparalleled suffering and excitement, they may stay themselves upon glorious anticipation. For deliverance will be near, and before they have gone through the cities of Israel, the Son of Man will have come.

But enough has been said to justify the reference of the second part of the discourse to the times immediately preceding the return of the Lord, and to prove, that it could not in any sense be applied to the mission of the Twelve.

John the Baptist

Passing on to the eleventh chapter, we come to the touching episode of John the Baptist's depression. Suddenly removed from scenes of intense excitement,

Mat. 10:
16-42

the is Satisfactory

and the stimulating presence of eager crowds, he had been thrown into a solitary dungeon. And there, in addition to the shock of confinement and enforced silence, he had been further perplexed, because his Lord made no movement to deliver him, and did not exhibit any of those acts of overmastering power which John, together with the whole of his nation, had been taught to expect from the Messiah.

What wonder that, in such circumstances, he had sunk from confidence to despondency, and from despondency to doubt? "Art Thou really He that cometh," he asked by his messengers, "or must we look for another?"

The Lord sent back the disciples who brought the message, simply bidding them tell their master what they had heard and seen. For He was well aware, that, as soon as John knew, that the blind were being made to see, the lame to walk, and the deaf to hear, that lepers were being cleansed, and dead persons recalled to life, while the poor were having the good tidings preached to them, he would understand, that such things could be the acts of none other than the Royal Messiah.

Then He spoke to the multitude concerning John; but, since we have already considered the prophecies which He cited and the relations between John and Elijah,¹ we have now to remark only upon the eleventh and two following verses.

In the eleventh, the Lord declared, that no greater one than John had ever arisen among them that were born of women, and yet, that the least in the Kingdom of the Heavens would be greater than he. In these

¹ See pp. 43-53.

words we have an evident allusion to the change of Dispensation, and the fact, that those who belonged to the new order of things had a Heavenly calling, far higher than that of Israelites upon the earth. And, indeed, as we are elsewhere taught, those blessed ones are no longer to be reckoned among them that are born of women, but as having been born again, and that of God.

“And from the days of John the Baptist,” the Lord continues, “the Kingdom of the Heavens forcibly obtrudes itself,¹ and forceful men seize upon it.” John commenced the proclamation of the new era, though he did not belong to it; for he was only the porter who opened the door of the fold, that the Good Shepherd might call out His Own sheep; but did not himself go with them. His forcible appeals had roused the whole country; and now the preaching of the Lord and His disciples was being carried on with absolutely convincing words and signs and miracles; so that the Kingdom might truly be described as forcing itself upon the notice of all men. With such power, indeed, had it broken in upon the Age, that it was affecting all those who had any strength of mind, and compelling them to reveal themselves. Believers were giving up all that they had, and facing any opposition, to obtain the great Prize: others were either

¹ So far as the form is concerned, the *βιάζεται* of this verse might be either Middle or Passive: hence many prefer to render “the Kingdom of the Heavens is subject to violence.” But we have thought it best to be guided by the parallel passage in Luke (xvi. 16), in which *εὐαγγελίζεται* takes the place of *βιάζεται*. The sense in the latter passage is simply “the Kingdom of the Heavens is preached:” but Matthew would impress us with the fact, that it is preached with convincing power,

striving to discredit it and destroy its King, or evinced a determination to compel it to serve their own ends, as did the multitude who would have seized the very Person of the Lord, in order to make Him their King by force.¹

For, until the days of John, all the Prophets and the Law had prophesied; that is to say, the only revelation before the people was in prophecy and type. But now the Kingdom had drawn near, nay was actually in the midst of them in the Person of Christ; even as He presently declared to the Pharisees, "If I by the Spirit of God cast out demons, then is the Kingdom of God come upon you;"² or a little later, "The Kingdom of God is in the midst of you."³

To this declaration the Lord adds the words;—

"And, if ye are willing to receive him, this is Elijah which is to come. He that hath ears to hear let him hear."

In this verse, the last sentence intimates, that an intelligent faith will be needed for the comprehension of the first: we must, therefore, consider it carefully. Now, the only direct prediction of Elijah's return to

¹ John vi. 15.

² Matth. xii. 28.

³ Luke xvii. 21. Both the A.V. and the R.V. have "The Kingdom of God is within you," that is, in a spiritual sense, "in your hearts." It is difficult to understand how such a mistake could have been made by two sets of translators. For the Kingdom was certainly not in the hearts of the Pharisees to whom the Lord's remark is addressed. The Greek preposition *ἐντός* here means "among," or, "in the midst of," as in Xen. Anab. I, x. 3. The expression is analogous to, "There standeth One among you" (John i. 26), or, "Yet a little while is the Light among you" (John xii. 35). The Lord Himself, around Whom both the Pharisees and the disciples were at the moment grouped, was at once the King and the embodiment of the Kingdom. For in Him all was contained.

Yes.

earth closes, as we have already seen, the prophecy of Malachi. There the expression, "Elijah the Prophet," forbids us to understand anything short of the personal appearing of the Tishbite himself.¹ And the Lord by the limiting clause, "if ye are willing to receive him," by omitting the article before Elijah, and, perhaps also, by adding the words, "which is to come," indicates that He is far from identifying John with Elijah. What, then, would He convey by these enigmatical words? Apparently this;—

God had promised, that, before the Great and Terrible Day of the Lord, Elijah should be sent to call Israel to repentance, and so to make it possible that some of the people might be saved out of the general destruction, and preserved for Millennial glory. But, so far as His will was concerned, Israel, or at least the Jews, might have repented in the times of the First Advent, in which case the Seventieth Seven of Years would have followed immediately upon the Sixty-ninth, and the Kingdom have been set up at once. And that an opportunity for this might not be wanting, John was sent forth, about the middle of the Sixty-ninth Seven, in the spirit and power of Elijah, and on a mission similar to that which had been appointed for the Tishbite, namely, to preach repentance with a view to the remission of sins. And thus, had he been successful in turning the hearts of the whole nation to God, there would have been no need of the Great Exile: the Messiah would have been joyfully accepted, and His Kingdom would not have needed to be delayed.

But God, foreseeing that Israel would be in no condition to take advantage of this earlier opportunity, and

¹ The Septuagint has "Elijah the Tishbite."

that a long discipline would yet be necessary, had predicted the coming of Elijah, in the terrible times of the Second Advent, to accomplish the work in which John would fail. Here, then, as in some other passages of this Gospel, difficulties vanish before those who have diligently and prayerfully studied the prophets of the Old Testament.

In what follows, we begin to hear the knell of the Jewish people, whose day of visitation was now fast declining. The Lord had weighed them in His balance, and found them wanting. Neither the stern warnings of John's ministry, nor the teachings and wondrous works of His Own, had wrought any permanent effect, save in the case of a few individuals: and He likens the froward generation to children, who peevishly reject every attempt to please them, whether the games proposed be gay or grave, a make-believe wedding or a funeral. For John had come as an ascetic, avoiding the dwellings and home-life of men; and they regarded him as one possessed by a demon, or melancholy mad: the Lord had appeared eating and drinking, like ordinary mortals; and they could find no better reason for the condescension than that He must be a glutton and a wine-bibber. What other end could there be to a perversity so irrational, and so daringly blasphemous, than that which He predicted for the cities wherein His mighty works had been done—that, on the Great Day, their doom would be worse than the doom of Tyre and Sidon, nay, even than that of wicked Sodom.

Then, turning from these wise and prudent men of the world who had despised the Kingdom, He sought consolation in giving thanks to His Father for the few who had received His teaching as little children, for the poor of the flock. To them He spoke gracious

words, and, after telling them that all things were committed unto Himself, and that He Alone knew the Father, and could reveal Him to men, He bade them come unto Him with all their sorrow, whether it arose from hard toil or from sore oppression, and He would give them rest.

The Crisis and the Rejection

Meanwhile, the Pharisees were dogging His steps, and spying for an opportunity of accusing Him. They followed Him into the cornfield, and charged Him with sanctioning the violation of the Sabbath: they watched Him in the Synagogue, and basely strove to entangle Him by playing upon the tenderness of His loving heart. But all these efforts were vain: in each case their villany was instantly unmasked by His words of power, and they withdrew, discomfited and sullen, to plot against His life. It was evident that a crisis was near.

And this the Lord, also, showed by His Own conduct: for He left the place; and, though He did not refuse to heal the sick among the multitude which persistently followed Him, He, nevertheless, commanded them not to make Him known.

His partial withdrawal is said to be the fulfilment of a prophecy by the mouth of Isaiah, the striking points of which for our purpose are the two predictions, "He will declare judgment to the Gentiles," and, "In His Name shall the Gentiles hope." For the introduction of the Gentiles at this crisis clearly intimates, that the Lord is now about to suspend His unavailing efforts to influence the whole Jewish nation, and will henceforth feed only "the poor of the flock," to whom it is His

Father's good pleasure to give the Kingdom, and will prepare them to assist Him in His great purpose of becoming "a Light to lighten the Gentiles."

As soon as the Pharisees had ascertained the direction in which He had gone, they again followed Him with malignant designs. And, after they had joined the crowd, an incident occurred, which speedily brought on the catastrophe. There was led to Him a poor sufferer, whom a demon had possessed, and deprived of sight and speech. The Lord instantly healed him, so that the man who had been blind and dumb both saw and spoke. The people were wild with enthusiasm, and cried, "Is not this the Son of David? Is not this the Great King that was to come?" But the Pharisees, exasperated beyond control, and utterly unable either to deny, or to make light of, the act of power which had been performed before their eyes, affirmed that He was casting out demons by the help of the Prince of the demons.

In His answer to this blasphemous lie, the Lord exposed the folly of the pretence, that He could do such mighty works by any other power than that of the Spirit of God. They should, therefore, rather have inferred from what they had seen, that, in His Person, the Kingdom of God had come upon them. They had spoken wilfully against conviction; for some of them, at least, knew well that He was the Son of God, and was acting with the irresistible power of His Father. Let them beware, then, lest they should commit that sin against the Holy Spirit which can never be pardoned, either in this Age or in the next; that is, the sin of one who, though enlightened and absolutely convinced by the Spirit, still struggles against God from pure hatred and malignity.

Either the tree and its fruit, He continues, must be

I cannot believe that this is by any means an adequate explanation of the sin against the Holy Spirit.

good, or both tree and fruit must be corrupt. They knew that all His fruits had been good, His acts of love and His teachings of truth. How, then, could they fail to perceive, that He came from God, and had no dealings with Beelzebub? But they, being evil in themselves, could, of course, speak nothing but evil. Let them, however, give heed to a solemn warning. To aid their own wicked purpose, they had just been uttering words of lying blasphemy; and the Tribunal, before which they must presently be arraigned, would be so severe that they would have to give account even of every idle word that had passed their lips. If, then, merely useless words would involve punishment, what would become of men who had given vent to malicious and blasphemous utterances against the Son of God! For the judicial principle of the Judge before Whom they must stand was, that a man's words, and especially his casual words, are the index of his heart, out of the fulness of which his mouth speaks: therefore, that by his words he must be either justified or condemned.

The Lord ceased: but His searching appeal seems to have produced little impression upon the hardened rebels that were grouped around Him. For, immediately, certain of the Scribes and Pharisees, doubtless in pursuance of a concerted plan, endeavoured to ensnare Him by asking for a sign. One would, indeed, have thought that He had already given enough of signs and to spare. But they, perhaps, argued, that His miracles of healing might have been effected by magic; and so, justified themselves in asking for a sign from Heaven, a sign apart from Himself.

His answer showed that He regarded the hypocritical inquirers as equally guilty with those who had accused

Him of casting out demons by the aid of Beelzebub, and the sign, so readily granted to humble faith, was in this case sternly refused.

No sign should be given to so evil and adulterous a generation, save that of the prophet Jonah. For, as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the fish, which God had specially prepared for the purpose, so should the Son of Man descend into the heart of the earth, and, on the third day rise again. But what would be the result? Would these Children of Abraham then believe on the Great Lord Himself, even as the Ninevites had believed on His servant Jonah? No: He knew that the hearts of most of them were now hopelessly hardened; and that, since they heard not Moses and the prophets, neither would they be persuaded, if one rose from the dead.¹ Therefore, in the Judgment, the men of Nineveh, who had repented at the sign and teaching of Jonah, should rise up and condemn that wicked generation.

But the Lord had not only exhibited deeds of power, He had also uttered marvellous words of wisdom and truth, such as the lips of man had never before spoken. Had, then, the Scribes and the Pharisees crowded around Him, eager to drink in every syllable that fell from His mouth? Nay, they had hated Him, because He was proclaiming truths of God, which, as they were well aware, would destroy their wicked influence and power. And, whenever they did follow Him, it was always with the malignant design of ensnaring Him, and of stopping the flow of life which issued from His lips, even though murder should prove to be only the means of effecting their purpose. Therefore, the Queen of

¹ Luke xvi. 31.

Sheba should arise in the Judgment, and condemn that doomed generation ; for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon ; while they were rejecting, and plotting to kill, One far wiser and greater than he.

At such a pitch of depravity and wickedness had the supposed holy men and religious leaders of Judaea arrived ! And, although, for the moment, the common people seemed to show a different spirit, yet in reality they were little better than their rulers. Pleased with the Lord's generously used power to heal, and regarding Him as a Champion, and not, like the Pharisees, as a Rival, they could for a while follow Him enthusiastically, and shout, Is not this the Son of David ! But a little later, when the fiendish cry, Crucify Him ! Crucify Him ! rent the air, there was not found one of these myriad voices to withstand it. The whole nation was corrupt, and ripe for judgment.

And so, the Lord ended His discourse with a prophecy of doom—conveyed in His vivid description of the man out of whom an evil spirit had departed—in which he depicted the condition and ultimate fate of the miserable people.

The indwelling spirit of open idolatry had, indeed, been exorcised for the time by the Babylonian Captivity, and its grosser manifestations had been swept out of the national heart. Nor was this all : the people had even garnished their house, but with nothing better than a cold and formal religion, which, while professing to honour God, corrupted His Word, ignored His commandments, and turned His promises into self-glorification. For they had sought no new Tenant for the house which had been vacated by the evil spirit : they had not intreated that their God would send His

Holy Spirit to take possession of it. And so, after a long interval, the foul demon should return to the still empty dwelling,¹ and bring with him seven others worse than himself; so that the last state of the Jews should be more blasphemously idolatrous than the first. They had rejected the Only Begotten Son of God; but they should fall down and worship the Man of Sin: nay they should even dare, together with the rest of the world, to adore and praise the Dragon,² that Old Serpent, which is called the Devil and Satan.³

Just after the Lord had uttered this fearful prediction, a significant incident ensued, pre-arranged by His wisdom to show, that no tie of the flesh, however strong, would be recognized by Him, unless it were accompanied by faith and obedience.

His mother and her sons had come to the outskirts of the crowd, and a bystander cried out;—"Behold, Thy mother and Thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with Thee." But He replied;—"Who is My mother, and who are My brethren? Then stretching forth His hand toward His disciples, He said;—Behold, My mother and My brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of My Father Which is in the Heavens, he is My brother, and sister, and mother." No mere earthly relationship could avail to stay judgment: even the seed of Abraham according to the flesh, and the Lord's Own immediate kinsfolk, must perish, if they

¹ The description of the man, as indwelt neither by the Spirit of God nor by the spirit of idolatry, is similar to the prophecy concerning Israel in Hos. iii. 4. But, from that passage, it would appear that the Ten Tribes will not worship the Antichrist as the majority of the Jews will.

² Rev. xiii. 3, 4.

³ Rev. xii. 9.

should continue in unbelief. He would mark for mercy only those who did the Will of His Father. And that Will was, that they should believe on Him Whom the Father had sent. But they had persisted in rejecting Him, and, at last, the hour had come when He, also, must reject them.

Their probation had ended in failure, and the offer of the Heavenly Kingdom to them, as a nation, was from this time finally withdrawn. Never again were they admonished that the Kingdom was within their grasp: on the contrary, when the Lord was drawing nigh unto Jerusalem for His death, He spoke a parable to warn them, that all was now changed, and that the Kingdom could not immediately appear.¹ The few Jews who had faithfully abode with Him should by no means lose the great reward: but the offer of it must now be passed on to the Gentiles, also, among whom a sufficient number to form the governing body in the Heavens would be found. Nevertheless, God would not forget His promise to Israel; for His gifts and calling are without repentance. But His eldest son must now be contented with the Kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms *under* the whole Heaven; ² while the younger, the Church, should reign nearer to Himself in the Heavens above.

¹ Luke xix. 11-27.

² Dan. vii. 27.

CHAPTER VI

THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW.—PART IV

THE SEVEN PROPHETIC PARABLES

The Mystery Hidden from the Ages

WHAT, then, was now to happen, seeing that the Lord had rejected the Jews, having found them, nationally, as unfit to possess the Heavenly Kingdom as they had already proved in the case of the Earthly? Would He be willing to abide without witnesses, and without a people, upon earth, until the Fourth Empire should have filled up the measure of its iniquities, and Israel could be restored? Not so: but witnesses of an altogether different kind must now be sought; and that, no longer in Israel exclusively, but among all nations. These should be incorporated into an invisible Body, united solely by the spiritual connection of all its members with the Lord; and, being each of them joined to Him, they should, also, become One Spirit in Him.

To the calling out and training of these witnesses, the Lord now devotes Himself; while for the Jews, as a nation, His lips henceforth utter nothing but stern reproofs and the terrors of Judgment. For the vessel which the Potter made has been marred, and must, therefore, be crushed into a shapeless lump, that it may

be afterwards remade, even as it shall seem good unto the Potter to make it.

Of the nature and destiny of the new witnessing body, the Lord gave several hints in the course of His ministry, and thrice mentioned the very name by which it was to be known.¹ Moreover, He specially distinguished between His Own disciples and the leaders of Judaism, by announcing, that the former should receive their reward in the Heavens, and not upon earth. Yet even His disciples could scarcely have understood all that He meant by this, until He had conversed with them after His Resurrection, and sent His Holy Spirit to interpret His words.

The main cause of their confusion, doubtless, lay in their inability to grasp the fact, that all their Jewish privileges and prospects must be given up, if they would obtain the more glorious portion of those who were willing to abide with Him in His temptations. And yet, just before His death, He spoke of the Heavenly calling in such plain terms that it is difficult to see how they could have mistaken His meaning, strong as their prejudices were.

It was late in the evening of that memorable day on which He ate the last Passover. He was still sitting at the table with eleven of His disciples: the supper was ended: the bread had been broken, and the wine drunk. The traitor Judas, though he had been suffered—like many others who shall never sit down with Christ in the Kingdom of the Heavens—to eat of the bread and drink of the wine, could not be permitted to share the great secret which was about to be disclosed. Therefore, he had been dismissed, that the

¹ Matth. xvi. 18, xviii. 17.

many question whether Judas was really present at the Supper?

Lord might speak in peace the farewell words of love and hope to those whom He had chosen.

They had just been partaking of the joyous feast of deliverance ; but there were no signs of joy upon their features : deep sorrow, nay, the very shadow of death, seemed to have fallen upon the little company, and every face had gathered gloom.

For they had heard strange and terrible things that night : their security had been dispelled, and their hopes utterly destroyed. There was, indeed, no excuse for their surprise : for in past time the Lord had more than once foretold the impending trouble. But they had neither heeded, nor cared to understand, His warnings ; and were, therefore, entirely unprepared for the events which He had declared to be then actually confronting them.

His very first remark must have excited their alarm ; for He spoke of the intensity of His desire to eat that Passover with them *before He suffered*.

Then He announced, that one of their number was a traitor, and would betray Him.

That Satan had demanded and obtained all of them, in order to sift them as wheat.

That Peter, who had been so loud in expressing his devotion, would deny His Lord three times in the course of that very night.

And, saddest of all, that He Himself was just about to leave them, and that whither He was going, they could not then follow Him, though they should do so in due time.

This last-mentioned disclosure must have struck a death-blow at all their hopes. For as yet they knew nothing of the purposes of God : they talked only of Jerusalem, and never dreamt that they were appointed

to a higher destiny, that the Heavens were their home, and the Jerusalem which is above their mother-city. According to their conceptions, Christ should have set up His royal standard, and summoned all Judaea to follow Him; should, after the destruction of the Roman legions, have caused Himself to be crowned at Jerusalem, and then have placed them upon the promised tribal thrones. And now He spoke of going away, of leaving them, and of abandoning the Land promised to Abraham's seed! All their expectations were shattered in a moment, and they were as those who see the forms of some fair dream breaking up and dissolving into the cold grey mist of morning.

But not only had their high hopes fallen; there was something even worse; for, if their Lord should depart, what would become of them in the world? He had been their support and stay, their guide, their help and defender in all danger, the One Who was never without resource to deliver them from every snare, to ward off every assault of their enemies. He had also been their joy; and, if the Bridegroom should be taken away, what could the children of the bride-chamber do, but weep and lament for ever! Now they began to comprehend His dark saying;—

“The days will come when ye shall desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and ye shall not see it.”

Who would thenceforth be able to comfort them in times of distress; to speak words which could make their hearts burn within them, and lift them up to hope from the lowest despair? Who would give them succour in every perplexity, create bread for them in the desert, and command the fishes of the sea to bring them the tribute-money?

Who, if their ship were again sinking beneath the storm, would bid the wind be still, and command the white-crested billow to fall back ere it broke? Who, if the Pharisees should excite a tumult against them, would stand forth and expose the hypocrisy of their adversaries with such clear and incisive words of power that the surging crowd would melt away, until there remained but a few awe-stricken sinners, no longer threatening, but crying out with emotion, "Never man spake like This Man!"

And, if any among them should lie ill, who could rebuke the disease, and in a moment heal the sick? Or, if the death of a beloved one should rend their hearts with anguish, who would turn their mourning into joy by commanding—even at the door of the sepulchre—with a voice which neither Death nor Hades could resist, "Lazarus, come forth!"

And who could supply His tender affection? For He had not been with them those three years and six months without entwining Himself around their hearts, and making them feel that in Him they had a Friend, indeed, Whose love passed the love of women, and Who was nearer to them than a brother. And yet He had just predicted, that all of them would, on that very night, forsake Him in the hour of trial; nay, that one of their number would betray and another deny Him!

We can imagine their despair: we can conceive the confused thoughts raging in their minds, like the wild waves of a tempestuous sea. Yet they could not disburden themselves: no sound escaped their lips, and a gloomy silence possessed the room.

At length, the Lord opened His mouth, and broke the oppressive stillness with soothing words which

shed hope upon their hearts, even as His command, "Let there be light," had once gone forth over the shoreless ocean of earth, and dispelled its darkness ;—

"Let not your heart be troubled ; ye believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's House are many mansions : if it were not so, I would have told you ; for I go to prepare a place for you. And, if I go and prepare a place for you, I am coming again, and will receive you unto Myself, that where I am, there ye may be also."

It is difficult for us to comprehend the surprise which these words must have occasioned to the disciples—if, at least, they understood them at the time. They had thought only of peace and glory in connection with the Jerusalem which is on earth, and such a vision would have been their sole consolation in the present distress ; but the Lord removes this stay, gives them no hope of anything better than tribulation in the world, and at last reveals in plain terms the great secret of God's purpose.

He bids them resign their privileges and expectations as Jews ; for He has called them to a higher destiny. Because they have received Him, He will give them power to become children of God ; and they shall dwell, not at Jerusalem, but with Himself where He is, that they may behold His glory. And, although He is about to leave them for a season, it is that He may prepare abodes for them in His Father's house ; and, as soon as they are all gathered in and ready, He will return, and take them unto Himself for ever.

A few weeks later, when the Apostles and some other faithful believers were assembled in an upper room, the Holy Spirit descended to baptize them into One Body, and so to found the Church of Christ.

I wonder will waiting saints be identical with the first-fruit, or not may, I think, be questioned - tho' it is worth considering.

And, from that time, God began to seek out for Himself a people from all flesh ; who were not, however, destined to rob the Israelite of his future dominion over the earth, but to sit in the Heavenly Places with the Lord Jesus, and, in association with Him, to become the spiritual rulers of the world. Thus the present Age commenced ; but there is no prophecy which will enable us to discover the exact length of its course. We must, however, remember that, although Dispensations may overlap, and a short transitional period be the result, yet God cannot, with this exception, have two peoples of different callings upon earth at the same time. Such a law is implied in the prediction of Micah, that because of the smiting of the Judge of Israel on the cheek, the Jews should be given up for dispersion, until the travailing Woman should bring forth¹—that is, until the number of the First-fruits should be completed. And when this point is taken up in the Book of Revelation, we are further instructed, that, as soon as the Man-child is born, he shall be caught up to God and to His Throne ;² so that the way will then be cleared for the standing up of Michael, and the deliverance of Daniel's people.³ Precisely similar is the teaching of Paul : for he affirms, that " a hardening in part has befallen Israel, *until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in* ;" and that, afterwards, all Israel shall be saved.

Thus the first sign of the End of this Age will be the sudden translation of all waiting saints, that is to say, of the First-fruits : and, until that event has happened, there is no place for calculation. For, as we have before observed, the times of the Church are not properly a

¹ Micah v. 1-3.

² Rev. xii. 5.

³ Dan. xii. 1.

part of the Fifth Dispensation, but a parenthesis fixed in it on account of the perversity of the Jews; an inserted period, unknown to Old Testament prophecy, and set apart for the preparation of a Heavenly people.

It was, as we are told, "at the End of the Ages," that Christ appeared, and put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. For when the Son of Man bowed His head upon the cross, there remained, it would seem, but seven short years for the course of this world. Mercy had been rejected; the time of forbearance was exhausted; and the terrific agents described in the Revelation were awaiting the command to speed forth upon their deadly missions, and execute the last indignation. But the wrath which had been gathering burst upon the Lord Jesus; the righteous sword of the Almighty was turned against the Man Who was His Fellow. And then God granted a respite to the world for which Christ died: then He checked the rapid flight of events, and, as it were, stayed the wings of the fleeting Age, until a time should have passed, the duration of which was known only to Himself.

For, if the Church inquires when her Lord will return, she receives but the answer;—"At an hour when ye think not;" "Surely I come quickly;" "Be ye therefore ready." The great Apostle of the Gentiles warned her of the futility of attempting to compute the length of her stay upon earth;—

"But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that aught be written unto you. For yourselves know perfectly, that the Day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night."

The duty of the Church is to keep herself in readiness

Grace

Very striking
depression

and to watch, not to reckon times. But, as soon as her appointed days upon earth are ended, all will be changed. The Fifth Age will finish its intercepted course : the Last Seven of Years will at once commence. Then, also, the periods into which the latter is to be divided, the Three Years and a half, the Time Times and Half a Time, the Forty and Two Months, the Twelve Hundred and Sixty Days, will all come into view, and be capable of exact calculation.

But, although we cannot accurately compute the times of the Church, we are by no means left without intimation of their progress and nearing end. For we see Christendom beginning to assume its last form, and the Mystery of Lawlessness daily gaining strength ; while the fulfilment of the Jewish prophecies has actually commenced. Since, therefore, the Church must be taken away before any of these things can be consummated, we may be well assured that the Lord is at hand ; and should exhort one another so much the more as we see the Day approaching.

Moreover, beside other revelations in the New Testament, there are two great prophecies, both of them from the mouth of the Lord Himself, the obvious interpretation of which appears to prove, that the acceptable year is now almost ended. These prophecies are the Seven Parables in the thirteenth chapter of Matthew, and the Seven Epistles in the second and third chapters of the Apocalypse, both of which we propose now to examine.

The number of Parables and Epistles is seven, that number being significant of Dispensational completeness ; and in each of the two prophetic series, we, apparently, have set before us seven successive phases, or characteristic epochs, of the Church, which include the

whole of her career upon earth. These epochs commence in the order in which they are given ; but any of them may overlap that which succeeds it, or even extend its influence, in a greater or less degree, to the End of the Age. And finally, we may remark, that, while the Seven Parables present a general and outward view of the nominal Church in its different epochs, the Seven Epistles reveal more of its internal condition, and often with considerable detail.

The Seven Parables

After the Lord had formally rejected the Jews, but on the very same day, He went down to the sea-shore, and there addressed a vast multitude that had gathered around Him. As soon, however, as He opened His mouth, His hearers could perceive, that the character of His teaching was changed. Its subject was, indeed, the same as that of His earlier discourses : it was still of the Kingdom of the Heavens that He spoke. But He no longer proclaimed its nearness : He held out no hope of its speedy appearing. On the contrary, He intimated that there were mysteries connected with it, which would require much time for their unfolding, that many things must happen before it could be openly revealed. For instance, He began to speak of a time of sowing, and the End of the Age was represented by the harvest, until which both wheat and tares must grow together : the mustard-plant must develop and become a tree : the leaven must work : the net must remain all the night in the sea.

Yet, again, He announced that the Field, which must now be sown, was not merely the Land of Israel, but the World—a portentous expression for Jewish ears,

especially if the quotation of the previous chapter,¹ and the prominence in it of the Gentiles, were remembered.

And, lastly, all this strange teaching was conveyed, not in plain statements such as He had hitherto been wont to utter, but in parables and dark sayings, which were felt by all men to require an interpreter.

Now, it is evident that some great change is here indicated; and it can be none other than that which was foretold by Zechariah the prophet. The Lord would be the Shepherd of Israel no longer: henceforth He would feed only the poor of the flock that gave heed to His words. But so small a company would by no means suffice to fill the offices of the Heavenly Kingdom. Therefore, the appearing of the latter must now be delayed, until these faithful ones, after they should have been taught and baptized in the Holy Spirit, could be sent forth among the Gentiles—even to the ends of the earth—and could fill up their numbers by means of converts from all nations and tribes and peoples and tongues.

To these He would reveal the mysteries of the Kingdom; but, to the nation in general, He would henceforth speak mainly in parables, because they had missed their opportunity, and it was no longer given to them to understand the secrets of God.

His utterances, as recorded in the thirteenth chapter, consist chiefly of the Seven Parables, the first four of which were spoken in the ears of all the people, but without interpretation. The remaining three were communicated to the disciples only, to whom the Lord also explained the first two and the seventh. Those who would have wisdom to interpret the rest must seek

¹ Matth. xii. 18-21.

it from His Holy Spirit, Whom He has commissioned to take of His things and reveal them unto us.

Now, it is usual to treat these Parables as if they contained nothing more than matter for what is called "practical" application to our every day life. This, however, as we hope to show, is by no means the case; for, without any difficulty, or any forcing of the Lord's words, we may unravel from them a prediction of the seven great phases of the nominal Church, which include the whole of her career, from the time of the Lord's discourse to the End of the present Age. Undoubtedly, they will also yield an abundant supply of more general instruction; but in this context, at least, the prophetic is manifestly the necessary and all-important meaning. If, however, we desire to use such of them as are suitable thereto for practical and individual application, we should turn to the Gospels of Mark and Luke, where some of them may be found in other settings, and with different intentions. For it is not without reason that God has given us four distinct Gospels.

We have already sketched the plan of the earlier chapters of Matthew, and pointed out the manner in which they lead up to, and introduce, the Parables as a revelation of a new order of things then about to be brought in. For on the one hand, they relate the repeated offers of the Kingdom to the Jews, the proclamation of its laws by the King, and the exhibition of His marvellous credentials; on the other, the ever-increasing hatred of the Jewish leaders, and their refusal to recognize the Lord's authority—a refusal prompted by so bitter a spirit that, when they were unable to deny His mighty works, they even dared to accuse Him of doing them by the aid of Satanic power. By this blasphemous charge their true condition was revealed :

their immediate salvation was proved to be impossible ; and so, at the end of the twelfth chapter, the Lord intimated that they were about to be rejected of God, and delivered into the hands of Satan for a season.

A crisis in the history of the nation had arrived, similar in some points to the time when Jerusalem was given up to Nebuchadnezzar, but involving a far deeper degradation.

For the earlier chastisement merely deprived the Jews for a while of their right to be "the Kings of the Earth upon the Earth." God still retained them as His people, though He sent them into captivity, and caused them to be bound in affliction and iron. Consequently, at that time it was only necessary to appoint temporary World-rulers, until the Kingdom could be restored to Israel ; and this was done by the transfer of the sovereignty to the Gentiles. And, since the secret of the Lord is always revealed to them that fear Him, His purpose in regard to the new era, with its four successive Empires, was disclosed to the godly Jews by the pen of Daniel.

Such were the circumstances connected with the assumption of the supremacy by Nebuchadnezzar : and the plan of the Gospel of Matthew is in strict analogy with them. But, in this second crisis, the Jews, by the rejection and murder of the Son of God, brought upon themselves a far more grievous punishment than the mere temporary loss of their earthly dominion ; for the covenant of Jehovah was now altogether suspended, and they were no longer recognized as His people. Yet it was necessary, during the interval, to maintain a testimony for Him upon the earth—without, however, infringing the power already granted to the Gentiles—and, accordingly, from that time He began to raise up

a new band of believers, who received a Heavenly calling. And, since the Father would again, as in the days of Daniel, have some knowledge of His purpose revealed for the guidance of the humble, the Lord Jesus proceeded, on the very day in which He announced the rejection of the Jews, to unfold the mystery which had been hidden from the Ages, and to foretell in parables what should befall the people of God during the interval between the Sixty-ninth and the Seventieth of Daniel's Sevens.

That His discourse contained an entirely new revelation, we are informed by the Evangelist, who observes, that, in delivering it, Christ fulfilled the prophecy ;—

“ I will open my mouth in parables ; I will utter things hidden from the foundation of the world.”¹

Indeed, we are more than once reminded in the New Testament, that the purpose of God in regard to the Church and the Heavenly calling had been kept secret, until the Lord Himself and His Apostles disclosed it.²

Thus the Seven Parables were similitudes of the Kingdom of the Heavens in its present state of mystery, intended to foreshadow the varying conditions under which those who shall hereafter reign with Christ should be gathered out of the present Age. And the main burden of the prediction is, that this body would, during its stay upon earth, be continually liable to become changed and corrupted by admixtures of evil ; that it would be interpenetrated, and even altogether concealed, by a far greater multitude who would profess to belong to it, while they were in reality the children of the Wicked One.

¹ Matth. xiii. 35.

² Rom. xvi. 25, 26 ; 1 Cor. ii. 7 ; Eph. iii. 5, 9 ; Col. i. 26.

Compare —
Phl. 3:5
Col. 1:26

The prophecy is, therefore, concerned with the whole number of nominal believers throughout the world, with every Church or sect which professes to derive its doctrines from the Word of God, and in any way acknowledges His Son Jesus Christ. This vast and motley crowd spreads over the whole extent of Christendom, in the largest sense of the term ; while here and there in the midst of it, and ever acting more or less as a check upon the corruption around them, stand the scattered children of God, unable to extricate themselves from the press, and destined to continue unable, until the great command goes forth ;—

“Gather My saints together, those that have made a covenant with Me by sacrifice !”

Now the whole of this great mixed multitude of Christendom is, for the time, called the Kingdom of the Heavens, because it holds within it—and so entangled that none but God can separate them—the true heirs of the Kingdom. Hence each of the Seven Parables appears to foreshadow some characteristics of the nominal Church, especially prominent at a particular time. And they seem to be arranged in chronological order ; for, to pass by details which we shall presently consider, they begin with the sowing, or first preaching, of the Word, and end with the separation of good and evil at the close of the Dispensation.

Yet, although they indicate the true succession of the phases which they represent, it does not, of course, necessarily follow that the period of one Parable must be completely ended before another commences : on the contrary, any one may overlap, and be contemporaneous with, that which follows it. But we shall now proceed to examine them separately.

*in what
Seven are
They are
Search the
beloved children
recognize
God's children
So far as
I have studied
must explain
themselves
the process
Him to
L. J. Smith
II Cor 6:18*

The Parable of the Sower

The first scene which opens before us is a large Field, already ploughed and prepared for the Sowing. On one side of it runs a road, the wayfarers and wagons travelling by which have so transgressed its limits, that the bordering ploughed land has become well-nigh as hard as the highway itself. Extending underneath a considerable portion of the Field lies a slab of rock, with but little soil above it; so that this part is quickly dried up by the sun. A third portion has rich and deep mould, but abounds in thorn-roots: the remainder of the Field consists of soil both clean and good.

Presently the Sower comes, and scatters his Seed broadcast over the furrows. Some of it falls upon the trodden ground near the highway, and lies exposed upon its hard surface. Possibly, it might yet sink into the soil, if it could be left untouched till heavy rains set in; but there is no chance of that. Multitudes of little birds are on the watch, and, as soon as the Sower's back is turned, snatch up and devour every grain.

Some Seed, again, falls upon the rocky soil; and, being unable to sink far beneath the surface, quickly sends forth blades of promise. But the sun arises in its strength, and they soon wither and die; for the thin-spread mould is speedily reduced to dust.

Other Seed is scattered over the place already occupied by the thorn-roots: it comes up well, but the thorns also appear with it. It is not injured by the sun, for it has depth of soil: but the ever-increasing weeds draw away its nourishment and take up its room, until, almost concealed by their luxuriant growth, the wheat becomes sickly and thin, and cannot bring its fruit to perfection.

But the Seed which falls upon good and unoccupied ground puts forth its blades in due time, and grows and produces much fruit, though in varying quantities; some grains a hundredfold, some sixtyfold, and some thirtyfold.

Now, this Parable exhibits the first period of the Gospel Dispensation. The ploughed Field is the World, prepared for the reception of Christ by previous dealings of God: the untilled highway is the bordering Kingdom of the Air, tenanted by those fallen angels and spirits to whom the offers of Christ were not extended; so that their realm is neither ploughed nor sown. The Sower is, first and principally, the Lord Jesus Himself, and, afterwards, those who succeeded Him in the work of carrying on all that He began to do and to teach. The Seed is the glorious Word of the Gospel. The various conditions of soil represent the four classes of hearers which are found among men. And the fact, that but one of these brings forth the desired fruit, is a hint, at the very outset of the discourse, that all expectations of the universal success of the Gospel in the present Age are false.

The first class of hearers are those who live so nigh to, and in such close communion with, the Powers of Evil, that they have become similar to them, and almost as hopelessly callous. For if men, like demons, do not care to retain God in their hearts, He gives them over to a reprobate mind; so that they have no further thought of Him; for His Spirit is grieved, and lets them alone. From persons of this class come those "Sons of the Evil One" who are represented by the Tares of the Second Parable: for they are altogether impervious to the Word of Truth, and do not experience even temporary impressions. The Seed

cannot sink into their hardened hearts, but lies, as it were, upon the surface, from whence it is immediately picked off and devoured by those ever-watchful agents of Satan, the countless spirits of the air.

There are other hearers, again, who have hearts like to the nether millstone, but overspread with a thin layer of sentiment. These receive the Gospel, or anything else, with an eagerness and a gushing enthusiasm which give hope of abundant fruit. But if, perchance, the heat of affliction or persecution be in the air, or they be called upon to deny themselves an indulgence or convenience, they will straightway cast off their faith, and, by their unyielding obduracy to all subsequent appeals, show how stony their hearts really are beneath the soft envelope.

Such people will sometimes weep in their comfortable rooms over the miseries of others, but will rarely bestir themselves to aid the objects of their compassion. They may, perhaps, delight in talking of what they mean to do; but, should any opportunity for action obtrude itself, usually find that they have need to attend to some private care, or social duty, which must needs take precedence of the Lord's business. These are they which spring up on all sides in times of revival, and loosen the tongue of the scorner by their apparent conversion and ostentatious zeal; for they quickly fall away, and, practically, if not avowedly, disown the faith for which they had professed themselves ready even to die.

The mind of the third class of hearers is of a different order. These can think and feel deeply; but they can do so in regard to other matters besides the love of God in Christ. In their heart, the Word lies amid various seeds and roots, which will presently spring

up into the deceitful pleasure-seeking of early life, the cares of middle age, and the desire of other things rather than God. Nor is the range of the last-mentioned temptations confined to such spheres as ambition, political power, intellect, love, hatred, or covetousness, can afford; they may be discovered in very unsuspected quarters. In some cases, for instance, they war against the soul by inducing a quiet indulgence of appetites, to which many yield, by no means so far as to provoke the rebuke of their fellows, but just so much as to incline their bodies to an, apparently, well-meaning indolence and complacency, which, while they last, most effectually bar the way of the Holy Spirit. But, whatever their individual bent, the wheat and thorns grow up together in persons of this class. They would be Christ's, but will not give up the world: they persist in striving to serve two masters; and, since they cannot hate the one, find themselves quite unable to cleave to the other: they do not follow the Lord with a whole heart; therefore, He will not accept them, and, at last, altogether withdraws the pleadings of His Spirit. Then the thorns choke the Word, and cover its withering remains with their luxuriant growth. Fruit may have begun to appear, but it is never brought to perfection.

Lastly, there are some who, humbled and broken-hearted through a sense of their own sinful condition, receive the Word with gratitude. These, realizing the horrors from which they have been rescued, are willing to give up all things for the love of the Lord Who redeemed them; to deny themselves daily, to take up their cross and follow Him, to count not their lives dear, if they may but finish their course with joy. In the hearts of such believers the Word grows by the

power of the Holy Spirit, so that they are enabled to be witnesses for their Saviour, and, in His strength, to do works which shall be their joy and crown in the day of His appearing.

A solemn thought is suggested by the mention of the rates of increase—"some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty." Less than thirtyfold the Lord does not recognize: it is for every true Christian to ask himself, whether the seed sown in him can yet have borne this minimum of fruit in the conversion and edification of others; nay, whether he has had any proof whatever that he is in the faith; by the fulfilment in him of the Lord's saying;—

"He that believeth on Me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water."¹

Historic Fulfilment of the First Parable

To these four classes of hearers the Gospel began to be preached, first by the Lord Himself, and afterwards by His disciples. The latter commenced their labours at Jerusalem, and were made instruments of the Spirit, to add three thousand souls to the Church, on the very first day of their mission. They also preached in Judaea, and did some work in Samaria; but, notwithstanding their Lord's command, and His open interference in the case of Cornelius, they stubbornly refused to carry the Gospel to the Gentiles. Then God called out another Apostle, specially commissioned to see to the neglected work, who proved more abundant in labours than all the rest, and kept

¹ John vii. 38.

The author's application of this verse to the first question also.

This is questionable. It seems to be very unlikely.

... John vii. 38. ... "stubborn refusal" ...

sending forth his converts, in every direction, to proclaim the glad news of salvation through the Blood of the Lord Jesus. Indeed, so active and powerful was the ministry of the new Apostle that he was soon able to speak to the Colossians of the Gospel, "which ye heard, which was preached in all creation under heaven."

And to the truth of this statement, even Heathen writers bear ample testimony. For example, Tacitus mentions the arrest of a "vast multitude" of Christians at Rome only a year or two later than the date of the Epistle to the Romans. Again, about seventy years after the Crucifixion, Pliny, in his famous letter to Trajan, affirms that "the contagion" of Christianity had then seized, not merely on the cities of Bithynia and Pontus, but even on the villages and country places.

And still bolder are the words of Justin Martyr, who says ;—

"For there is absolutely no single race of men whether Greeks or Barbarians, or by whatever other name they may be called, whether dwellers in wagons, or homeless wanderers, or herdmen living in tents, among whom prayers and thanksgivings are not offered to the Father and Maker of all things through the Name of the crucified Jesus."¹

Thus was the world sown in the first age of the Church: and, during this time, the prominent characteristic of the followers of Christ was an earnest propagation of their faith in every land ; though, after all, their efforts were baffled by the generally unfavourable

¹ Just. Mart. *Dial. cum Triph.* chap. cxvii.

conditions of the human heart, and achieved but a very partial success.

The Parable of the Tares

The Second Parable, that of the Tares, is as follows ;—

“The Kingdom of the Heavens is likened unto a man that sowed good seed in his field ; but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares,¹ also, among the wheat, and went away. But when the blade sprang up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. And the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field ? Whence, then, hath it tares ? And he said unto them, An enemy hath done this. And the servants say unto him, Wilt thou, then, that we go and gather them up ? But he said, Nay, lest haply while ye gather up the tares, ye root up the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest, and, in

¹ “Let me call your attention to these ‘tares’ which are growing among the barley. The grain is just in the proper stage of development to illustrate the parable. In those parts where the grain has *headed out*, they have done the same, and *there* a child cannot mistake them for wheat or barley ; but where both are less developed, the closest scrutiny will often fail to detect them. I cannot do it at all with any confidence. Even the farmers, who in this country generally *weed* their fields, do not attempt to separate the one from the other. They would not only mistake good grain for them, but very commonly the roots of the two are so intertwined that it is impossible to separate them, without plucking up both. Both, therefore, must be left to *grow together* until the time of harvest.”

The common Arabic name for the tare is *sowan*, and this, I presume, is the root of the Greek name *zizanian*. The tare abounds all over the East, and is a great nuisance to the farmer.”—Thomson’s *Land and the Book*, pp. 420-1.

the time of the harvest, I will say to the reapers, Gather up first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn."

This story is simple and obvious, nor can we possibly fall into any mistake as regards its general meaning; for we have the Lord's Own interpretation of it, according to which;—

The Sower of the Good Seed is the Son of Man.

The Good Seed in this Parable does not stand for quite the same thing as in that of the Sower: for there it signifies "the Word of God," here "the Sons of the Kingdom." These last, however, according to the previous Parable, are the product resulting from the co-operation of the Seed and the Ground into which it is cast; that is, from the action of the Word of God upon the disposition of the man by whom it is received. There is thus not much difficulty in tracing the connection between the two meanings. In the other Parables, the Meal, Treasure, and Pearl, correspond to the first meaning: the Good Fish to the second.

Similarly, the Tares are "the Sons of the Evil One," the Seed of the Serpent, the Agents of Satan for the corruption of humanity. Let us ever remember, that they are sown *among the wheat*.

The Field is the World. And how greatly must this declaration of the universality of the sowing have startled the Jewish prejudices of the disciples.

The Enemy, who sowed the Tares, is the Devil.

The Harvest is the End of the Age.

And the Reapers, who will effect the separation of the Sons of the Evil One from the Sons of the Kingdom, and convey every man to his own place, are the angels.

Now, there are two great and very practical truths which we ought to carry away from this Parable.

First, we have the express prediction of the Lord Himself, that, as soon as He had established His Church, Satan would foist in among its members creatures of his own, the pernicious nature of whose doctrines and practices would only be discovered by their results, as time passed on. Yet, from the very first, they would occupy the place, and draw away the nourishment, of real believers, crowding them out still more and more, and stunting their growth by intercepting the rays of the sun, until at last the black fruit—which tares are said to produce—would be everywhere mingled with the golden grain.

And, secondly, that this state of things would be irremediable, and must continue till the End of the Age: that there would be no effectual purging, or reformation, of the visible Church, until the Son of Man Himself should put in the sickle, and the earth be reaped. Then, in a moment, should that separation be effected which the Lord's people on earth never have been, and never will be, able to compass.

Now, these two truths, so far, at least, as their practical use goes, are surface truths, having nothing of the deep or occult in them. Even a child could understand them, provided only that he gave heed to the plain words of the Lord, and accepted their simple meaning, instead of weaving a meaning of his own into them. And they are intended to convey to us two cardinal principles, two rules for our guidance, to which, if we attend not, we are liable at any time to be deceived by some false light of the Devil, and to be led far out of the right way, perhaps even into the wastes that border on the swamp of perdition.

These principles are as follows;—

I. The visible Church must at all times be a mixed

body, including, not merely unconverted and indifferent persons, but positive children of the Evil One, active agents of Satan, sons of perdition, like Judas the first example of them, who will do the work of their father, the Devil, as long as they live. Wherefore, we may never accept any teaching on the mere ground that it is the teaching of the nominal Church; lest, haply, we be found to be listening to that which Satan has dictated, and not Christ. We must test all things by the Word of God, which is given to us for that purpose, and hold fast only that which is proved by its testimony to be good.

II. Hence it is clear, that we must not set our heart upon any earthly church, or great hierarchy, in that world which is at present the realm of Satan; but must long for the coming of the Lord of the Harvest, Who will make all men know whom He has chosen and loved, by calling them away to Himself, and afterwards appearing with them in Glory.

O that these truths had been recognized from the first! How much waste of Christian life and exertion would have been avoided; how would the eyes of believers have been ever fixed upon that one object which is set before them in the Scriptures, the return of their King, instead of wandering to and fro after so many misleading and pernicious phantoms!

We see, then, that the Lord Himself has explained the Parable of the Tares, and has left nothing for us to do, save to mark its fulfilment in history. But, if we do this in strict accordance with the lines laid down in His interpretation, we straightway find ourselves in conflict with the larger part of the religious world.

For there is a prevalent fallacy, that the nominal Church, in its earlier days, preserved intact, or nearly

so, the Word which had been received from the beginning; and, therefore, that we ought implicitly to follow the interpretations, and accept the doctrines and principles, of the so-called "Fathers."

Now, certainly, at first sight such an idea seems sufficiently reasonable; and, were there no other considerations to influence our judgment, we should be compelled to admit its probability. In ordinary circumstances, those who had heard the voice of the Apostles with their own ears, or had lived in Subapostolic times, would be more likely than others to have imbibed Apostolic principles, and to have been well-instructed in Apostolic interpretation.

Nevertheless, plausible as the suggestion may seem, we cannot but reject it; since, in this Parable, the Lord has plainly and unmistakably warned us against such a conclusion. For, immediately after the sowing of the Good Seed, He has represented an Enemy as coming unawares, at dead of night while men slept, and scattering his malignant Tares over the whole of the Field which is the World. Since, however, men cannot be charged either with indolence or neglect of duty simply because they sleep in the night, the note of the time must be understood to mean no more than that the Enemy would bring in his agents stealthily, so that no one would perceive what was going on. And the deception would be aided by the fact, that the Tares themselves could scarcely be distinguished from the Wheat, until their fruit had actually ripened.

For these Tares were the hypocrites who were found to be suitable instruments for developing the crafty and treacherous designs of Satan; who, with bitter hatred of the Lord, were ever foisting themselves among His people, and making it the business of their lives to

spread corruption both in doctrine and conduct. Seeing, then, that many such men crept into the churches, obtained influence, and pushed themselves to the front as leaders or teachers, how can we be sure that any writings which have come down to us, even from the earliest times, are of the Truth, save the God-given Scriptures alone?

Of course, the state of things represented in this Parable must continue throughout the present Age. The Tares once planted can never be rooted up: they must remain until the Harvest. And, during the whole of the first stage of the historic fulfilment, that is, until the period signified by the Mustard-Tree had begun, violent persecutions were raging at intervals, which we shall find specially noticed in the other continuous prophecy of the Church. Here, however, there is nothing more than a very obvious allusion. The Lord feared lest His Church should take a lesson from their oppressors, and, if at any time they had the power, put to death obstinate heretics. Hence, the Servants are ordered not to root up the Tares out of the Field—a command which may be easily understood if we remember, that “the Tares are the Children of the Evil One,” and that “the Field is the World.”

In regard to the Harvest, a difficulty has arisen in the minds of many, because the command, “Gather ye together first the Tares,” seems to imply that the Lord will execute judgment upon the wicked before He deals with His Church. It is, however, impossible that such a sequence of events could be intended; or this passage would stand alone, and oppose itself to the general testimony of Scripture.

As an example of that testimony, we may quote the fourteenth chapter of the Apocalypse, in which three

classes of men affected by the Lord's return are represented as Firstfruits, Harvest, and Vintage. And, in accordance with the natural order, the Firstfruits,¹ as we may see by the context, are those who will be "redeemed² from the earth" before the Tribulation:³ the Harvest follows at its close,⁴ and still later comes the Vintage,⁵ the grapes of which answer to the Tares of the Parable.

And, again, in the nineteenth chapter, John sees Heaven opened, and the Lord appearing—with the whole Church, which has previously ascended to Him, in His train—to destroy them which corrupt the earth.

Indeed, if we turn to the last of this very series of Parables, we shall find the apparent order of the Second reversed: for the Good Fish are first picked out of the Net and placed in vessels, and then the Bad are cast away.

Now, a right understanding of Scripture quickly dispels all supposed difficulties: how, then, can we explain this seeming discrepancy in parables of the same series? Apparently, by the following considerations.

In the Greek of the command to the Reapers, there is no word—such as "then," or "afterwards"—to answer to "Gather ye first." We must, therefore, supply one, and may do so in the next clause—"and *then* bind them." In that case the "but" which follows may be understood, as it often is, to express difference or opposition, and may merely indicate a contrast of destiny, without any reference to order of time. Thus the command will read;—"First collect the Tares, and

¹ vv. 1-5.

² vv. 12-13.

³ ver. 4. R.V. "purchased."

⁴ vv. 14-16.

⁵ vv. 17-20.

who is not quite satisfied.

This might be taken out. See this time a little.

then bind them in bundles to burn them ; but, as to the Wheat, gather that into My barn."

And if it be asked, Why, then, did the Lord mention the Tares first? the answer is sufficiently obvious. He did so because the Tares are the great subject of the Parable.

We may, perhaps, add, that a farmer would not be likely to trouble himself about the tares, provided they were carefully picked out of the wheat, until he had safely conveyed the latter to its receptacle.

Again ; we must remember that the two Parables are elementary and general : they are by no means intended to furnish details of the End, but only to lay down the broad principle, that Christ will thoroughly purge His floor. The inevitable mingling of evil and good in the present Age, and the certainty of ultimate separation and judgment, are the great lessons which they teach.

A peculiar Greek word, signifying "to gather by picking out," is used of the Tares in one Parable and of the Good Fish in the other ; so that the meaning may be clear from both sides. Satan must sow his Tares, and they must grow up with the Wheat, and become inextricably entangled with it, until the Harvest. But before the Lord gathers in His Own, He will not fail to pick out from their midst all the children of the Evil One. And, again, while the Gospel Net is lying in the sea of the nations, the nominal Church must needs include many children of the Evil One, together with merely intellectual, sentimental, and hypocritical members, as well as real believers. But, as soon as the Net is drawn to shore, just as fishermen carefully select the good fish to put into their vessels, and then cast the rest away, so the Lord will take every soul of His Own out of the great masses of unfaithful and spurious

worshippers, before He consigns the latter to their own places.

In passing on to interpret the remaining Parables, we must keep one point clearly in mind. We have just seen that Wheat and Tares are to grow together until the End; and, accordingly, in the Seventh and last Parable, we shall find Good and Bad Fish mingled in the same Net. It is manifest, therefore, that all the intervening Parables must also represent the Church in conditions more or less corrupt.

Historic Fulfilment of the Second Parable

In searching out the historical fulfilment of this Parable, it is worth while to notice, that the word Tares apparently includes but one kind of noxious weed. And it is a remarkable fact, that, if we examine the works of the earlier "Fathers," we find them recognizing but one group of true heretics, that is to say, the Gnostic sects.

For in those days, the Nazarenes were regarded merely as Judaizing Christians, and were not yet reckoned among heretics: the Essenes were Jewish Gnostics: the Ebionites, though at first they posed as a kind of Judaizing and Rationalistic Christians, soon drifted into Gnosticism: and, as to the Montanists, in spite of a possibly undue fanaticism, they seem to have been much more like Christian believers than the main body from which they had seceded.

Hence, in investigating the heresies of the Apostolic and Subapostolic Age, it is almost exclusively with Gnostics that we have to deal. And how immediately after the sowing of the Good Seed these Tares of Satan were scattered broadcast over the Field which is the

World, we may see by the frequent allusions to them in the Epistles of Paul, John, Peter, and Jude.

They were divided into many sects, dispersed over the whole world from Gaul to the far East, all holding the same fundamental doctrines, but differing in minor points, and often taking their distinctive names from their founders. As a general designation, they called themselves Gnostics, that is to say, men that have the *gnosis*, or true knowledge, the possession of which they regarded as salvation.

Their characteristic doctrines are of remote antiquity ; but their origin in the form in which we have to deal with them would appear to have been as follows ;— Toward the end of the previous Dispensation, in those sad times when men were fast losing confidence in the old religions, and, having nothing else upon which to fall back, were giving way to a desponding scepticism, there arose some among them who sought refuge in a new and comprehensive faith. They selected such doctrines as their mind approved from the various religions and philosophies of the world, and arranged them into a system by which they hoped to unite the nations of the whole human race, and the practical summary of which was, that intellectuality and initiation into their mysteries, were the sole means by which men could be saved, and obtain access to the Presence of God.

It was a daring scheme, this Gnosticism, and successful to a very great extent : for it was a combination of the most striking teachings to be found among men, and was so arranged that it could insinuate itself by receiving and absorbing almost any popular doctrine of the religions with which it came into contact. And, prepared and made ready, as it was, just before the

First Advent, it seems as though it were the working out of a subtle plot of Satan, to marshal all men in battle array against the Lord and against His Anointed.

The fundamental doctrine of the Gnostics, by means of which they thought to solve all the perplexities of the world and the enigmas of life, was the ancient Oriental belief in two antagonistic principles, or deities,¹ a good and an evil, by whose ceaseless action and reaction all visible phenomena are produced. On the one side was the Kingdom of spirit, light, justice, and benevolence: on the other, that of matter, darkness, injustice, and malignity. All that was absolutely good was pure spirit: but matter, which was coexistent with God, and not created by Him, was altogether evil, and produced nothing but evil.

Moreover, if at any time it could enwrap spirit within itself, it degraded the latter and fettered its powers, the free use of which it could never recover, except by a complete deliverance and separation from its material body. But, whatever was altogether of matter was hopelessly bad, and must ultimately perish.

Such a doctrine, however, raised a serious question as to the origin of the present visible, material, and therefore evil, world. For how was it possible that the Supreme God, the inaccessible and incomprehensible Spirit, could endure to touch so accursed and contaminating a thing as matter! How could He, the All-pure, form a world of a substance that was necessarily evil!

¹ Many of the Zoroastrians, if not all of them, believed in a Supreme, but apparently inactive, God, far above these contending deities, who were understood to be brothers. And the same idea is reflected in Gnosticism. But, for practical purposes, these Supreme Beings are, in both religions, little more than figure-heads.

To meet this difficulty of their own making, the Gnostics invented the wild stories to which Paul refers as "profane and old wives' fables."¹ They affirmed, that Emanations, or Æons, were "projected"² by the Supreme God; and that these produced other Æons, in each succeeding generation of which the Divine element became continually weaker, until the lowest of them, together with similarly projected angels and archangels, were able to deal with matter, and so made the world.

Upon such a foundation was it that the Gnostics built up their creed with materials drawn from various sources, but mainly from Platonic Philosophy, and from Jewish Theology as Hellenized by Philo or Chaldeanized by the writers of the Kabbala.

Their favourite method of teaching was by allegorism—that subtle device by which leaders in religion have so often wrested authoritative writings, and especially the Holy Scriptures of God, into some kind of harmony with their own views. And the practice was fostered by Gnostics to such an extent that they sought for allegories in every direction, in astronomy, physics, nature generally, and in Pagan Mythology, affirming, that truth was expressed everywhere and in everything. Hence, when they began to pose as Christians, they applied the same process to the New Testament, just as Philo had done to the Old; and were thus enabled to get what they would out of it.

The earliest of their known sects belong to the group called Ophites, that is, Serpent-worshippers, of which Hippolytus mentions four. These are the Naasenes,

¹ 1 Tim. iv. 7.

² *προβάλλειν*, to throw before, project, is the term used for the bringing forth of Æons.

of whom he tells us that they obtained their doctrines, not from the Scriptures, but from the Greek philosophers, and the Hierophants, or Expounders, of the Mysteries: the Paratae, whose ideas were founded upon astrology: the Sethites, "who patched together their own system from shreds of opinion taken from Musaeus, Linus, and Orpheus;" and the Justinians, who based their teachings upon fabulous stories culled from the pages of Herodotus.¹

Into the strange and diverse theories of these sects we cannot now enter; but must, nevertheless, remark upon one doctrine, common in some form or other to all of them, and of the gravest importance. And, in considering it, we must remember, not only that the initiates of all these sects were Serpent-worshippers, but also that the Naasenes actually derived their name from the Hebrew word for the Serpent in the narrative of the Fall.

Now, the Ophites, like the later Gnostics, believed that the world was framed by an inferior deity, called the Demiurge, or Artificer, who was, also, the inspirer of the Old Testament. In plain terms, they taught that he was the God of the Jews; and that, either through ignorance or malice, he was hostile to the Supreme God, and made the world against His will. Hence the Serpent, in inciting Adam and Eve to disobey the Demiurge, was regarded as their emancipator from the tyranny of an inferior deity, and not as having moved them to transgress the commandments of the Supreme God. And, in this way, the Serpent was made to pose as a benefactor of the human race, and not as its adversary.

¹ See Hipp. *Ref. Omn. Haer.*, Contents to Book V.

But the logical outcome of such teaching was, that the Serpent was God, and the Maker of the world the Adversary. Nor is there any reason to doubt, that, in giving their esoteric instruction, the Hierophants did not shrink even from this hideous blasphemy, though they did not usually press it upon the uninitiated. Such a doctrine would, however, necessarily involve a complete reversal of Scripture: the men whom the Bible sets forth as servants of God, that is, of the Demiurge, would be regarded as children of the Evil One; while those whom it stigmatized as wicked, such as Cain, Esau or Korah, would be the real saints.

*How like some
of the modern
heresies.*

And, lastly, the commandments given in the Old Testament would, also, of necessity be evil, and be devised for the purpose of turning men away from the path which they ought to take.

Now, it is certain that the esoteric teaching of these Gnostics to their own initiates would be perfectly consistent, and would include all the above logical sequences. But the majority of the sects did not dare to be consistent in public; and so, among other hypocrisies, they affected to concede to Jewish, and subsequently to Christian, prejudice, that, although Satan had greatly benefited the human race, he was, nevertheless, in some way an evil being, and had, perhaps, been so overruled by the Supreme God, as to have done good unawares.

*"
Like Philon
said about
Ism"*

There was, however, one sect, that of the Cainites, whose initiates appear to have been logical even in their outward teaching; for they confessed that Satan was their god, regarded Cain, from whom they took their name, as the first of the saints, and avowed that he, and all who were like him, were their own kindred and brethren. Nor did they hesitate to say, that the

"Contempt are they
 they have done
 abominable
 works."
 Rafter
 14:1

Demiurge must be resisted in all his commandments; for that a man, while in the body, must pass through every form of action natural to the body, including the gratification of all its lusts; since that was a part of his discipline here below. And, even more outrageous was the doctrine of Carpocrates, the founder of another sect, who urged upon his disciples the necessity of expressing their contempt for the Maker of the World by breaking all the laws of the Old Testament.

Moreover, he added, that, should they fail to do so in one life, they would have to endure successive reincarnations, until they had thoroughly completed their round of sins. Rom. 1:32

Carpocrates himself flourished about the beginning of the second century; but the other Ophite sects preceded the Carpocratians, and were active in the lifetime of the Apostles. Indeed, it was, doubtless, their wicked propaganda that Paul indicated when he described the Mystery of Lawlessness, which was even then working, and must go on working, until the End of the Age, when it should be consummated by the revelation of the Lawless One, the Christ of Satan.

Such, then, were some of the features of the earlier Gnosticism. But to attempt even a slight account of its history, schools, and later sects, and of the variety of systems and doctrines that were developed among its adherents, would carry us very far beyond our limits. We must be content with little more than a bare enumeration of such famous names as Simon Magus and Meander, Cerinthus and Carpocrates, Saturninus Tatian and Bardesanes, Basilides Valentinus and Marcion. At the same time, it seems necessary to offer some further means of estimating the nature of the great movement, and its destructive effect upon the faith

once delivered to the saints. We will, therefore, endeavour to do so much, by briefly sketching the most popular and interesting of all the systems, that of Valentinus, which is as follows;—

In the centre of the spiritual realms the Supreme God, whose name is Bythus, or Depth, and who is incomprehensible and inconceivable, reposed alone for untold ages. But, being essentially love, and knowing that love cannot exist without an object upon which to bestow itself, He at length projected two Æons, or Emanations, a male and a female,¹ whose names were Mind, or Only-begotten, and Truth. Subsequently, the latter produced another pair, Word and Life, who, in their turn, presented to the Father a third couple, Man and Church.² And the Mystic Ogdoad, or Eight, was afterwards completed, as we shall see in due course, by Christ and the Holy Spirit, who are described as the later offspring of Mind and Truth.

So much, then, for the Ogdoad, or highest company of Æons. But when Mind and Truth saw that Word and Life, also, had been gifted with generative power, they forthwith projected ten Æons, called the Decad, as an offering of praise to Bythus. Then Word and Life, wishing to honour their parents in a similar manner, projected twelve Æons, afterwards known as the Dodecad, but in this they failed to produce

¹ This he did alone, and without the aid of a consort. For, doubtless, Valentinus, following as he did the numerical system of Pythagoras, intended Bythus to represent the original Monad from which all else proceeds. But other Gnostic leaders affirmed, that Bythus had a consort named Thought, Grace, or Silence.

² These names may seem strange to us; but the idea of them is evidently drawn from Plato's *Timæus*; and the Æons correspond to his heavenly archetypes, or patterns, of what should afterwards be made upon earth.

a perfect number, as Mind and Truth had done. For, according to Pythagorus, eight and ten are perfect numbers, but twelve is not so. Thus, so far, there were twenty-eight Æons, and the number was presently increased to thirty.

These Æons were dwelling together, in harmony and security, in their spiritual habitation called the Pleroma—that is, the Plenitude, or the Fulness¹—when an untoward event threw them all into confusion and perplexity. Sophia, or Wisdom, the youngest of their number, was seized with a desire to project offspring without the aid of a consort, as Bythus had done. For, in her folly, she had not considered that he was the only unbegotten, in whom alone all things and all powers resided.

Now, among the Æons, the female projects the substance, but the male gives it form: hence all that Sophia could do was to project a formless abortion. As soon as she saw it, she distressed the whole Pleroma with her lamentations: while the sight of her shapeless offspring terrified the Æons with fear, lest they, too, should experience similar misfortunes, or even meet with a speedy destruction. They, therefore, went in a body to Bythus, and implored him to devise a remedy for the sorrows of Sophia, and a means of removing her abortion.

Whereupon Bythus ordered the projection of two additional Æons, Christ and the Holy Spirit, which was effected by Mind and Truth. The abortion was removed beyond the bounds of the Pleroma: and Bythus himself, also, projected another Æon, strong,

¹ τὸ πλήρωμα, the Greek word which is translated "the fulness" by both of our Versions in Eph. i. 23, and Col. ii. 9.

stern, having nothing feminine in him, and named Order, or Limit; whose duty it was to divide the Pleroma from the outer region, whither the abortion of Sophia had been conveyed; so that nothing could pass from it into the Pleroma.

Sophia herself, having been thus separated from the cause of her passion, was tranquillized, and rejoined her consort. Then Christ and the Holy Spirit proceeded to pacify the Æons, and explained to them the folly of attempting to imitate Bythus, or even to understand him, incomprehensible and inaccessible as he was to all of them, save to Mind, the Only-begotten. And, as soon as they had thus quieted and restored peace to the Æons in the Pleroma, they passed out of it, and found the abortion lying in a land of shadow and emptiness. To her Christ gave substantial form, but did not endow her with spiritual knowledge; so that, although no longer shapeless, she remained still in ignorance of all things, and little resembling what she ultimately became, that is, the Sophia of the Lower Heavens. In order, however, to distinguish her the more readily from her mother, the Upper Sophia, we will henceforth speak of her by her Hebrew name, Achamoth.¹

Now, she had received her form in the region outside the pale of the Pleroma, the home of Christ and the Holy Spirit. As soon, therefore, as the latter had completed their work, they withdrew, and returned to their parents within the Pleroma, that they might join them in rendering praises to Bythus. And, peace and harmony having been now restored among them, the

¹ The grammatical form of this name is that of the Hebrew plural of excellence, which, in Prov. ix. 1, is used for Wisdom.

whole body of Æons resolved to glorify Bythus with an offering of ripe fruit. Accordingly, by their united action, each having contributed that which was most excellent in himself, they projected one other Æon whom they called "The Joint Fruit of the Pleroma," in order that he might be "an earnest of their union and unanimity and peace." This was the Second Christ—Jesus, the Great High Priest; and, at the time of his projection, a number of angels and arch-angels were also produced to act as his body-guard.

Meanwhile, Achamoth was seized with great terror at the disappearance of the First Christ, fearing that she must speedily perish, if he who had given her form should have deserted her. She darted after the retreating light, but was repelled by the Æon, Order, as soon as she had reached the confines of the Pleroma. Constrained to stay without the pale, and being thus unable to find her benefactor, she betook herself in her perplexity to prayer and supplication. And to this course she was moved by a certain vague light which the First Christ had left in her: just as, in the system of Basilides, the ascending sonship, though compelled to desert the spirit that had borne him to the borders of the Pleroma but could go no further, leaves, nevertheless, in it a certain odour, or savour, of sonship.¹

While, then, Achamoth was thus crying for help in fear, grief and perplexity, Bythus and the Æons, pitying her sad condition, sent forth the Second Christ, the Joint Fruit of the Pleroma, to rectify the sufferings which she was enduring in her search for the First Christ, and to add spiritual knowledge to the substantial form which she had already received.

¹ Hipp. *Ref. Omn. Haer.* vii. 10.

Accordingly, he quitted the Pleroma, followed by his angelic body-guard, and approached the distracted suppliant. When she saw him, though at first terrified, she was afterwards attracted toward him. He removed from her the passions with which she was afflicted, but could not annihilate them, because they had originated in the Upper Sophia. Therefore, he changed them into material essences, or unorganized matter, by means of which the world was presently formed. But the essence into which her conversion and supplication were turned was very different from the grosser substance which was produced from her fear, her grief, and her perplexity; for the former became psychic matter, soul-material, or animal life. And even that which resulted from the latter was scarcely the grossest material of the elements, which the Gnostics supposed to have existed from eternity; "but only," as Harvey remarks, "their ideal substance:" . . . "for it is stated in the sequel, that the Demiurge was the maker of the *light* and of the *heavy*, of the *buoyant* and of the *gravitating*."¹

The Second Christ, then, imparted to Achamoth the perfect knowledge which she lacked; and, as soon as her eyes were opened to discern spiritual things, she beheld the brightness of the attendant angels, and produced a spiritual progeny through gazing upon their light.

Thus three distinct kinds of substance were derived from her: from her fear, grief and perplexity, unorganized ideal matter; from her conversion and supplication, soul-material; and from her joy at the vision of angels, a spiritual seed. Over the last of

¹ Harvey's *Irenacus*, cxxx.

these she had no power of further formation, because it was of the same nature as herself; but out of the others she moulded and vivified the Demiurge or Artificer of the World.

The latter then commenced to form the Lower Heavens, and the earth beneath them; and thenceforth Achamoth seems to take a place in the Lower Heavens corresponding to that of Bythus in the Upper. The Demiurge, however, was exclusively soulish, or animal, and knew nothing whatever of the spiritual Heavens above, or even of his own mother; so that he conceived himself to be the Supreme God.¹ But, in his work, he was unawares influenced and guided by Achamoth, who was, therefore, the real Artificer of the world which her son was blindly forming. Hence the Scripture says, "Achamoth"—or Wisdom—"hath builded her house," that is, hath formed the world.²

In this way the Demiurge established the Ogdoad, or highest of the Lower Heavens, in which his mother Achamoth dwelt. Next he made the Hebdomad, or Seven Planetary Heavens, in the first of which he himself abides and reigns, while the remaining six are governed each by an angel to whom it was assigned. Lastly, he made the world beneath the Hebdomad, with all its inhabitants—men, living creatures, and demons. The body of man he prepared on this wise. First he formed it of the ideal matter, invisible and transcendental, and breathed into it the breath of life, that is to say, of such life as he himself possessed, namely, the animal

¹ In so horribly blasphemous a way do the Gnostics account for such a passage as, "I am the First, and I am the Last, and beside Me there is no God" (Isa. xlv. 6).

² Prov. ix. 1.

soul. Finally, he clothed it with a body of flesh moulded out of the grosser and lower matter.

So far, then, man had but two component parts, the soulish and the material. A spiritual principle was, however, added to an elect number of the race by Achamoth, who infused into the Demiurge, without his knowledge, the spiritual seed which she had conceived through her vision of the angels, and which he unconsciously transmitted to the souls of those whom he formed.

Thus the Valentinians, like other Gnostics and Neoplatonists, recognized three classes of men in the world, namely, the material, the soulish, and the spiritual, the last named of which were, exclusively, initiated Gnostics : and they taught that these orders were typified by Adam's three sons, Cain, Abel and Seth. Complete redemption consisted in the separation and deliverance of the spiritual portion of man from his other component parts ; and so, could be effected only in men of the first class, that is to say, only in the case of initiated Gnostics. And, as soon as all the spiritual seed had been redeemed, Achamoth, their real mother, would return to the Pleroma, and take them all with her. There she would be united as his consort to the Second Christ, and her seed would become the brides of his angelic attendants.

For the second class of men, also, there was an inferior kind of redemption. Never, indeed, could they become spiritual : they would, therefore, always remain without the pale of the Pleroma. Nevertheless, they would ultimately become purified, and ascend to the Demiurge to dwell with him in the place called "the Rest," or "the Mean," outside the limits of the Pleroma. For there the Demiurge would give repose to his own

children, the men of soulish or animal nature, that is to say, to those ordinary Christians who could not receive the Valentinian gnosis, and, perhaps, also, to good Jews.

As to the third class of men, the material or carnal, for them there could be no redemption: they must perish for ever. And on that account was it that Christ did not assume a human body, but a wonderfully prepared frame of the same substance as the animal soul, which, nevertheless, seemed to men's eyes, and felt to their touch, as if it were an ordinary body of flesh. But it had only the attributes of flesh, and lacked its reality, being merely a tangible phantom. This is one form of the heresy held by the Docetae, or Apparitionists, of whom John says;—

“For many deceivers are gone forth into the world, even they that confess not that Jesus Christ cometh in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the Antichrist.”¹

As to their view of the origin of the Jesus who redeemed, that is, the Third Christ, we have no certain information. But to maintain the correspondence with the architypal hierarchy in the Pleroma, it is probable that they regarded him as the son of the Demiurge, and, therefore, as by birth possessed of nothing higher than an animal soul. Nevertheless, he subsequently received a spiritual nature, according to some authorities, from Achamoth; according to others, from the Second Christ, whom they supposed to have descended on the man Jesus at his baptism, and to have abandoned him just before his sufferings and death. Thus as a spiritual being he belonged to a higher class than the Demiurge his father.

¹ 2 John, 7.

Such, then was the Valentinian revelation! Perhaps, however, it may be a matter of surprise to many that so wild a legend, and the religion founded thereon, could ever have gained credence among intelligent and educated men. But, that it actually did so, is a matter of history; and, when the circumstances are understood, there is nothing very wonderful in the fact.

The plans of Satan are seldom deficient either in foresight or perfect organization; and, as we have remarked above, men found in Gnosticism a new and attractive combination of doctrines which had long been believed in the Pagan world. At the time of its appearance, faith in the old religions of the Roman Empire was, indeed, fast dying out; but Gnosticism rejected their effete gods and all else in them that had become discredited, and absorbed whatever seemed likely to be popular, especially those mysterious Egyptian and Indian teachings, which Plato had so skilfully blended with Hellenism, and which were familiar to the educated and intellectual. L

It availed itself, also, of the secrets involved in the cults of Mithras and Isis, deities which had but recently been introduced in Rome, and were already becoming fashionable; which, moreover, by assuming the names of Jesus and Mary, might powerfully aid its endeavours to unite with Christianity. Nor did it omit to portray the dark background of life, in which the Oriental God of Matter and of Darkness fiercely contended with the Lord of Light.

With such a repository to draw from, and an unlimited power of assimilating Jewish, Christian, or other doctrines, for their own ends, the Gnostics succeeded in producing an eclectic system which could afford abundant food for the intellectual, could attract the

See 2. ent.
32: 17

curious to itself by the mere fact that it was a secret society with mysteries to disclose, and could delight the aesthetic with its fascinating rites.

Then, again, the practised skill in allegorism of the Gnostic teachers enabled them to find their own doctrines even in the Holy Scripture itself, and to expound them from it, however much those doctrines might differ from the plain and logical meaning of the passages which were being manipulated.

Still further, they were careful to press no teachings that were distasteful to fallen human nature: their discipline was intellectual, not moral: no initiate of Achamoth could fail to attain to the Pleroma, whatever might have been his misdeeds, and however shameful his life upon earth. For his ascension to everlasting life and glory did not in the slightest degree depend upon his conduct, but solely upon the circumstance that a spiritual principle had been planted within him, of which he had positive proof in the fact that he had been moved to become an initiated Gnostic. Thus they were well able to instruct men in the method of making the best of both worlds.

And, while the simple were at liberty to take the Valentinian romance seriously, if they so pleased, and to believe in its literal truth, the educated and philosophic, on the other hand, might, if they would, regard it as an attractive allegory, from which they would soon discover that the Valentinian teachers were able to extract a highly interesting and logical theosophy—a theosophy, moreover, in which there was no discredited polytheism, to be forced upon those whom it did not suit; for the Æons in the Pleroma were in no sense deities, but merely personified attributes of the one Supreme God; and, if a certain cult of angels offended

*How true this
is of all the
heretical
systems!* →

them¹—well, it was but a rendering of the respect due from lowly mortals to the messengers and agents of the Almighty.

Yet, beneath this fair show, in their dark and secret mystery-services, they were devoting themselves to Mithras and Isis, the ancient Baal and Astarte, the old nature-deities, the male and female principles, the Sun and Moon, Fire and Water, Gold and Silver. And, in process of time, they succeeded in foisting in the nominal Church many of the rites and symbols of the former, and brought about the open and authorized worship of the latter, under her new name, by the professed followers of Christ Jesus the Lord.

We may, however, tarry no longer to discuss such matters, but must hasten to the point which is of most importance to our purpose, the havoc which Satan wrought with pure Christianity by means of these vigorously growing Tares. For that they had not only been sown, but had also sprung up thickly, in the times of the Apostles, we have already shown. And, although, in the third century, the heretical sects had, apparently, been vanquished by the Orthodox Christians, and, by the end of the sixth, had altogether disappeared as visible and distinct bodies; yet this did not happen until they had done their work. Their spirit remained in the Church, upon which their teachings had been far too deeply impressed to be ever erased; and, indeed, to this day their influence has continued to mar the simplicity of revelation; of which fact we will now give two or three instances.

Yes.

First, then, they taught the eternity of unorganized

¹ See Col. ii. 18, where Paul is probably dealing with Jewish Gnostics, or Essenes.

matter, or chaos, which they regarded as being absolutely evil. And, of this article of their faith, two other doctrines were the logical outcome, namely, that the earth was not created by the Word of God, but was merely formed out of pre-existing matter; and that, since matter was evil, it could not have been handled by the Supreme and Holy God, but was moulded by an inferior deity.

Now, it is true that the worst of this teaching was rejected by the Church, which would neither admit the eternity and absolute evil of matter, nor consent to attribute the making of the world to any other than the Supreme God. Nevertheless, the Gnostic doctrine fatally affected her interpretation of the first chapter of Genesis. For, owing to its influence, she seems to have supposed, that, in the beginning, God created, not the heavens and the earth, but only the unorganized matter out of which He formed them in the Six Days. Such an idea ought to have been corrected by the very words of the verse,¹ by Isaiah's direct contradiction of it,² and by the meaning of *tohu* in other passages.³

¹ Because those words say, that "the heavens and the earth" were created, and not the mere materials out of which they were afterwards formed.

² The Hebrew word translated by "without form" (A.V.), or, "a waste" (R.V.), is *tohu*. And whatever this word may mean, it certainly cannot describe the state of the earth as originally created; for, in Isa. xlv. 18, we are told, in plain terms, that God did not create the earth a *tohu*. Gen. i. 2, must, then, refer to a subsequent and changed condition of our planet. Hence there must have been an interval of unknown length between the creation-period and the time of ver. 2, in which the earth is found to have become a *tohu*. For Isa. xlv. 18, obliges us to render "became," and not "was;" just as in Gen. xix. 26—where we find the same verb and the same construction—we translate, "she became a pillar of salt."

³ The true meaning of *tohu* is a ruin, and especially a ruin caused

Yet, crude and unsupported as the idea was, it became the established interpretation : and so, in later times when Geology began to be studied, and the strata of the earth's crust to be understood, it did its evil work by causing men to doubt the truth of God's Word ; and so, revealed its sinister origin.

The Church, however, was unwilling to part with her dogma ; so it was suggested, that, although God had said days, He must have meant ages ; and, in that case, there would have been plenty of time for the formation of the strata. Soon, however, it further appeared, that no possible ingenuity could force the order of the Six Days into correspondence with that of the strata. And so, the Cosmogony of the Bible was exposed to the criticism and ridicule of the Scientists, and became a cause of scepticism to many ; whereas, but for Gnostic influence, it would have remained a proof, that, thousands of years ago, the Spirit of God knew all that Science has since discovered. For, although He had not chosen to reveal the history of the strata, He had, at least,

by "the fierce anger" of the Lord. See Jer. iv. 23, 26 ; Isa. xxxiv. 11—"And He shall stretch over it the line of ruin, and the plummet of emptiness." Hence Gen. i. 2, tells us, that, after a lapse of time, which, for aught we know, may have extended to many ages, the wrath of God reduced the earth to a ruin, from which it was restored in the Six Days.

Other hints of the truth of this interpretation may be found in the remainder of the chapter. For, in ver. 9, when the floods were gathered together into one place, the dry land "was seen : " it had been created long before, but was hidden beneath the floods. So, in ver. 16, the sun moon and stars are not said to have been created—*bara*—but only to have been made, or prepared—*asah*. For some catastrophe had deprived them of their light—or, at least, of the power of making it visible upon our earth—which was restored on the Fourth Day.

allowed an unlimited lapse of time for their formation between the first and second verses of Genesis.

Again, how great a confusion was caused by the teaching, that there were two celestial Christs—neither of whom was the direct Son of the Supreme God, much less the Only Begotten Son—and one earth-born Jesus. For by such a doctrine the Gnostics made Jesus and the Christ to be two distinct persons, just as they did the Maker of the World and the Supreme God. And, while the Valentinians deprived Him of His human nature, by affirming, that He came into the world with a phantom body, and merely passed through the womb of Mary as water does through a pipe; the Ebionite Gnostics, on the other hand, regarded Jesus as no more than a man, the son of Joseph and Mary, upon whom the Second Christ descended at his baptism, but abandoned him just before His sufferings and death. Here is the beginning of the great Antichristian movement, which from that time has been ever and anon breaking out in the Church with its Arians, Socinians, Swedenborgians, and Unitarians, and is now bringing in the greatest of all its apostasies, but, thanks be to God, also the last. How, then, can we wonder at the vigour of John's words against those in whom it originated?—

“Who is the liar but he that denieth that Jesus IS the Christ? This is the Antichrist, even he that denieth the Father and the Son. Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: he that confesseth the Son hath the Father also.”

Moreover, as if this false teaching were not enough, the Gnostics also assigned many of the Lord's attributes to the Æons in the Pleroma, and thus, as it were, dispersed them, so that they were no longer under-

As in the
teaching of
"New Thought"
(c. k.)

stood to be concentrated in the Beloved Son. And to this it is that Paul refers, when, after exhorting the Colossians to hold firmly to the doctrines which they had learned when they received Christ, he adds;—

“Take heed, lest there shall be any one that maketh spoil of you through his philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ: for in Him dwelleth all the fulness—*Pleroma*—of the Godhead bodily, and in Him ye are made full, Who is the Head of all Principality and Power.”¹

From these and other verses it is evident, that some Gnostic sect—probably a Judæo-Gnostic—was spreading its pretended knowledge and vain philosophy among the Colossians; and Paul warns them, that such teaching was no message from God and His Son Jesus Christ, but flowed from a system of error, made up of human tradition, and a rudimentary discipline, such as would be suggested by the spirit of the world. Let them, then, beware of following leaders who would substitute the imaginary *Æons* of their fabled *Pleroma* for the Only Begotten Son of God. For in Him Alone doth all the Fulness—*Pleroma*—of the Godhead dwell, even in the body by the assumption of which He has united Himself with man.

The Gnostics did, indeed, teach that one of their Christs, such as he was, had effected the redemption of men: but from what did he redeem them? Not from their sins, from which the Lord Jesus saves His people:² the Gnostics had very little to say respecting sin. Matter was the only evil, and cause of evil, which they recognized. If intellectual men did wrong, that was

¹ Col. ii. 8-10.

² Matth. i. 21.

because of their compulsory imprisonment in houses of clay.

Hence redemption was the separation of man's spirit from the accursed matter which encumbered it. For the spirit had no sins from which it must needs be loosed by the expiating Blood of the Lord Jesus, but was altogether holy as soon as the fetters of flesh had been broken off and cast away, no matter how great evil it might have wrought while in the body.

The serious consequences of such teaching as this upon pure doctrine will be readily perceived. In the first place, because it enabled Gnostics, with logical consistency, to deny the resurrection of the body, and, therefore, also, that of the Lord's Body. They taught, that resurrection took place during the earth-life, and was merely the awakening of the spirit to a consciousness of its own separate nature and present bondage. And this seems to have been the doctrine of Hymenaeus and Philetus, who, by affirming that the resurrection was past already, overthrew the faith of some.¹

Yet, again, the principle that evil resided only in matter and material flesh, took another direction, and branched out into two divergent roads, of which men might make choice according to their natural bent. And so, some affirmed, that, since the body was utterly vile, and, as soon as the spirit left it, would sink back into, and be for ever lost in, primeval chaos: therefore, it was unimportant to what use it was put during their enforced association with it. Hence they plunged into any kind of uncleanness to which their lust inclined them, having taught, until they themselves believed it, that nothing could possibly pollute the spirit, or prevent

¹ 2 Tim. ii. 17, 18.

it from emerging as pure and holy from the most degraded as from the chastest body. Of the practical results of such a doctrine, Irenaeus gives a vivid description in his account of the filthy lives and conduct of the Gnostics in Gaul, among whom his own lot was cast.¹

As to those who took the other road, they, regarding the material body as despicable, evil, and the cause of all their woes, were ever striving to humiliate and mortify it, just as the Sadhus and Fakirs of Hindustan, and many devout Catholics of Christendom, are doing to-day; for they believed that by such means they would loosen its power over themselves, and the sooner escape altogether from its bondage. And this is just what the Judaeon Gnostics, or Essenes, were teaching at Colossae.² But Paul stigmatizes what they taught as precepts and doctrines of men, and adds;—

“Which things have, indeed, a show of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and severity to the body; but are not of any value against the indulgence of the flesh.”³

Nevertheless, he warns them, that they have members upon the earth which they would do well to humiliate and mortify with all their strength—such as fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness.⁴

Thus from diverse applications of the same Gnostic doctrine, there resulted, on the one side, a gross libertinism, on the other, the severest asceticism.

In regard to the Holy Spirit, we must not omit to notice, that the Gnostic sects regarded Him as of feminine gender, agreeing in this point with the Pagan

¹ Iren. *Advers. Haer.*, I. vi. 2-4, and xiii. 5-7.

² Col. ii.

³ Col. ii. 23.

⁴ Col. iii. 5.

Certainly

religions, whose Trinities always consisted of Father, Mother and Son. Thus they opened the way for the Catholic Virgin-goddess, who succeeded to the forms, titles, symbols, rites, and ceremonies, of Isis. Moreover, Isis, although she was the mother of Horus, was, nevertheless, said to have remained the Ever-virgin: it was, then, from her that the unscriptural doctrine of the "Immaculate Conception" was derived. For, in the New Testament, Mary is never called a virgin after the birth of her Son, but always "His mother," or "the mother of Jesus."

Our limits will allow us to consider but one other of these interesting doctrinal points—one, however, which is the most significant of all. The Ophite sects boasted that they alone knew "the depths"—τὰ βάθη—and, according to Hippolytus,¹ it was on this account that they called themselves Gnostics, or men that know. We cannot, then, but suppose that these "depths" would include the great fundamental secret of the sects, the esoteric teaching which Paul designates as "the Mystery of Lawlessness."

Now, if we remember that the word Ophite means "Serpent-worshipper;" that some of the Ophite sects avowed the Serpent whom they adored to be the same as he that had beguiled Eve; that other sects were suspected of teaching Serpent-worship esoterically to their initiates; and that all Gnostics despised the Demiurge, whom they blasphemously regarded as the God of Israel—if we put these facts together, we shall find little difficulty in believing, that the great secret of the Mystery of Lawlessness involves the substitution of the worship of Satan for that of Jehovah.

¹ Hipp. *Ref. Omn. Haer.*, v. 1.

This conclusion is strengthened by the famous Classical myth of the Golden Age, when Saturn was Supreme in Heaven. For the story goes on to say, that Saturn was expelled by his own son Jupiter, under whose stern and pitiless rule the earth is now abiding in darkness and misery. But Saturn fled to the country which was thenceforth called Latium, or the Hiding Place, where he will lie concealed, until the fateful moment arrives when he is to put an end to the tyranny of Jupiter, and to restore peace and happiness to mankind. The meaning of this prophecy of fallen angels is obvious : and, in the beginning, at least, of the Beast's reign, it will seem to foolish mortals that the myth is becoming history.

But there are, also, passages in the New Testament which seem to afford absolute proof of the correctness of our inference, fearful though it be. For what does the Lord mean by promising immunity from the judgment of Thyatira to "as many as have not this teaching, which know not the depths—*τὰ βάθη*—of Satan, as they say" ? Why does He quote the very term by which the Ophites were wont to designate their secret teaching, and add to it the ominous words, "of Satan" ?¹

And, again, as regards the Mystery of Lawlessness, Paul intimates, that the Satanic conspirators will go on working and progressing in secret, or virtually so, until about three years and a half before the End of the present Age. Then the time will have arrived for the manifestation of the Lawless One, who may be readily identified with the Beast of the Apocalypse. In the thirteenth chapter of that Book, there is a prediction of

¹ Rev. ii. 24.

his coming and its consequences ; and, in the third and fourth verses, we read ;—

“And I saw one of his heads as though it had been smitten unto death ; and his death-stroke was healed : and the whole earth wondered after the Beast ; and they worshipped the Dragon, because he gave his authority unto the Beast ; and they worshipped the Beast, saying, Who is like unto the Beast ? and who is able to war with him ? ”¹

Thus the infernal secret will be unveiled at last, and will present Satan as God ; and so, provoke men to an open outburst of that rebellion against Jehovah which is always smouldering in their breasts : nay, it will even cause the formal recognition of the Adversary, amid the acclaims of men and fallen spirits. We need not follow out the details of the story, which should be well known to every believer ; for the time is at hand. After the short space of three years and a half, the hour of Judgment will have arrived, and the Lord Jesus, suddenly appearing in flaming fire, will involve the Dragon, the Beast, the False Prophet, and all the corruptors of the earth, in one awful and inexorable destruction. So shall the song of Hannah be fulfilled, and the wicked be put to silence in darkness.

In the third century, we hear but little of the Gnostics, and it is generally assumed that the Orthodox party had almost suppressed them. But, as we have already said, the victory must rather be ascribed to the Gnostics, who had completely effected their purpose. They had succeeded in corrupting many vital doctrines of the Church : they had introduced Sacerdotalism,

¹ Rev. xiii. 3, 4.

and persuaded her to imitate Pagan ritual : they had assimilated her government to that of Pagan religions and states, and had foisted in not a few ideas and customs from the Gentile world. Under their influence, that which had once been a simple Evangelical and Apostolic body was becoming an ecclesiastical hierarchy, and was now fully prepared for the next move of Satan, which was to exalt it to earthly power by uniting it with, and subordinating it to, the great World-Empire of Rome.

For by that time the nominal Church had been deprived of almost all that would have checked her ready participation in earthly things. Her enthusiasm had died out : her miraculous powers had gone ; for the guidance of worldly bishops, many of whom were also Pagan initiates, had superseded that of the Holy Spirit : there were no more speakings with tongues : prophesyings had ceased to startle the assemblies : and, worst of all, the Great Lord Himself was now far from being the sole hope of those who professed to be His people ; for they had forgotten to look for His return, because they had lost all desire for it, and were actually branding Millennarians as heretics.

There was, indeed, a strong reaction against this lamentable state of things, even while it was developing, and the nominal Church was only beginning to lose her first love : the effort was, however, unsuccessful, and those who made it have, under the name of Montanists, been represented in ecclesiastical history as heretics and schismatics. But unworldly, fervent, and eager for their Lord's return, as they were, it is not improbable that many of them will hereafter be found among "the called and chosen and faithful."

We note, moreover, that they do not seem to have

been accused of heresy in doctrine, but only of separation from the Catholic Church, and of fanaticism. Those, however, who love the Lord Jesus first and best, must needs sever themselves from an apostatizing Church; and experience teaches us, that the holy fervour of such as are energized by the Spirit of God is usually regarded as fanaticism by men who have never felt it.

As to certain adverse stories concerning the Montanists, they have been handed down to us from hostile sources; and are probably exaggerated, possibly altogether untrue. For there is nothing more prolific in calumnies than the *odium theologicum*. Yet, if the charge of fanaticism were to some extent true, we could not, on that account, consent to treat as heretics those who left the great professing body because they deemed, that, as believers, they must maintain the simplicity of Christ, keep themselves unspotted from the world, strive for the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and ever watch and pray for the coming of their Lord.

The Gnostics were closely connected with the Neoplatonists, and especially with Ammonius Saccas, Clement, and Origen, the three great teachers in the Catechetical School at Alexandria. These all combined to adulterate Christianity with "Gentile philosophy and vain deceit," their object being to frame a universal religion, by which all men might be united. They were all allegorists, and set intellectuality in the forefront of the qualities that marked men as capable of the higher redemption. Nor was it long before the Neoplatonists revealed their affinity to Gnosticism in another way, by devoting themselves to wonder-working, astrology, magic, and the composition of spells and talismans.

It was by the co-operating influence of these and other forces that Catholicism was evolved, with her wonders that substantiate a lie, her scapulars, medals, relics and other charms and spells, with her round wafers of Mithras in place of the broken bread, and with her immaculate Virgin-goddess, once known as Isis.

Alas! this is too true.

Yet another effect of Gnosticism is seen in the fact, that its teaching respecting the Lord Jesus, as already described, so lowered and obscured His Godhead that the disastrous outburst of Arianism in the fourth century followed almost as a natural result.

In the year 533 A.D., we hear for the first time of the Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite,¹ whose famous works dominated Christendom, and maintained the Paganism of her Christianity, for nearly a thousand years. In his *Celestial Hierarchy*, this writer affirms, that there are nine descending orders of angels—each of them decreasing in purity and perfection—through all of which communications must pass, whether they be from God to man or from man to God. And in his *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, he reveals a corresponding series of ascending Ecclesiastical Orders, culminating

¹ "The Pseudo-Dionysius was a Monophysite Christian Neoplatonist, who transferred the secret arts of the Dionysian Mysteries to Christian worship, Monasticism, hierarchy, and Church doctrine. . . . Side by side with the revealed doctrine of Holy Scripture, he sets a secret doctrine, the knowledge of which is reached only by initiation. . . . The historical Christ with His redeeming life sufferings and death, is at no time the subject of the Areopagite Mysticism. It is always concerned with the Heavenly Christ: not with the reconciliation, but only with the mystical living fellowship of God and man, with the immediate vision and enjoyment of God's glory. The Monophysite standpoint of the author betrays itself in his tendency to think of the human nature of Christ as absorbed by the Divine." —Kurtz's *Church History*, § 47, 11.

Compare this
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 with "Areopagite"
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II Cor. 5:
 14-16

in Bishops, through which alone the lowest angelic ranks can be reached. Such a system betrays its Gnostic origin; and many of the elaborate rites described by Dionysius are, doubtless, drawn from the same source.

During the Middle Ages, the Gnostics were probably active among the many secret Societies known to be then in existence, though it may be difficult to decide under what names they were working. But many of the famous Alchemists, Astrologers, Magicians, and Architects, of those times had the reputation of being connected with them.

And, since these men professed Christianity with their lips, while in their heart they were bitterly opposed to it, E. A. M. Lewis suggests, that we owe to them the abominable gargoyles, corbel-heads, and other unseemly figures, which, in many churches and cathedrals, leer at us with faces expressive of all that is unholy and unchaste. He supposes the architects of such churches to have been Gnostics, who thus signified their contempt for the religion which they were thought to be adorning.¹

There was, however, one institution, at least, of Mediæval times which was openly charged with Gnosticism, namely the Knights Templar; who, although they claimed to be a Christian Order, were accused of many abominations, such as the practice of magic, the custom of spitting on the cross, and trampling it underfoot in their initiations, the worship of Satan, and so on. The German poet Werner, reported to have been a Gnostic initiate, gives some curious particulars respecting the Templars in his dramatic poem, *The Sons of the Valley*. And in the first part of

¹ *The Brethren of the Cross*, p. xv.

it, *The Templars in Cyprus*, he mentions two legends connected with their Mysteries; that of Baphomet, their fallen Grand Master, who is by and by to be delivered from the punishment and disfigurements which he is now enduring, and to be restored to his former position; and that of Lucifer, who is also oppressed by the Supreme God, but will again be revealed in power. It requires very little imagination to connect these Gnostic heroes with the Apocalyptic Beast—that was, and is not, and is about to come up out of the Abyss—and the Dragon.

Since we have no space for any notice of the trial cruel treatment and execution of the Templars, we will quote a few significant words from E. A. M. Lewis;—¹

“But, though it is not pleasant to give expression to that which is blasphemous, it is only fair, in justice to the Church and the action of her Councils in the condemnation of the Templars, to say, that, according to the Luciferian heresy, the reinstatement (of Satan) is to be effected by the deposition of Lucifer’s usurping younger brother Jesus Christ; and what is this but Antichrist?”

But we must hasten on to the Gnosticism of our own times, now known as Theosophy, of which, however, we need not say much, since we have fully expounded it elsewhere.² We will, therefore, confine ourselves to a few brief remarks upon two points, namely, that its identity with some kind of Gnosticism appears to be recognized by the leaders of the movement; and, also, that symptoms of Satan-worship may be readily detected in their writings.

also New
Thought & Sci-
ence

¹ Translation of *The Brethren of the Cross*, p. xvii.

² See the chapter on Theosophy in *Earth's Earliest Ages*.

As to the latter point, Theosophists do not as yet seem prepared to reveal all that is in their minds. But they are educating the world to receive it; and no one who reads much of their literature can fail to notice the peculiar tenderness with which they speak of Satan, and their manifest desire to remove all prejudice against him, and to transform him into a benefactor of the human family.

In *Isis Unveiled*,¹ Madame Blavatski urges, that, in his temptation of the Lord, he "is evidently no malignant principle, but one exercising discipline;" and warns us, that we must not understand him to be "the manifestation of any evil principle that is evil in itself, but only the shadow of the Light, so to say;" and that, though apparently "antagonistic" to the good principle, he is really essential to its "vitality, evolving, and vigour."²

Again, Miss Corelli's imagination has invented a new story of his career; and, in her *Sorrows of Satan*, she certainly impresses her readers with the idea that he wishes well to mankind, but is forced to do that which he would not by the Supreme God.

Such are specimens of Theosophical apologies for the Adversary. But even more strange is a comment upon his rebellion in the number of *Lucifer*³ for September, 1887. For, in criticizing the Satan of Milton, the editor remarks;—"If one analyses his rebellion, however, it will be found of no worse nature than an assertion of free will and independent thought, as if Lucifer had been born in the XIXth century. This epithet of 'rebellious' is a Theological calumny" (!!!).

¹ Vol. ii. p. 485.

² *Isis Unveiled*, vol. ii. p. 480.

³ The organ of the Theosophical Society.

As to the worship and restoration of Satan, the Theosophists say but little at present to the uninitiated : that revelation will probably come when the whole earth is wondering after the Beast healed of his deadly wound. But even now they tell us, that "it is Satan who is the god of our planet, and the only god;" that "he is one with the Logos, 'the first son, eldest of the gods.'"¹ Is not this an invitation to worship him?

As to the recognition by Theosophical leaders of some kind of Gnostics as their religious ancestors, Madame Blavatski thus expresses herself;—

"The chief aim of the Founders of the Eclectic Theosophical School (at Alexandria) was one of the three objects of its modern successor, the Theosophical Society, namely, to reconcile all religious sects and nations under a common system of ethics, based upon eternal verities."²

Here, then, is a frank admission of the direct descent of the Theosophical Society from the Catechetical School at Alexandria, which taught a so-called "Christian Gnosticism." The writer claims Ammonius Saccas and Origen as initiates; and is, no doubt, justified in so doing, as she would have been had she, also, claimed the other great Alexandrian teacher, Clement.

In the professed aim of the Theosophical Society, we may discern the shadow of a coming event—the union of the world against God and His Christ, the raising, for the last time, of that awful cry, "Let us break Their bands asunder, and cast away Their cords from us!"

One other quotation from the same writer, exhibiting

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the answer
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Systems

¹ *The Secret Doctrine*, vol. ii. p. 234.

² *Key to Theosophy*, pp. 2, 3.

the affinity between Gnosticism and Theosophy, is worth notice ;—

“Had not the Christians burdened themselves with the revelations of a little nation, and accepted the Jehovah of Moses, the Gnostic ideas would never have been termed heresies ; once relieved of their¹ dogmatic exaggerations, the world would have had a religious system based upon pure Platonic philosophy, and surely something would have been gained.”²

The Gnostics were ever assailing the Old Testament, while many of them hypocritically professed to believe in the New ; for they were well aware, that, if they could but overthrow the faith of men in the Hebrew Scriptures, they would be able to make short work of the Greek. This is, also, the view of modern Theosophists : and their allies, who call themselves “Higher Critics,” are helping them with both hands.

In *Lucifer* for August, 1891, the Templars are greatly lauded as “men imbued with the mystic learning and hidden secrets of the East,” and as representing “advanced thought in a time of persecution.” Now, this sympathetic language corroborates what we have already said, and exhibits the Templars linked on the one side to modern Theosophy, just as we found above that they were to ancient Gnosticism on the other. And their rite of spitting and trampling upon the cross bears a suspicious resemblance to the Black Mass of the French Devil-worshippers.

It would thus appear, that the Lord's prediction of the Tares, sown immediately after the Wheat and

¹ Apparently, the reference is to the Christians.

² *Isis Unveiled*, vol. ii. p. 155.

growing together with it until the Harvest, has been fulfilled by the continual presence in the world of Sons of the Evil One. These are willing and intelligent emissaries of the Devil : his children, because they are filled with his spirit ; and, apparently, also, his conscious adorers. It was to some of these that, with an obvious reference to their parentage, the Lord said ;—

“Ye serpents, ye offspring of vipers, how shall ye escape the judgment of Hell !”¹

And, whether acting as individuals with occasional groupings, or under the direction of a permanent Secret Society, they are the Satanic conspirators who work out the great plan of their Master, that is to say, “the Mystery of Lawlessness,” which will find its momentary consummation and triumph in the revelation of the Lawless One, and the open and universal worship of Satan.

All heresies are propagated by these disguised agents of the Evil One ; for every kind of evil comes from one source alone, even as all love comes from One Source Alone ; and, from time to time, they have originated and established various religions, sects, and societies, either for the direct purpose of leading men further and further from the Truth, or in order to distract, bewilder, and reduce to feebleness, the real children of God.

The Church of Rome is their presentation of Christianity to those who *will* have Christianity ; but, in her teachings, they have completely deprived the Gospel of its meaning and life-giving power. For, if the doctrines of Rome be examined, they will be found to include an

¹ Matth. xxiii. 33.

implicit trust in priests and sacraments, salvation by works, and the worship of Isis or the female principle.

Now, in reviewing the present aspect of things, we must not forget, that the great movements of Spiritualism and Christian Science are, both of them, developments of Gnosticism : for both despise matter, deny the resurrection of the body, and either obscure, or altogether rid themselves of, the Lord Jesus and His loving expiation of the sins of men. And, if we add to this the fact, that the Roman Church, also, belongs to the same group, how can we refuse to admit, that Gnosticism is to-day in possession of the field throughout the whole of Christendom ?

In fine, she is now marshalling the forces of both the Harlot and the Beast, to make war upon the Lamb. For, as we learn from the seventeenth chapter of the Apocalypse, she will once more use the Church of Rome for her own purposes : and then, when the hour has come for the manifestation of her god and his false Christ, she will violently destroy the Harlot, of whom she will have no further need, in order that she may blot out the very names of Jehovah and Jesus from the face of the earth.

But her gods will have no power to stay the hand of the Almighty, or to shield the affrighted world from His desolating plagues. And, after the lapse of three short years and six months, the corrupters of the earth will be destroyed by the glorious, and at last vengeful, appearing of the Son of God.

The Parable of the Mustard-tree

In the third similitude, a grain of mustard—proverbial in Palestine as being the smallest of familiar seeds—is sown by a man in his field ; and, with

solemn significance, the Lord tells us, that the plant, although really belonging to the class of herbs or vegetables—*τὰ λάχανα*—becomes, nevertheless, greater than all herbs, and grows into a tree. This is an evident intimation of something wrong; for God would have every plant to develop according to the limits of its kind, and by the unnatural growth of the Mustard His Creation-law is broken.¹

For, in changing into a tree, the Mustard must strike its roots more deeply into the earth than, as an annual, it was intended to do, and so becomes a perennial, and puts forth great branches. And hence the fowls of the air, which, in the first Parable, caught up and devoured the Good Seed, are able to come and lodge under its shelter. Here are two other ominous hints, which, had they been duly weighed, would have checked the frequent, and undoubtedly mistaken, use of this Parable for missionary sermons.

Since it is very unlikely that the Lord would have used a purely imaginary phenomenon as an illustration of His teaching, one instinctively inquires, whether anything like what He describes is to be seen in Palestine to-day. Thomson tells us, that he has met with wild mustard as tall as the horse and his rider; and also mentions the perennial and monstrous growth, in Palestine, of the Red Pepper Bush and the Castor Bean.² But these instances seem scarcely adequate as a solution of our difficulty.

There were, however, certain legends and stories prevalent among the Jews of our Lord's time, which seem to meet the case and show that there must have been Mustard-trees in those days. Two of these

"to every seed
its own
body."
2 Cor. 15.
38

¹ Gen. i. 11, 12.

² *The Land and the Book*, pp. 414-16.

legends are given by Lightfoot in his *Hebrew and Talmudical Exercitations upon St. Matthew*, as follows ;—

“ There was a stalk of mustard in Sichin, from which sprang out three boughs : one of which, when broken off, covered the tent of a potter, and produced three cabs of mustard. R. Simeon Ben Calaphta said, ‘ A stalk of mustard was in my field, into which I was wont to climb, as men are wont to climb into a fig-tree.’ ”¹

Now, such stories would scarcely have been circulated, had there not been some truth in them. It is, therefore, probable, that in ancient times there was in Palestine some kind of mustard which occasionally, at least, became perennial, and grew tall and tree-like.

As regards the interpretation of the Parable, the grain represented the seed and principles sown by Christ in the world, out of which the Nominal Church grew : the description of its unnatural growth signified that those principles would be abandoned as the Age rolled on—a prediction which was very manifestly fulfilled.

For the Lord had charged His disciples to learn of Him, and be meek and lowly in heart during their sojourn upon earth ; to cast aside every high thought, and to follow their despised and rejected Master. But Satan, by means of false teachers and errors, stealthily introduced during the period of the Tares, prevailed on the great body of professing Christians to turn from the words of golden hope, “ Behold, I come quickly,” and to fix their eyes upon earthly things. He taught them to think of the cessation of human enmity, and of their

¹ Lightfoot's *Whole Works*, vol. xi. p. 207

own growing importance; and so, allured their community in the direction of an eminence to which they could attain only by forsaking Christ and serving Mammon. Then, when the fitting moment had arrived, he approached them, and offered the present favour of earthly kings in exchange for the hope of the King from the Heavens. And, forgetful of their Lord's example, they accepted the offer: like Eve, they were beguiled, and blindly consented to receive their power and influence from the Prince of this World.

The Historic Fulfilment of the Third Parable

The historical phase of the Nominal Church represented in this Parable began to be developed early in the fourth century, when Constantine was carried to the imperial throne upon the shoulders of his British legionaries, the great majority of whom were Christians.

Now, whatever we may have to say concerning the moral character of Constantine, it cannot be doubted that he was a far-seeing statesman. And so, perceiving the strong points of Christianity, and especially the facts, that it was not a national but a universal faith, and that, in spite of the cruel persecutions with which it had been assailed, it was rapidly spreading through all the subject kingdoms of Rome, he was convinced that it would prove to be the religion of the future, and, if skilfully guided, might become a firm bond of union for the whole Empire. Accordingly, he put a stop to the persecutions, and, recognizing all Christians as citizens with full civic rights, made Christianity the State-religion.

To this action there was, probably, more than one impelling motive. Unquestionably Constantine regarded it, first of all, as a masterly stroke of policy;

but he may, also, have been influenced by a partial conviction that Christianity was the best religion for the Empire, and by a desire to evince gratitude, or, at least, to affect to do so, to his Christian soldiers.

But all this by no means made him a true believer ; and the vacillating and insincere way in which he endeavoured to please both parties, and to reconcile Christianity with Paganism, together with the abominable crimes which he committed after he had professed himself to be a worshipper of the Lord Jesus, clearly proved, that he had never experienced the miraculous change which we call conversion.

But, as regards his religious attitude, we would prefer to let another speak, whose impartiality would be denied by few. The late Dean Stanley, after mentioning the decisive battle of the Milvian Bridge, comments as follows ;—

“ This victory ended the age of persecutions, and ended also the primitive period of ecclesiastical history. The seven-branched candlestick of Jerusalem was lost, it is said, on that day in the waves of the Tiber. On that day, too, was lost the simpler ruder form of the Christianity of the first three centuries. From that day onwards, the 28th of October in the year 312, began the gradual recognition of the Christian faith by those ambiguous measures which have invested the career of Constantine with such a peculiar difficulty of interpretation.

The triumphal arch which bears his name, and which was erected as a trophy of the Battle of the Milvian Bridge, is a standing monument, not only of the decay of art, which had already made itself felt, but of the hesitation of the new Emperor

between the two religions. The dubious inscription on its front well marks the moment of transition. 'Instinctu Divinitatis et mentis magnitudine' are the two causes to which the senate ascribes the victory. 'Divinitatis,' or 'Providence,' is the word under which, in his public acts, he veils his passage from Paganism to Christianity. His statues, in like manner, halted between the two opinions. That erected at Rome held in its hand the Emperor's well-known spear, but the spear bore the form of a cross. That at Constantinople was in the image of his ancient patron deity, Apollo; but the glory of the sunbeams was composed of the emblems of the Crucifixion, and underneath its feet were buried, in strange juxtaposition, a fragment of the 'True Cross' and the ancient Palladium of Rome. His coins bore, on the one side, the letters of the name of Christ; on the other, the figure of the Sun-god, and the inscription 'Sol invictus;' as if he could not bear to relinquish the patronage of the bright luminary which represented to him, as to Augustus and to Julian, his own guardian deity.

The same tenacious adherence to the ancient God of light has left its trace, even to our own time, on one of the most sacred and universal of Christian institutions. The retention of the old Pagan name of 'Dies Solis,' or 'Sunday,' for the weekly Christian festival, is, in great measure, owing to the union of Pagan and Christian sentiment with which the first day of the week was recommended by Constantine to his subjects, Pagan and Christian alike, as the 'venerable day of the Sun.' His decree, regulating its observance, has

Sec

Sun-worship

"Christus"
"Belial:"
 outragem.
 blasphemy.

An. ful.

been justly called a 'new era in the history of the Lord's "day."' It was his mode of harmonizing the discordant religions of the Empire under one common institution."¹

Terrible. (Such was the temporizing character of the Emperor who now presented himself as the patron of Christianity, although he still retained the title and office of Pontifex Maximus, or High Priest of Paganism; who began at once to receive baptismal instruction as a catechumen, but postponed his baptism for four-and-twenty years, until just before he died; who professed to believe in the Lord Jesus, but also worshipped Apollo. See II Ki. 17:

In that Polytheistic age, the last mentioned inconsistency would not have seemed strange. For a Roman, while acknowledging all the known gods, and ever ready to accept new ones, was wont to select one—or, perhaps, two—out of the multitude as his special protector and object of worship, just as a modern Roman Catholic regards some one of the Saints as his peculiar guardian, although he believes in all of them. Similarly, Constantine placed Christ in the Pantheon, and adopted Him as his favourite god; while, at the same time, he continued, also, to adore his former patron, Apollo. 333
- 41

But the main object of Constantine's actions was political rather than religious: he wished to weld his Christian and Pagan subjects into one people; and so, to consolidate his Empire. And, with this end in view, he invented sundry ambiguous devices, similar to that of the transformation of the First Day of the Week into Sunday, or the Day of the Sun-god.

One other of these devices we will mention, that

¹ *Eastern Church*, pp. 192-3.

of his well-known standard, the Labarum, which he was reported to have seen in his vision. On its summit stood the Chi-Rho, which Christians might regard as the monogram of Christ, while the Pagans would recognize it either as standing for Chrestos, a word which they often used of their gods, meaning the good, kind, propitious, or benevolent; or as a slightly altered form of the sign of Osiris or Jupiter Ammon.¹ And the cross-bar of the pole might serve as a cross for Christian worship; but, on the purple-silk field of the banner below it, were the heads of the Emperor and his sons for the customary adoration of the Pagans.

"Christ +
Relial"
II Cor. 6
14-15

The results of this raising of Christianity to the dignity of the State-religion were disastrous; for, of course, the State forthwith claimed, in return, the right to rule the Church. And the latter, by consenting to such a bargain, simply delivered herself into the hands of Satan. She was rapidly secularized; and henceforth her aims and aspirations began to be directed rather toward earthly than Heavenly objects, and the Emperor, not Christ, became her real head. Instead of being made as the filth of the world and the off-scouring of all things, her leaders stood among the great ones of the earth; and, although a certain prejudice in favour of Paganism still remained to be overcome, there was from this time but little difficulty in the "conversion" of ordinary men. For the Church had now something more than mere visions of the Heavenly City to offer her followers: she could help them to obtain the good things of this life also, and even satisfy their ambition, or sordid greed.

¹ See Jennings' *Rosicrucians*, pp. 147, 180.

Moreover, the principle of Catholicism—that is, the formation of an “all-pervading,” or world-wide, Church, with a fixed constitution and a recognized Hierarchy—could now be developed, at least within the limits of the Roman Dominion; and it was not long before this was accomplished upon the model of the Empire.

Up to that time, the government of the Church had been very simple. At first, each assembly was ruled by several Presbyters or Bishops, these terms being synonymous and interchangeable, the former of Hebrew, the latter of Greek origin. In course of time, however, it became customary for one of the Bishops to preside over the others, and very soon he became the acknowledged head of the assembly, retaining his title of Bishop and leaving that of Presbyter to his subordinates. Thus far, however, the Bishop was merely the Chief Pastor of one Church; and his charge was called his Parish, that is, the district that surrounded his house. And, should an increase of population, or any other cause, demand the establishment of other assemblies in the parish, these were supervised by the Bishop of the Mother-church; and, in this way, the office might have become gradually assimilated to the Mediaeval and Modern Episcopate. But this simple arrangement and slow progress were soon changed after the accession of Constantine.

For the great Emperor and Statesman had apportioned his vast dominions as follows;—Four great Divisions of the Empire were styled *Praetoria*, and ruled by *Praetorian Prefects*. These were assisted by *Vicars*, or *Governors*, who directed the affairs of fourteen *Dioceses*, into which the *Praetoria* were divided; while the *Dioceses*, again, were subdivided into a

See
I Peter
5:3

hundred and twenty Provinces, of which Lieutenant Governors, variously called Presidents, Consulars, Pro-consuls, or Correctors, took charge.

This elaborate scheme was profanely called the Divine Hierarchy, and the Church was induced to secularize herself by adopting the same order. And so, while her Bishops were set each over a Province, her Metropolitans were made to correspond to the Vicars of Dioceses, and her Patriarchs, or Popes as they were then called, to the Praetorian Prefects.

The Church was now organized as a World-power, and for a great career upon earth, as completely as the Empire itself. One thing only was lacking to her—a spiritual Caesar over all, to unite her Patriarchates and consolidate her power. In due course, the deficiency would be supplied: meanwhile, she would be content to acknowledge the secular Caesar as her Head, and to bide her time.

Thus the nominal and now corrupted Church was assimilated to the Fourth and greatest of Satan's World-powers, of which, for a while, she became the actual successor, inheriting its powers, and, like it, ruling over "peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues."¹ She was no longer a lowly herb of the ground; for she had grown tall and expanded into a mighty tree. But the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, had left her; and the foul and rebellious spirits of the air were coming and lodging in her branches. She had ceased, as a visible body, to be the Lord's witness upon earth, and had become a destructive instrument in the hands of Satan.

¹ Rev. xvii. 15.

The Parable of the Leaven

In this Parable we see before us a Woman hiding Leaven in three measures of fine Meal;¹ so that the process of fermentation commences, and silently proceeds, until the whole is leavened. The interpretation of the scene depends, of course, on the meaning to be given to Leaven, which has been commonly supposed to represent pure Christianity. But such an explanation must have come from the Dark Ages, and could only have originated in the minds of men who had determined it by their own preconceived ideas of what the future should be, and not by patient investigation: for Leaven is an unmistakable symbol of sin and corruption, as will appear from a consideration of the following points.

I. The nature of the Leaven used by the ancients, and its consequent figurative meaning in the Heathen as well as the Jewish world.

II. The evident basis of the Parable in the Old Testament.

III. The invariable use of Leaven as a symbol of evil in the Bible.

IV. And the fact, that, if the opposite meaning were given to it in this instance, such an interpretation would involve a doctrine contradicted by every other passage of Scripture which deals with the subject.

I. In regard to the first point, the only Leaven known to the ancients was something sour; and the effect which it produced was incipient corruption spreading through the dough and rendering it sour, and, unless

¹ The measures are probably seahs, three of which were contained in an ephah; while the latter seems to have been a full measure for baking. See Gen. xviii. 6; Judg. vi. 19; 1. Sam. i. 24.

baked at the right time, positively corrupt. Hence, in speaking of bread, the Hebrews used "sour" for leavened, and "sweet" for unleavened. And hence, also, Leaven became a symbol of corruption both to the Jews and to many Heathen nations.

In the Talmud, it is a frequent figure for "evil affections and the naughtiness of the heart," and, among other instances, we find the following prayer ;—

"Lord of Ages, it is revealed and known before Thy face that we would do Thy will ; but do Thou subdue that which hinders, namely, the Leaven which is in the lump."

One of the Rabbis, also, says ;—

"Trust not a proselyte till twenty-four generations ; for he holds his Leaven."

At Rome, the Flamen Dialis, or High Priest of Jupiter, was forbidden to touch it ; and Plutarch, the Greek historian, explains the prohibition on the ground, that "Leaven is both itself generated by corruption, and also corrupts the mass with which it is mingled."

II. Our Lord, Who frequently founds His sayings upon something written in the Old Testament, appears to have taken the present Parable from the description of the Meal-offering in the second chapter of Leviticus. That offering, which seems to represent the devotion of Christ, our Substitute, in service, was of fine Flour ; and, if the Flour were in any way baked, there is an express injunction that no Leaven should be in it. Moreover, this special command is immediately followed by the general precept ;—

"For ye shall burn no Leaven, nor any honey, in any offering of the Lord made by fire."¹

¹ Lev. ii. 11.

Thus the woman, by putting Leaven into the fine Flour, was rendering it unfit for an offering to the Lord.

And, of course, if it were unfit, it must also be unacceptable, and would bring a curse rather than a blessing upon the head of the offerer. There are many persons now living who think that they are serving the Lord with much devotion; but they are not doing so in strict accordance with the directions of the New Testament; for the doctrine which they follow is leavened. They will, therefore, experience a bitter disappointment, when they discover, before the Judgment-seat, that no degree of zeal can counterbalance a lack of conscientious obedience to pure revelation.

III. We are directed to interpret Scripture by comparing spiritual things with spiritual, and Leaven is, without a single exception, used as a familiar and well-known figure of corruption in both the Old and the New Testament.

The Israelites were to put it away from their houses at the Passover;¹ God would have none of it offered upon His altar;² and it is expressly contrasted with salt, the symbol of purity.³ Accordingly, when Amos, in bitter irony, bids the people multiply their transgressions and provoke God still further, he tells them that this may be done by offering a sacrifice of thanksgiving with Leaven.⁴

But, perhaps, the most striking instance of the figurative significance of Leaven is to be found in the description of the Feast of Pentecost.⁵ On that occasion, two ordinary leavened loaves, made of the

¹ Exod. xii. 15, 19, 20; xiii. 6, 7; Deut. xvi. 3, 4.

² Lev. ii. 4, 5, 11; vi. 17; x. 12. ³ Lev. ii. 11, 13.

⁴ Amos iv. 4, 5. ⁵ Lev. xxiii. 15-21.

corn of the year, were to be brought forth from the habitations of the Israelites to the altar, as the first-fruits unto the Lord. But, because there was Leaven in them, they could not be burnt upon the altar and ascend from it as a sweet savour, and were, therefore, set down before it. These loaves, possibly, symbolized the Church—which was called into existence on the day of Pentecost by the descent of the Holy Spirit, as a kind of Firstfruits of Creation¹—presented before God, but unacceptable to Him on account of the sin which is in her.

Then seven lambs without blemish, a young bullock, and two rams, were offered for a burnt offering, as a type of the whole devotion of our Substitute, Christ, even to the death. Each of these sacrifices was followed by its appropriate meal and drink offering, pointing to His perfect and willing service in daily life, His fulfilment of the second table of the Law for us. Then a kid of the goats was slain as a sin offering, a shadow of Christ putting away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. Lastly, two lambs were brought to the altar for peace offerings: to set forth Christ as reconciling us to God, and restoring us to communion with Him.

And so, after the whole work of the Saviour had been thus represented, the two loaves were taken up and waved before the Lord, and—although they could not, indeed, be placed upon the altar, on account of their Leaven—were, nevertheless, accepted, and passed on for the use of the priest—a wondrous type of the Church, which, spite of all her faults, shall also be accepted in the Beloved.

¹ Jam. i. 18.

Leaven of a good influence, the Parable could only mean, that all evil would be overcome by a gentle, gradual, and almost imperceptible, process; and it would thus be made to contradict the whole testimony of the Bible. For the inspired writers repeatedly affirm, that wickedness will increase, until at length it shall be forcibly checked by the interference of the Lord Himself, and the destruction of those who are corrupting the earth. The Mystery of Lawlessness had begun to work like Leaven even in Apostolic times, and it must go on, until its true nature be revealed in the person of the Lawless One. It is needless to multiply passages which speak of evil men and seducers waxing worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived, of love growing cold, and waning faith; passages which predict that the world will again become corrupt and filled with violence, as in the days of Noah, will be reeking with the foulest crimes, like the Cities of the Plain; so that the Lord will come forth out of His place to shake terribly the earth, and to punish its inhabitants for their iniquity.

Even in this series of Parables, we are taught that Wheat and Tares must both grow together to the End of the Age; that the children of the Wicked One will be left undisturbed, until the Son of Man sends forth His angels to gather out of His Kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; and that, only at the End of the Age, shall the wicked be severed from among the righteous, and cast into the Furnace of Fire.

There is, therefore, no doubt as to the Scriptural significance of Leaven; it is sin or corrupt doctrine, and is so explained for us by Matthew, in the words;—

“ Then understood they how that He bade them

not beware of the Leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.”¹

We must not, however, understand that the Kingdom of the Heavens is likened to the simple idea of Leaven, or corruption that imperceptibly communicates its own nature to all that is around it. The comparison is obviously with the whole process depicted in the Parable: that which will happen to the Kingdom in Mystery, or the Nominal Church, will be as the effect upon fine Flour of Leaven that has been hidden beneath it.

And it will, perhaps, help us to comprehend what is meant, if we remember that the Lord has interpreted the first two Parables for us, explaining the Good Seed, in the one, as “the Word,” that is, the true teaching or message from God; whereas, in the other, the Wheat, which springs from the Good Seed, stands for “the Children of the Kingdom,” and the Tares, which are the product of the Bad Seed, for “the Children of the Evil One.”

Now, it is a fair inference, that He intends us to be guided by these interpretations in our efforts to elucidate the Parables respecting which He has given us no direct help. We may, then, assume, that the subjects which the Lord expounds in this series of Parables are the sowing of the Good and the Bad Seed, and their subsequent growth and fruit in the Children of Light and Darkness. And so, the Leaven, as we have already learnt from its invariable use in Scripture, denotes corrupt teaching or influence; while the Meal, the fruit of the Wheat prepared for food, is the true teaching communicated to the Children of

¹ Matth. xvi. 12.

the Kingdom, that they may sustain therewith both themselves, and all those within their reach who desire the unleavened Bread of Life.

The active agent in the Parable is a Woman—the usual Scriptural figure for an organized system, whether it be a State or a Church. In this case, she must represent a religious system, or Church, and, therefore, the Harlot-church, for she is stealthily inserting into the pure Meal that which will render it unfit to be offered to the Lord; and, if unfit, then unacceptable, and liable to bring down a curse, and not a blessing, upon the head of the offerer. In other words, the fine Meal affected by the Leaven represents doctrine originally God-given and pure, but so corrupted by human admixtures that, if it be offered to God in this condition, by being put into practice, He will refuse to account the resulting works as service done to Himself, but will view them with indignation, and, unless there be extenuating circumstances, will ultimately punish the offerer in His wrath.

Historic Fulfilment of the Fourth Parable

Even before the days of Constantine, many ambitious members of the Christian Churches, affected, it may be, by suggestions from Gnostics or false brethren, were looking forward to the time when they should become one united and perfectly organized Church, extending her influence to the limits of the Empire, and resembling the all-powerful Secret Society of the Pagan Mysteries. And, as we have already seen, the elevation of Christianity to the position of a State Church, not only afforded to those who wished it an opportunity of realizing this ideal, but also forced the acceptance of it upon the unwilling. For, in the changed circum-

except by breaking off entirely from the professing thing - which is just what the faithful ones ought to have done.

stances, it was impossible for them to retain the independence of their local assemblies. Henceforth they were compelled to imitate the government, and consult the conveniences, of the State. It was necessary for their organization to be assimilated to that of the Secular Empire, by the appointment of a chief magistrate over every assembly, of one supreme head over the aggregated assemblies of each Province, and so on; and that they should thus consolidate themselves into a Department which could be easily handled by their new Lord, the Emperor.

That Christ and His Apostles had not taught them so to ally themselves with the great ones of this world, they must have been well aware. And they should have known, that, so long as Christian believers were sojourning in Satan's realm, the object of the Adversary would be to foist his subjects in the Congregation of the Lord, in order to swamp the latter by superior numbers, and get the control of the Nominal Church into his own hands. And, if this could be effected, there would be little difficulty in reducing her to a condition of hopeless corruption, and using her for his own ends, though she still retained the name of Christian. And what would be more likely to insure the success of such a plan than the raising of the Church to earthly power and her endowment with earthly wealth?

For, at all times, men may be found in large numbers who can accommodate their conscience to any kind of doctrine, provided only they see that position, honour, and riches, are to be gained by so doing. The Bible calls such men Balaamites, and the Church was quickly filled with them, as soon as it became a credit and a worldly advantage to belong to

her. Such men increased her carnality, dulled her perceptions of Heavenly things, and taught her to think on the lines of expediency rather than on those of obedience.

Amid such influences, then, was the Catholic Church formed; and, after submitting to the Emperor for a while, she, at last, conceived the idea of rising above him by means of a "spiritual" Caesar, elected from among her own Princes; and so, of ruling the world.

Now, it could not for a moment be expected that such a Church as this would remain subject to the laws of the New Testament. The very exigencies of her situation obliged her to put forth precepts of an altogether different kind, which, when mingled with the commandments of God, so changed and made them void that men could no longer offer an acceptable sacrifice unto Him by means of service based upon them.

Thus we see, that the very idea of the one Catholic Church upon earth both brought the Woman into existence and produced the Leaven with which she wrought her mischief. For, when men went so far as to believe, that there was but one visible Church upon earth, how could they avoid the logical conclusion, that salvation was to be obtained only by a corporate union with her? How could they refuse their assent to the dogmatic assertion of Cyprian, that "without the pale of the Church there is no salvation"?

And so, the Church with her two Ordinances—or "Sacraments" as they were now called, in imitation of the Pagan Mysteries¹—began to usurp the place of the Lord Jesus; and, in the practical Theology of the many, to be esteemed as the actual source of salvation.

¹ Sacramenta being a Latin rendering of the Greek *Μυστήρια*.

See Mat. 15:9

See
John 18:
36

Again, the worldly constitution of the Catholic Church, and the absence of the Holy Spirit's guidance and power, caused her to adopt worldly methods in all things ; so that she was ever committing adultery with the Kings of the Earth, and striving to attain her ends and advance her power by means of diplomacy and all kinds of craft and deceit. Nor did she scruple, when she saw that she might do so with impunity, to deprive men of that liberty of conscience which God has allowed them in the present Age of Grace, and even to imprison, and put to torture and death, those who refused to subscribe to her dogmas, to worship her images, or to obey her commands.

Such, then, was the Woman ; and the short account which we have given of her Leaven will suffice for the illustration of the Parable before us.

The three kinds of Leaven mentioned by the Lord may be easily distinguished in this apostasy. In both the Greek and the Latin communities there has ever been a sufficiency of Pharisees, those who have, perhaps, some kind of faith in what they teach, but who put their trust in outward forms, in the traditions of men, and in the authority of their own Church ; while they look down, sometimes with pity, but more frequently in a spirit of contempt and persecution, upon all who venture to differ from them.

And, again, there is always a plentiful sprinkling of Sadducees, men who decline, more or less, to believe anything which they have not experienced, or cannot understand ; who disparage revelation, and avoid all mention of the supernatural ; who regard sin as a mere deficiency, and see no need for its expiation ; who dream that the new birth can be effected by education, human philosophy, and the practice of virtue and

philanthropy ; and who, while apparently acquiescing in the doctrines and practices of their Church, are in their hearts more or less indifferent to them ; nay, are often possessed with a bitter spirit of scepticism which resents the very suggestion of a God. When the false religion is growing old in a land, and its authority is becoming relaxed, these men are the fungi which draw life from its decay : they multiply in numbers and increase in boldness, until at length they throw off all disguise, and openly avow their real sentiments, and their hatred of every form of worship.

Of Herodians, who would support religion by the arm of secular power, and who consider political intrigue a fitting means for advancing the interests of Christ's Kingdom, it is needless to speak. Men of this class have ever been conspicuous in the communities of apostate Churches, and in none more than that of Rome.

The most active period of the Leaven passed by ; but neither reformations nor revivals, however great their partial success, could altogether free Christendom from its pernicious influence. It is still found to a greater or less extent, and in one or other of its forms, in every Church and Sect : it continues to work in the whole mass of professing Christians, though sometimes one of its developments may be more powerful, sometimes another. Hitherto the Pharisean and Herodian elements have usually been the most prominent ; but for a long time the Sadducean has been rapidly increasing, and this will, probably, be the chief agent in forcing the Mystery of Lawlessness to its climax, and in gathering the nations to the battle of the Great Day of God Almighty.

The Parable of the Hidden Treasure

There is now a pause in the Lord's discourse, and the three remaining Parables are spoken to the disciples alone; for, at this point, He dismissed the multitude, and retired into the house where He was staying. Thither His disciples followed Him, and asked for an explanation of the Parable of the Tares, which He gave them. Afterwards, He proceeded with His series of Prophecies, and delivered the fifth of them, which was as follows;—

44. "Again, the Kingdom of the Heavens is like unto a Treasure hidden in the Field, which a Man found and hid; and in his joy he goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that Field."

In this scene, the ceaseless working and rapid progress of the Leaven are checked; but that is all: the Leaven itself is not altogether purged away. Only, that which had been active for evil has now settled down into a cold inert mass, like that of a level Field. Nevertheless, hidden beneath its unpromising surface lies the Heavenly Treasure.

In this Field a Man is occupied, probably, either in digging or ploughing, and thinking of nothing but his work, or some other commonplace subject, when suddenly his mattock, or ploughshare, strikes upon a metal casket, or some other vessel or chest, which he finds to be full of valuables. Overjoyed at his good fortune, he hastily replaces the Treasure in the hole from whence he has taken it, and covers it again with earth. Then, after raising a sufficient sum by selling all that he has, he buys the whole Field for the sake of the Treasure which he knows to be lying within it.

The incident is, then, a case of what we call treasure-

this means a little for - fetched -

trove. And, consequently, the interpretation of those who would have us to see Christ in the Man, and His Church in the Treasure, is not merely out of harmony with the subject of the series of Parables, but becomes altogether untenable. For surely the Lord did not accidentally light upon His Church while He was about some other business on our earth; but, on the contrary, appeared among us to do things which had been determined before the foundation of the world.

We must, therefore, discard so incongruous an exposition, and seek one more in accord with the Lord's Own interpretation of the First Second and Seventh Parables. And so, the Treasure will correspond to the Good Seed which is the Word, and the Man that lights upon it to the Children of the Kingdom, and to the Good Fish.

Thus the general meaning of the Parable may be discerned. The enclosed Field, probably, represents the tenets of some Sect or body of professed believers: the Man hears the Word preached among them, accidentally, as it were; but as soon as he does hear it, he perceives how unspeakably precious it is, involving in itself, as it does, the forgiveness of sins and the hope of the Heavenly Kingdom; and he is willing to give up all that he has upon earth, if he may but secure it as his own. The purchase of the whole Field would seem to indicate, that, having found the Word of Life in that Sect, he rejoices, for its sake, to accept all the tenets teachings and conditions which he finds associated with it, at any cost to himself.

Historic Fulfilment of the Fifth Parable

The next scene to that of the Harlot-church, infusing her corrupting Leaven, will naturally be the Churches

Christ's Son - the Man - or Son of Man - is the Son of Man.
 Christ's Son - the Man - or Son of Man - is the Son of Man.
 Christ's Son - the Man - or Son of Man - is the Son of Man.

Quotations

of the Reformation, and the Fifth Parable was, apparently, intended to give some hint of what their condition would be.

Even the pause in the Lord's discourse, that preceded the delivery of the prophetic utterance which we are now to consider, together with the diminished audience, and the shifting of the scene from the beach to a room in the house, seems to be significant; and may, perhaps, indicate a turning point in the history of the Nominal Church, and a more confined area for the prophecy.

For the Reformation at first seemed likely to embrace the whole of Christendom, and was carrying everything before it. But the leaders and partizans of the Roman Obedience took counsel, and soon devised plans for checking the progress of enlightenment, and even for driving Protestantism out of some of the countries which seemed already to be her own.

The means which they used for this work were mainly two. First, the Counter-reformation in their own Church, through which they endeavoured to remove the grossest of the scandals which, even before the Reformation, had made their Priests and Monks objects of scorn to the world, and which the Protestants were able to use so effectually against them. And, secondly, the Order of the Jesuits, founded at Paris in 1534 by Ignatius Loyola for the maintenance of the Catholic Faith, and accepted and formally established by Pope Paul III. in 1540. It was chiefly through the agency of this formidable Society that, as Macaulay has it, "the Church of Rome, having lost a large part of Europe, not only ceased to lose, but actually regained nearly half of what she had lost." The Reformation was checked and crushed in Italy, Austria, Southern

Germany, Spain and Portugal, and, ultimately, in France and Belgium. That is to say, speaking roughly, the Latin Kingdoms returned to Popery; while the Teutonic remained true to Protestantism, and, subsequently, became active in the circulation of the Bible and the sending forth of Evangelical Missionaries. For, as we have already pointed out in our exposition of the Song of Moses, the Teutonic race is evidently the nation chosen by God to provoke Israel to jealousy by becoming her successor, as God's witness upon earth, during the period of her exile. And, since writing the note to which we refer, we have met with the subjoined interesting passage in Froude's *Short Studies on Great Subjects*,¹ which is worth inserting;—

“The doctrines of the Reformation were not accepted by this person or rejected by that; but, as if by some latent magnetism, they selected throughout Europe the Teutonic races, leaving the Celtic and Latin races, after a brief struggle, to Catholicism, and scarcely touching the Slavonic races at all. England and Scotland became Protestant; but the arguments which converted the Saxons failed to touch the Irish. When the war of freedom ended in the Low Countries, the seven Teutonic Provinces were independent and Calvinistic; while Celtic Belgium remained to Rome and Spain. France, in which Celtic and Frankish elements were combined, was convulsed for half a century. The country could not be divided, and the majority carried the day. But it is said the part taken by the great families in the wars of the League was determined by their

Striking

¹ Vol. ii. pp. 157-8.

blood: the Colignies, the Turennes, the Montgomeries, the Rochefoucaulds, all the leading Huguenots, were of German descent."

"We are not to suppose," adds Froude, "that there was a second time a selection of a peculiar people." And his reason for this assertion is, that no respectable divine has ever entertained such an idea. We are sorry to leave the company of respectable divines, but since God declared, by the mouth of Moses, that He would call out another race to be His witnesses in the place of Israel, and since the Teutonic race includes the only nations who have been at all prominent in the circulation of the simple Word of God and the dissemination of more or less pure teaching from it, we cannot but recognize in them the favoured and chosen race. And it is mainly with them that the last three Parables are concerned.

The one now before us seems very applicable to the period of Protestant deadness, which set in as soon as the excitement of the conflict with Rome had abated, and lasted on, with but few signs of life to vary its monotony, until it was broken in Germany by the rise of Pietism and the Moravians, and in England by the preaching of Wesley, Whitefield, and others. For, after the fighting enthusiasm had passed away, men felt tired of religion, and began to turn their attention to political, commercial and industrial life, and so, speedily settled down to a mere form of godliness, while they denied its power. They thought it a duty to go through their own heartless services, but love had grown cold; they boasted of their pure faith, but failed to show the works which it should have produced. And a mournful proof of this may be found in the fact, that two centuries had elapsed

before they roused themselves to any important missionary effort.

But controversies and divisions were rife, and soon the peoples among whom the Reformation had triumphed were divided off into sharply-defined Sects, like fenced fields. Each of these Sects held the life-giving doctrine of the Atonement: but it was often concealed more or less by other teachings, which, in some cases, seemed to have been very imperfectly purged from the Leaven.

During this period the number of believers was usually increased in the manner indicated by the Parable. A man would, as it were by chance, hear the Gospel of Christ, and, having received it, would in his joy buy the whole Field, that is, accept, at any cost to himself, all the doctrines of the community of Christians in which he had found his treasure. This was a very characteristic feature of the times from the Reformation to the middle of the last century: the generality of good men, after finding the Heavenly Treasure in some professing body, and while holding firmly, indeed, to fundamental and vital truths, would, in other matters, thenceforth read the Word of God, not independently, but by the light of, and to prove the correctness of, the doctrines which they had adopted.

And the various Protestant Churches, while conceding salvation to all believers in Christ's Atonement, were wont, nevertheless, to preserve strongly-marked lines of separation, and to remember their distinctive tenets.

The Parable of the Pearl of Great Price

45, 46. "Again, the Kingdom of the Heavens is like unto a man that is a merchant seeking goodly pearls; and having found one Pearl of great

price, he went and sold all that he had, and bought it."

*Price -
but the
infinite*

In this similitude, the scene again changes : the solid field breaks up into the ever-shifting waves of the sea, and the secret which opens the way to the Kingdom is found as a Pearl in its lowest depths. This points to times like those on which we seem already to have entered ; times in which the narrow boundaries of Sect have become indistinct, and are little noticed, while almost every man holds his own peculiar opinions. And, just as the Pearl lies far beneath the restless surface of the waves, so is the Word of God already being hidden among the many waters of perpetually changing confessions, creeds, sects, opinions, and philosophies ; and, still later, at the culmination of the great apostasy, its very existence will be almost forgotten. The truth of God will be no more found, as it were, accidentally—as a man unexpectedly stumbles upon treasure-trove—but only by means of earnest inquiry.

For, in this case, a merchant, who knows the value of pearls, is seeking for them ; and the reward of his diligence is the discovery of a Pearl of Great Price, to obtain which he gives up all that he has. The Lord thus signifies, that, even in the perilous times of the End, those who are really desirous of truth will be guided to the great Truth. But, as we learn from other prophecies, their sincerity will be sorely tested : in order to begin the search, they will have to turn away from that which is exciting the enthusiasm of the whole world ; and, when they have been successful, may be required to surrender family, position, property, and even life itself, if they would possess the Prize.

Since, however, the merchant is able to find the Pearl, we are taught, that God will not leave Himself altogether without witnesses, even while the Lawless One is reigning: there will yet be fishers, blessed of Him, who will be empowered to bring up His truth from beneath the troubled waters of human opinions, and to offer it to those who are honestly seeking for "glory and honour and immortality."¹

Historic Fulfilment of the Sixth Parable

A glance around will convince us, that, if we are not already within the times prefigured by this Parable, we are, at least, passing rapidly through the transitional period which divides them from those of the preceding epoch. Already, on every side, the fields of dogma are breaking up, and where one distinct and unalterable law was wont to prevail, there is nothing but uncertainty and innumerable opinions—opinions, too, which rarely claim to be derived from the revelation of God, but are avowedly based upon human authority, whether ancient or modern, whether ecclesiastical or secular.

The Protestant Sects, as communities, attracted by human traditions and philosophies, are ceasing to hold fast the Head, and becoming less and less able to withstand the powerful influx of corruption. Those principles which used to characterize them are, like houses surprised by an inundation, already tottering, and threatening every moment to fall through the

¹ We must carefully bear in mind, that the merchant does not dive to bring up the Pearl from the deep, but merely purchases it from one who has previously secured it. Great, therefore, is the mistake of interpreters who find in this Parable a representation of Christ seeking and saving His Church.

violence of the floods ; so that, shortly, nothing will be seen but the tumultuous waters out of which Satan will evoke the last great enemy of Christ.

More than forty years ago, the first slight advances of infidelity were viewed with alarm wherever they were discovered : Mr. Voysey was deprived of his orders, and the seven Essayists and Bishop Colenso were regarded as dangerous teachers. But it is not so now : almost all popular magazines and reviews teem with scepticism, and it is openly taught by those who might have been expected to act as barriers against it. Nor is the spread of Romanism, especially in covert forms, less remarkable.

The scarcely noticed summer stream has swelled into a broad and foaming river, and is bringing destruction with it from the mountains. We cannot hope to stay its rapid tide : for it will prevail, until He appears unto Whom all power is given. But we must not, therefore, remain idle all the day ; nay, we are exhorted to greater exertions as the difficulties increase and the End approaches, lest the Lord, coming suddenly, should find us sleeping. We can stand by the rushing torrent, and pull out many a one who is being carried away by it, before his spirit is quite extinguished : we can warn others, so that they may avoid it altogether. And, by the mercy of God, there are still large numbers of His people thus employed. The energy of evil is, for the present, provoking some little corresponding energy for good ; but of this we shall hear in our Lord's second continuous prophecy. For, in the Parables, He deals more especially with the general outward appearance of that which claims to be the Church.

The Parable of the Drag-net

In the seventh and last of the Prophetic Parables, we find, as we should expect to do, a description of the Judgment of the Nominal Church, which is given to us in these words ;—

47, 48. "Again, the Kingdom of the Heavens is like unto a Net that was cast into the Sea, and gathered of every kind ; which, when it was filled, they drew up on the beach ; and they sat down, and gathered the good into vessels ; but the bad they cast away.

49, 50. So shall it be at the consummation of the Age : the Angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the righteous, and shall cast them into the Furnace of Fire : there shall be the weeping and gnashing of teeth."

The Lord has now completed the sad story of the mingling of Satan's Tares with the Wheat of God. It only remains to speak of the final and unerring separation which He Himself will make between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth Him not. And it is this dread time of Judgment which is here set before us.

Since the similitude is taken from fishing, the Sea is introduced merely as the home of fishes, and, therefore, corresponds to the Field, which is the World, in the Parable of the Tares.

The Net, which is a large Drag-net, is the Kingdom in Mystery, or the Nominal Church : the casting of the Net is the preaching of the Gospel, whereby men are enabled to enter into it. And, as the Aorist tense of the participle¹ indicates, the casting was accomplished,

¹ βληθειση.

once for all, by the Lord and His Apostles, who revealed and established the Gospel among men. For those who came after them could but repeat what they had said, and drag the Net from place to place.

From the time when it was cast, the Net gathers within its meshes fish of every kind: that is, it does not discriminate, but receives every fish that comes to it, whether it be good or bad. Nor can there be discrimination in the Nominal Church; for it is only God Who can try the heart and the reins.

In the Sea the Net must abide, until it is filled, that is, until it has gathered the full number of fish which it was designed to hold: then, and not till then, it is drawn up on the beach. And from this fact we may learn, that God has determined how many of the human race are to come under the influence of the Gospel during the present Age; and that, for reasons which He may some day reveal to our adoring minds. For, as Isaiah tells us, when the Lord returns, there will be found nations that have not heard His fame, neither have seen His glory.¹

As soon as the Net has been hauled up on the shore, the fishermen sit down upon the beach, and begin to examine its contents. And this mention of the sitting down is, doubtless, intended to point to the deliberate and thorough character of their work. As they pass each fish in review, they place the Good into vessels which are waiting upon the beach to receive them, and which correspond to the "barn" in the Second Parable. But the Bad they cast out, or away.

So, the Lord adds, it shall be at the End of the Age. "The Angels shall come forth," a rather remarkable

¹ Isa. lxvi. 19.

expression, which may mean that they shall suddenly become visible, flash, as it were, out of the void. And then, at length, they will effect the severance of the wicked from the righteous among whom they will be found still mingled, and will cast them into the Furnace of Fire, that is, into the Fiery Abyss in the centre of the earth, prepared as a prison for the Devil and his Angels during the Thousand Years of the next Age.

Summary of the Seven Parables

Such, then, is the first great revelation in regard to the career of the Nominal Church.

The Lord sows Good Seed; but the bad soil of human hearts renders it for the most part unfruitful.

And, where it is growing well, an enemy causes disastrous confusion and mischief, by stealthily introducing disguised Children of the Wicked One among the Children of the Kingdom.

Changed by this evil admixture, the professing Church casts off her humility, and, ceasing to wait for the Lord from Heaven, strives to establish herself upon earth. Throwing aside the cross, she desires to say, "I sit a queen, and am no widow," and, in order to gratify her ambition, enters into a shameful alliance with the great ones of earth, and suffers the Spirits of Darkness, the devourers of the Word, to take shelter in her branches.

With such counsellors and helpers she organizes herself, and so corrupts the whole Word of God by the teachings of demons that it can no longer be recovered, any more than fine flour can be again purified from that which has once leavened it.

After a while, there follows a time of partial revival, corresponding to the reformation of the Jews under

Zerubbabel and Joshua, but also resembling that movement in its speedy subsidence to apathy and deadness. During this period, however, the Word is able to be separated from the Field, though it could not be recovered from the Leaven, and many a one comes upon it unexpectedly, and receives it with joy as a great treasure, although, in order to obtain it, he must needs buy the whole Field.

Then the Word is again hidden; not, however, at this time by fixed and rigid dogmas, but by opinions of perplexing variety, which are ever shifting, like the waves of the sea. Yet the agitated and threatening state of the world moves some to search earnestly for Divine revelation and truth, and those who do so find the Pearl of Great Price, and, if they are willing to give up all else for its sake, may possess and rejoice in it.

At the close of this period the Lord suddenly begins to pass in review the whole of Christendom, all the nations that have heard His Gospel; and by taking those who have accepted it to Himself, and casting the obstinately rebellious into the Furnace of Fire, at length effects the separation which His servants are not permitted to attempt, and finishes the Mystery of God.

Who can thoughtfully consider these Parables and refuse to admit their striking fulfilment, thus far, in the history of the professing Church, together with the grave inference, that the days of this Dispensation are numbered?

CHAPTER VII

THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW.—PART V

THE CANAANITISH WOMAN. THE LEAVEN OF THE PHARISEES AND SADDUCEES

THE first event described in the fourteenth chapter, that is to say, the death of John the Baptist, has a very significant bearing upon the Dispensational change. John, who came in the spirit and power of Elijah, had failed to do the predicted work of the Tishbite, and was, therefore, removed. The day of grace for Israel had passed : thenceforth no one would be found who could prepare the way for the reception of the Messiah, until Elijah himself should appear. And there was no Divine promise that he should be sent, until the Great and Dreadful Day of the Lord was close at hand.

On hearing of the murder of John, the Lord retired into the wilderness ; and, after healing the sick among the thousands that persistently followed Him thither, He fed them by a miraculous act of creative power. A scene of wild enthusiasm was the result, and the people attempted to take Him by force and make Him their King¹—only, however, as the sequel proved, for the sake of the temporal goods which they hoped to receive from Him. For, on the morrow, when they

¹ John vi. 15.

found that He would no longer speak of the immediate setting up of the Kingdom, but would only offer Himself to them as the Bread of Life, they murmured and left Him.¹

In the fifteenth chapter, we find the Scribes and Pharisees again at their evil work. They accused His disciples—Himself they did not yet dare to assail directly—of transgressing the traditions of the Elders. This brought down the lightning upon their own heads. He sternly denounced them as making void the laws of the Great God by their enforcement of those very traditions, as mere hypocrites and disobedient lip-servers, who would worship God in vain so long as they taught for doctrines the traditions of men. And, afterwards, when His disciples told Him that the Pharisees were offended at His words, He simply replied, "Every plant which My Heavenly Father planted not, shall be rooted up." Then, when He had further exposed their folly to His disciples, He led the latter away.

But whither did He go, when He turned from these sons of rebellion and hatred? To the borders of the despised Gentiles. For His Spirit was yearning for the faith which He could not then find in Israel, but which He knew to be awaiting its opportunity among the broken-hearted and afflicted ones in the dark lands of the Heathen. Not yet, indeed, had the hour for their relief arrived: the Sixty-ninth of Daniel's Sevens was not quite spent, but very nearly so; and some premonitory drops of the rain with which the clouds were already big might fall upon those to whom His heart was going out. Accordingly, He crossed the border into

¹ John vi. 22-66.

the parts of Tyre and Sidon, and to one distressed woman His coming was as the rising of the dawn.

She was no daughter of Abraham, but a Canaanite—one of the accursed race which God had doomed to extirpation. Yet, although afflicted and miserable, her affliction had not hardened her against God. Indeed, as her subsequent conduct proved, she must have had some consciousness of the truth, that sinners, like herself, had no right to murmur at trouble. And so, dejected and lowly as she was, the Lord discerned in her a fitting subject for His mercy. His fame as the wonder-working Prophet of Nazareth must have reached her: she must, too, have heard of the tenderness of His heart. Perhaps, she had even listened with awe to whispered hints, that He might be the Messiah so long expected by Israel. But, at any rate, she determined to go to Him; for might not He, Who had removed the burdens of so many children of sorrow, also have compassion upon her?

And very grievous was her trial; for her daughter had been seized and possessed by one of the foul demons which the Gentiles worshipped, and, ever harassed and tormented, could neither find rest for herself, nor suffer it to abide in the house in which she dwelt.

The wearied mother made her way to the Lord, and, with piteous cries, intreated Him to have mercy upon herself and her daughter who was so painfully vexed by the demon. But, although she called Him Lord, and acknowledged Him as the Son of David, He answered her not a word, and His disciples were evidently annoyed by her persistence. Nay, she even heard Him telling them, that He was sent to none, save to the lost sheep of the House of Israel. Yet this

She
Canaanite
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did but make her press the nearer to Him, and throw herself at His feet, crying, "Lord, help me!" Then, at length, He opened His mouth; only, however, to say, that He must not take the children's bread, and cast it to the dogs. But not even this chilling answer could daunt her: she was willing to take any place of humility which He chose to indicate. "Even so, Lord," she replied, "it is only for the dog's portion that I ask—only for the crumbs that fall from the children's table."

The hitherto averted Face was turned full upon her; but not with the look of one about to cast morsels to dogs. It was radiant with love and grace; and the poor accursed Gentile heard the King of Glory saying to her, "O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt."

She doubted not the word of power, and filled with gratitude and joy returned to her home, but not to the sad sights and sounds that were so painfully familiar to her. No restless form was flitting aimlessly and wildly about the house. No shrieks of rage or terror or distress pierced her ears as she passed the threshold. All was quiet and still; and her daughter was breathing softly in sleep upon the bed, having, at last, found the rest of which she had been so greatly in need. The peace of the Royal Messiah of Israel had fallen for the first time upon a home in the land of the Gentiles—a gracious earnest of many other such blessings.

Some time, perhaps, we may hear the sequel of the story. Now we can only imagine the devotion of both mother and daughter to the Lord Who had saved them: we can but picture in fancy the deep feeling with which they heard of His Death to expiate their

sins, of His Resurrection and Ascension, and of the glorious truth, that His grace was no longer confined to Jews, but that He had thrown open the Gates of the Heavenly Kingdom to all believers.

On His return, He once more stirred the enthusiasm of the Jewish crowds by healing all among them that were distressed in body or mind, and by miraculously feeding the whole multitude with seven loaves and a few small fishes.

Then He crossed the lake to Magdala, only to find the unwearied Pharisees—now in alliance with their normal foes, the Sadducees—prepared to assail and hoping to confound Him by a demand for a sign from Heaven. But they were sternly repelled. He exposed the hypocrisy of their request, and asked how it was that they could so readily interpret the face of the Heaven, but could not discern the signs of the times. “A wicked and adulterous generation,” He continued, “seeketh after a sign, and there shall no sign be given unto it, but the sign of Jonah.” Then He left them in anger, and again crossed the lake.¹

Now, the disciples had forgotten to take bread with them, and, having discovered their mistake on the way, were discussing it; when the Lord remarked, “Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” These words, of course, had reference to His late encounter with the Jewish leaders. But they, absorbed as they were with their earthly need, thought that He was speaking of the leaven of bread, and was warning them, forsooth, against eating that which had been baked by a Pharisee or a Sadducee. For, in their case, the Kingdom of God and His righteousness had

¹ *Matth. xvi. 4, 5*

become wholly submerged beneath the petty cares of this life.

He upbraided them for the weakness of their faith, and expressed His surprise that they had not even understood the teaching of His acts of power. Did they not remember how He had recently fed the five thousand, and again the four thousand, in the wilderness? Had they forgotten, that the baskets of fragments, which, in each case, they had gathered after the meal, far exceeded the few loaves and small fishes with which He had satisfied the multitude? Or, after these displays of creative power, did they really think that He, like themselves, was anxious lest a want of bread should befall them? Then they understood, that He had not spoken to them of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

And we, too, should learn a lesson from this incident; and, when we are oppressed, should ask the days that are past, and, recalling former deliverances, know that God will give an end to present trials also.

The Confession of Peter

The time had now come when the Lord must announce His sufferings and death to His disciples; probably, as we shall presently see, because His probation as Man was drawing near to its close. And He had prepared for this step, as for every other, by withdrawing to a solitary place for prayer.¹ Hitherto He had seemed to carry everything before Him, to bear down all opposition; and His disciples were, doubtless, expecting a speedy revelation of earthly glory. For it is not likely that they were much impressed by His

¹ Luke ix. 18.

hint, that the Bridegroom must shortly be taken away, and leave the children of the Bridechamber to mourn. But now they must be plainly told what was coming to pass, though even this warning would produce but a temporary effect upon them.

First, however, He must test their faith, and ascertain whether they were worthy of such a revelation. And so, as soon as they had rejoined Him, and He was now on the road with them, He inquired ;—“ Whom do men say that the Son of Man is ? What is the popular opinion respecting Me, the judgment of flesh and blood ? ”¹ By their answer the disciples evidently understood Him to refer to unbelievers only ; and what they said disclosed the deep impression which His Person and work had made upon the people, and the bewilderment of those who could not recognize Him as the Messiah.

Some affirmed that He was John the Baptist risen from the dead. These may have been Herodians ; for Herod had expressed the same idea, and believed that by it he could account for the Lord's acts of power.

Others supposed Him to be Elijah, and regarded His appearance as the fulfilment of the last verses of Malachi, expecting, of course, that He would soon be followed by the Messiah.

The thought of Jeremiah was, probably, suggested by a legend, contained in the Second Book of the Maccabees,² to the effect that Jeremiah had, by God's command, hidden the Tabernacle, the Ark and the Altar of Incense in a cave on Mount Pisgah ; and that the cave was unknown, and would never be discovered

¹ See Matth. xvi. 17.

² 2 Macc. ii. 4-8.

until God was about to restore the Glory to Israel. Very probably a prediction had been afterwards added to this story, that Jeremiah himself would be raised from the dead to reveal the spot in which the holy things were deposited. Those, then, who deemed the Lord to be that prophet must have believed that He had appeared for the purpose.

Lastly, many were so confused that they could only imagine Him to be one of the old prophets sent back to earth.

Such were the various opinions of the masses of the people; for the answer of the disciples ignored those leaders of Israel who pretended to regard the Lord as an impostor, because they had, so far, failed to affect the populace.

When the Lord had received their answer, He put to them the question for which He had been preparing the way. But, as regards yourselves, He asked, "Whom say ye that I am?" And Peter instantly replied for himself and his brethren, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of God." A noble answer, which tells its own tale of sincerity and truth; for in it Peter breaks away from the formula which his Master had twice used, and instead of replying, "We say," or "I say," simply declares "Thou art." Moreover, the confession is marvellously full and comprehensive, testifying both to the human and to the Divine nature of the Lord. For, in acknowledging Him to be the Messiah, Peter necessarily recognizes Him as the Son of David, and then, passing far beyond the range of Jewish teaching, adds that He is, also, the Son of God.

This brings a very gracious response from the Lord;—

“Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jonah ; for flesh and blood revealed it not unto thee, but My Father Which is in the Heavens.”

We should note here, that the Lord calls Peter “blessed ;” and, although the latter had expressed the faith of all the Apostles as well as his own, the blessing is given in the singular, and not in the plural : it is exclusively for Peter as the first open confessor. Nevertheless, the term “blessed” by no means sets him permanently above his fellows ; for, in the sixteenth verse of the thirteenth chapter, the same word is applied to all the Apostles, and even to all real believers. But the special blessing here bestowed upon Peter is explained in the next two verses.

Flesh and blood had not revealed the Person of the Master to His disciples ; for the Lord Himself had said ;—“No man can come unto Me, except the Father, Which sent Me, draw him.” And, by Peter’s confession, the drawing of the Father was made manifest in his case. Many impulses, like that which carried him away before the end of this very conversation, had in the past, and yet would in the future, come to him from flesh and blood : but, in this confession, the nature of the revelation given to him proved that it was from God. And now follow the memorable and much disputed words ;—

“And I say unto thee, that thou art Peter”—that is, a stone—“and upon this Rock I will build My Church, and the Gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.”

Peter had said to the Lord, “Thou art the Christ :” the Lord answered, “Thou art Peter.” Thou hast confessed what I am, I will tell thee what thou art. At their first interview, the Lord had said, “Thou

shalt be called Cephas,"¹ in the future: now He tells His Apostle that he has already become so. For his bold confession indicated, that God had begun in him the great change which should progress until it should be perfected.

In spite of all that has been urged against such a conclusion, we cannot but feel that the interpretation of the first two clauses of this verse hangs upon the difference between *Petros*, that is, Peter, and *Petra*, or Rock. For the former of these words signifies a stone, or detached piece of rock, whether it be such as could be hurled by the hand or an immense boulder; while the latter is a firmly fixed rock, a ledge, shelf, or ridge, of rock.² Now it cannot be conceived that Scripture inspired by God would use words of such different meaning as synonyms in the same sentence: they must, therefore, be contrasted, in which case, the stone will represent Peter, and the Rock Christ.³

As to the objection, that, in the words "upon This Rock," the Lord could not have been referring to Himself, because, if this were so, some further explanation would have been necessary—we can easily dispose of that difficulty by pointing to a memorable parallel. For, when the Pharisees demanded of Him

¹ The Aramaic for Πέτρος, or Peter, which means a stone.

² In a single poetic passage, Soph. Phil. 272, κατηρεφῆς πέτρος does seem to be used of a rock hollowed into a cave: but we know of no instance, either in prose or poetry, of the use of πέτρα in the sense of πέτρος.

³ The reader will remember how frequently the figure of a Rock is applied to Jehovah in the Old Testament. Moreover, the Rock of offence, upon Whom, nevertheless, he that believeth shall not be ashamed (Rom. ix. 33; 1 Peter ii. 8), and the Rock That followed the Children of Israel in the Wilderness (1 Cor. x. 4), will also occur to him.

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a sign, He replied ;—" Destroy This Temple, and in three days I will raise It up." And, while they supposed that He referred to the Temple on Mount Moriah, the Evangelist remarks, " But He spake of the Temple of His Body."¹

Hence the Lord seems to intimate—and He presently makes His intimation unmistakably clear—that Peter has been chosen as the stone to be first laid upon the Rock Which is Himself, as the beginning of the building which He is about to erect, that is, of His Church, which Peter afterwards calls a spiritual house, built up of living stones.²

But it is only priority that Peter is to have ; not permanent pre-eminence. The other Apostles are, also, to be used in the same way ; for the Church is to be built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets³—this foundation, in the figure of our present passage, being, of course, not the final ground-base, but consisting of the stones placed first upon the Great Rock, so as to support the whole of the superstructure.

Never does the Lord speak of one of the Twelve as set over the rest. They are the branches of the Vine, Which is Himself ; they are all brethren, and He is the Master. He promises, that, in the regeneration, they shall sit upon twelve thrones ; and the name of each of them is to be written on one of the twelve foundations of the New Jerusalem.

The words, " And the Gates of Hades shall not prevail against it," are very simple, and can be readily explained from other Scriptures ; but they have been systematically distorted. The incorrect English Version, " the Gates of Hell," has been usually adopted, and

¹ John ii. 21.² 1 Pet. ii. 4, 5.³ Eph. ii. 20.

understood to signify the power of Satan. And so, the sense has been inferred, that Satan shall never, either by means of his spiritual or his earthly agents, succeed in overwhelming the members of the Church that are upon the earth at any particular time. There is, however, no such promise contained, either in this or in any other part of the Scriptures.

It is "the Gates of *Hades*" that are not to prevail against the Church, and that for a very obvious reason; for the Lord elsewhere tells us, that He is the Living One, Who was dead, and is now alive for evermore, and holds the keys of Death and of Hades. The promise, therefore, has no reference to the present life, or to the scenes of earth, with which Hades is not concerned, but to the intermediate state.

Until Christ died, the spirits of all who left the body, whether good or bad, were conveyed to the gloomy prison in the centre, or heart, of the earth, which is called Hades, or the Unseen World. Of course, even there, the good and the bad were separated: nevertheless, all went thither, and the time of sojourn in those sunless realms is the first death.

Hence, in Old Testament days, the people of God never regarded death with pleasure. In former Dispensations, long life was one of the great blessings; and it was specially promised to him who honoured his father and mother. There is a striking instance of its bestowal in the case of Abraham, "the friend of God." For we are told, that, when he died, he was "satiated," or "surfeited," with life¹—such is the meaning of the Hebrew word.² That is, God loved him so much that He permitted him to live on, until

¹ Gen. xxv. 8.

² שָׂבַע.

he was weary of the world, and had no further desire for it.

But, as the Lord Jesus was on His way to the tomb of Lazarus, He uttered the memorable words—"Who-soever liveth, and believeth on Me, shall never die." What He meant by this seems to be explained in His words to the thief who was crucified with Him, that the latter should be with Him when He ascended to Paradise. And we are told, in the Epistle to the Ephesians,¹ that He first descended into the lower parts of the earth, and then, breaking the fetters of those captives of Death that belonged to His Father, led them triumphantly in His train as He ascended on high, and placed them in the Paradise of God.² This resurrection of Old Testament saints seems to have been the signal for the great change; and, from that time, the spirits of those who have been put to sleep by the Lord Jesus no longer go down to the subterranean caverns of Hades, when they leave the body, but are conveyed from earth to Paradise. For, when sin is removed, the power of death is destroyed: the Gates of Hades may not detain those who have been washed and made white in the Blood of the Lamb. Hence, although the Death and Resurrection of the Lord did not at once effect the redemption of living men, but only made that redemption possible by the payment in full of the ransom; it, nevertheless, produced immediate results in the case of the departed, and, for them, broke instantaneously, and for ever, the power of Death. True, indeed, was the saying of Paul, when he spoke of the glory of the Lord in that He had abolished death, and brought life and immortality to

¹ chap. iv. 9.

² Luke xxiii. 43.

i.e. redemption as in the sense of "to
 redemption of the purchased position"
 Eph. i: 14

light.¹ But yet more completely does the Lord Himself banish all our terrors with those glorious words ;—

“Fear not : I am the First and the Last, and the Living One. And I was dead ; but, behold, I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of Death and of Hades.”²

For ;—

“Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”³

In the nineteenth verse, we have the personal promise to Peter, that the Lord would give him the keys of the Kingdom of the Heavens. This promise was distinctly fulfilled in the fact, that Peter was the first to preach the Gospel to the Jews on the day of Pentecost, and to the Gentiles in the case of Cornelius and his family. But the Gates of Salvation, when once thrown open, could never again be closed, save by the Lord Himself. Hence, as soon as Peter had unlocked them, his special work, so far as the keys were concerned, was finished. He had received the reward of his prompt and bold confession, and stepped back into the ranks of his fellow-Apostles, to declare, in company with them, that the Gates were now opened, and that whosoever would might enter in by them.

The authority to bind and to loose is, probably, to be explained by the common Jewish use of the verbs *asar* and *chahal*⁴ in the figurative sense of “to forbid”

¹ 2 Tim. i. 10.

² Rev. i. 17, 18.

³ Rom. viii. 38, 39.

⁴ אָסַר and חָלַל.

and "to permit," respectively; and it thus indicates that inspired power of laying down laws for the Church which the Holy Spirit conferred upon all the Apostles, causing some of them to exercise it, for the benefit of future generations, in writing the Books of the New Testament. At this time, however, it was given to Peter only, who received it first, because he had been the first to confess his Lord, and had, perhaps, finally confirmed the faith of some of his brethren by his unhesitating avowal. But, in the eighteenth chapter,¹ we read of its subsequent bestowal upon all the disciples.

Interesting

After this plain declaration of belief in which all the Apostles acquiesced, it seems, at first sight, strange that the Lord should have bidden them to keep the great truth to themselves, and to tell no man that He was the Christ. Yet the reason for his command is obvious; for He had now tested the Jewish nation, and proved that it would not receive Him as His disciples had done. He had, therefore, given it up to the discipline of the long exile, and would not have its guilt increased by the useless proclamation of Himself as the Messiah. For he knew that the people, as a whole, would offer themselves willingly only in the Day of His Power,² that is, at His Second Coming.

As to those few to whom the Arm of Jehovah had been revealed, and who discerned the glory of the Son of God beneath the Visage that was so marred more than any man—for the present, let them be content to follow whither He was leading them. But the Kingdom of the Heavens was theirs: for them He had in store a destiny beyond all that the heart of man had conceived.

¹ v. 18.

² Psa. cx. 3.

The disciples had recognized the Lord as their long-expected Messiah: He would, therefore, now test their fitness to receive instruction in regard to the nature of His present Mission. Accordingly, He began to explain, doubtless from the Scriptures, that it was necessary for Him to go to Jerusalem, where He must suffer many indignities from the religious leaders of the people, and be put to death; but that, on the third day, He would rise again.

Such a disclosure as this was, however, by no means to the taste of the disciples. They had avowed their Master to be the Messiah, and now they would have had Him to carry out His function according to their ideal of it. For the Jews had so far gone in the way of Cain that they were expecting to walk in the sunshine of the Lord's favour without any reference to the expiation of their sins; and, similarly, the disciples, feeling sure that the Messiah was in their midst, were eagerly awaiting the manifestation of His glory, in which they hoped to be partakers.

It is, therefore, easy to imagine their bewilderment and trepidation at this new and unexpected turn in His teaching. Indeed, Peter, the first as usual to give vent to his feelings, became so excited that he even seized the robe, or arm, of the Lord from behind, as though he would forcibly compel Him to abjure His purpose, and "began to rebuke Him." The word "began" adds a graphic touch to the narrative; for it evidently implies that the Lord did not suffer Peter to finish what he had to say. The vehement Apostle had only time to exclaim, "Be it far from Thee, Lord: this shall never be unto Thee," when his vain clamour against the will of the Most High was checked by the awful words, "Get thee behind Me, Satan: thou art a

stumbling-block unto Me: for thou mindest not the things of God, but the things of men." In yielding to an impulse of the flesh, Peter had unconsciously passed over to the side of Satan, and was suffering himself to be prompted by the great Adversary, whose presence was perceived by the Lord.

But, in foretelling His Own sufferings, death, and Resurrection, the Lord was, also, setting forth the great law of the Church—Through earthly suffering to Heavenly glory—as opposed to that of the legal Dispensation, which was, Through good works to earthly prosperity. And so, He went on to declare, that those who would be His disciples must prepare to follow in His steps, and to suffer even as He was about to suffer. The glowing promises of the twenty-sixth chapter of Leviticus, and the twenty-eighth of Deuteronomy, were not for the Heavenly election. But, just as the Israelites could not escape from toil and oppression until they had marched out of Egypt, in like manner the Church must have tribulation so long as she remains in the world, and her every member be willing to deny himself, take up his cross, and follow his Lord. In them there must be no desire for the world in its present sinfulness, such as that which lurked beneath the carnal Messianic aspirations of the Jews.

Nor would there be any profit in the gratification of such a desire. For, should a man insist upon the harvest of a fully gratified life in this world of sin, the contamination, into which he must plunge for such a purpose, would destroy his God-consciousness, alienate him for ever from Him Who is the True Life, and so cause him to lose his soul, or animal life, without which he could enjoy neither this world nor any other created thing. And what does he possess wherewith he could

purchase back his life, when he perceives it to have been sold for that which is useless without it? To obtain what is after all but a passing dream, he has bartered away, or lost, himself; for in this present existence, it is the soul which is the *ego*, or personality.

On the other hand, he that refuses the pleasures of sin for a season, and is willing to lose his animal life for the Lord's sake, will receive it again, and that for ever. For, yet a little while, and the Son of Man will appear in the glory of His Father, and then will He reward every man according to his works.

Had the disciples been sincere, this would have been no hard saying for them: since they had just acknowledged their Master to be the Son of the Living God, with Whom all things are possible.

Moreover, He added that some of them should see His glory or ever they had passed out of the world; but conveyed His promise in words which have been the subject of much inconclusive comment, as follows;—

“Verily I say unto you, there be some of them that stand here which shall in no wise taste of death, till they have seen the Son of Man coming in His Kingdom.”

Now, there can be no doubt that in this promise He was alluding simply and exclusively to the Transfiguration, of which He intended Peter James and John to be witnesses. And a true conception of the meaning of that memorable scene will convince us, that His promise was literally and fully realized in it.

The Transfiguration

In the previous section, we saw that the Lord had drawn from His disciples the confession, that He was the Christ, the Son of God. And yet, as soon

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as He began to show them how He must fulfil His commission, and put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself, they had become disturbed and perplexed. Since, however, as distinct members of His Body, they must learn to know the fellowship of His sufferings, and to become conformed unto His death,¹ He had determined to strengthen them for the trial by giving to three of their number a brief glimpse of the glory which He would permanently assume after His Resurrection. For, until His people have felt the power of His Resurrection, they cannot follow Him into sufferings and death.

Accordingly, after six days, He took with Him Peter and James and John as His companions, and led them up a high mountain—possibly Mount Hermon—where He was transfigured before them, that is, His ordinary appearance as the Man of Sorrows was suddenly changed into that of the Lord of Glory. Now, it will not be necessary to depict a scene so familiar to all believers: it is its meaning that we must endeavour to discover; and, with this end in view, we will first consider what one of the eye-witnesses has to say respecting it.

In his Second Epistle, Peter exhorts those to whom he is writing, to be diligent in the attainment and exercise of grace after grace, that they may make their calling and election sure, and that so the desired entrance into the Eternal Kingdom of our Lord and Saviour—that is, into the Millennial Kingdom—may be richly supplied unto them. For, whereas Everlasting Life is the gift of God for Christ's sake, the Kingdom is the reward of works wrought in Christ:

¹ Phil, iii 10.

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The Apostle then expresses his determination to remind them continually of what he has taught; and that the more, because he knows that the time for putting off his earthly tabernacle is very near, even as the Lord declared to him. Moreover, he promises to take measures, that, at every time, even after his decease,¹ they may have it in their power to call these things to remembrance; by which he, probably, means, that he will commit them to writing.² Why they are of so much importance, he thus explains;—

“For we did not follow cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eye-witnesses of His majesty.

For He received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to Him from the excellent glory, This is My Beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased.

And this voice we ourselves heard come out of Heaven, when we were with Him in the Holy Mount.”³

Now, we know from the context in the narratives of both Matthew and Luke, that the Transfiguration was closely connected with the Lord's first plain announcement of His sufferings and death. And,

¹ The use in this passage of the words “tabernacle” and “decease,” both of which occur in the narratives of the Transfiguration, may, perhaps, show how vividly the scene was present in the mind of Peter. “Ἐξόδος, in the sense of “decease,” is found, in the New Testament, only in Luke ix. 31 and 2 Pet. i. 15.

² Some understand this promise to refer to the Epistle which Peter was then writing; others see in it a pledge of the Gospel of Mark, which they believe to have been compiled from Peter's reminiscences.

³ 2 Pet i. 16-18.

while Matthew tells us that Moses and Elijah talked with Him, Luke adds the subject of their conversation, namely, "His decease which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem." It is, therefore, clear, that the Transfiguration, and the reception of honour and glory from the Father which it involved, pointed in some way to the Lord's death. But in what way did it so point? To discover this, we must examine a frequently misunderstood passage in the Epistle to the Hebrews;—

"But we behold Him Who hath been made a little lower than angels, even Jesus, crowned with glory and honour because of the suffering of death, in order that, by the grace of God, He might taste death for every man."¹

Now, the clause, "because of the suffering of death," is usually understood to mean, that the crowning took place after the Lord had accomplished His decease at Jerusalem. But such an interpretation is absolutely forbidden by the following clause—"in order that, by the grace of God, He might taste death for every man." Unless, then, we are willing, with many commentators, to force an unnatural meaning upon the verse, we must understand, that the crowning preceded the death, and was in some way a preparation for it.

Moreover, the expression, "crowned with glory and honour," may certainly be identified with that reception of "honour and glory" from the Father, which Peter notes as having taken place on the Mount of Transfiguration. Hence there can be no doubt, that the passage in the Epistle to the Hebrews, also, refers

¹ Heb. ii. 9.

to the Transfiguration; and we are now confronted with three questions;—

(1) Why was the Lord crowned with glory and honour at the Transfiguration?

(2) What connection had the Transfiguration with His death?

(3) In what sense could the Transfiguration be called His coming in His Kingdom?

Now, in regard to the first question, it must be remembered, that the Lord Jesus came into the world to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. But He could be accepted as a sacrifice for sin only if He Himself were found to be sinless, and without spot or blemish. And this perfection must, of course, be exhibited in His human nature; for it was as perfect Man that He must save men: the fallen race could be restored only by one of its own members. Hence a period of probation was, doubtless, assigned to Him, during which His life of irreproachable obedience worked for our salvation as much as His subsequent death; for, apart from the former, the latter would have been useless.

It is, therefore, probable, that His probationary period had come to its close when He ascended the Mount of Transfiguration. He had successfully finished His course; and hence the Glory of His Spirit, hitherto confined within Him, was no longer restrained, but burst forth and surrounded Him with a halo of dazzling splendour; for He was found to be absolutely spotless. And, had He so chosen, He might, even as a sinless man, have soared at once to the Heavens, casting off for ever the bonds of suffering and mortality. But, in that case, He would have failed to put away sin by the sacrifice

Quite true. His life of sinless
obedience did in no sense redeem or atone
for us; but it was the necessary preparation
for His qualification for His Atoning Death.

Very true.

of Himself, and the great purpose of His birth into the world would have been unfulfilled. He had, however, of His tender mercy and compassion toward us, set His face as a flint, and Moses and Elijah were well aware of His resolution; for they spoke not with Him of a return to His glory, but of His decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem.

And so, we obtain an answer to the second question also. For the crowning of the Lord with glory and honour testified to His spotless purity at the end of His probation as Man; and, therefore, to His perfect fitness to be a sacrifice for the sins of others. It was thus the necessary prelude to His crucifixion.

Lastly, in His recognition by the Father as a Son of Man Who had passed through His probation with a Spirit unstained by sin in deed word or thought, and in the fact, that no other man had ever done so, He became at once the Heir to all that Adam had lost by his fall, and was the rightful Lord of the earth, and of all that pertains to it. He was the Man in Whom at length, and in Whom Alone, the prediction could be fulfilled;—

“Thou madest Him a little lower than angels;
 And crownedst Him with glory and honour.
 Thou madest Him to have dominion over the
 works of Thy hands,
 Thou hast put all things under His feet;
 Sheep and oxen, all of them,
 Yea, and the beasts of the field,
 Fowl of heaven, and the fishes of the sea,
 Whatsoever passeth through the paths of the
 seas.”¹

¹ Psa. viii. 6-8.

See
 Luke
 9:51

to
 Luke

Thus, at the moment of the Transfiguration, the Lord, as a Man, became *de jure* the Ruler of the World, and the Prince of the Kings of the Earth; and the three disciples saw His coronation, beheld Him "coming in His Kingdom." Why He then laid aside His glory and prepared for His decease, we have already explained. Little as the disciples suspected such a thing at the time, it was only by so doing that He could save their lives, and preserve them unto His Heavenly Kingdom. But, later on, the Mystery was revealed, and one of the three witnesses tells us, in touching words, that His love for us so moved the Great King that He must needs, "His Own Self," bear "our sins in His Own Body on the tree."¹

Nor was the same disciple perplexed by the further delay after the Resurrection of his Master. "The Lord," he says, "is not slack concerning His promise as some men count slackness; but is long-suffering to you-ward, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."² For, because of the multitude of the King's enemies, who will not that He should reign over them, a brief change from the Acceptable Year to the dread Days of Vengeance must precede the setting up of the Kingdom.

Of course, there is significant Dispensational teaching in the incident which brought the Transfiguration-scene to its close—the proposal of Peter to place Moses and Elijah on the same level as his Lord. For the Lawgiver and the Prophet were instantly swept out of sight by a cloud; and the Voice of the Father was heard proclaiming from the Heavens, "This is My

¹ 1 Pet. ii. 24.

² 2 Pet. iii. 9.

Beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased : hear ye Him !” And, when the disciples were able to lift up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only. For the times of Moses and Elijah were now past, and henceforth the Lord Alone was to be followed whithersoever He might lead.

The Transfiguration seems to have taken place during the night ; for it was not until the next day that the Master and His disciples were descending the Mount. The latter, knowing that they had seen the Messiah in His power and glory, and not understanding the delay that must intervene before He could manifest Himself in like manner to the world, were perplexed, because He had come in His Kingdom without the previous mission of Elijah as His Forerunner.

We have, however, already considered His reply to their question : it is only necessary to repeat, that we have here a plain declaration, made by the Lord after the death of John the Baptist, that Elijah has yet to come, and to restore all things, before the Great and Dreadful Day of the Lord.

But He, also, hinted that the nation was not yet prepared for the appearing of that Prophet ; for that an Elijah, that is, one in the spirit and power of Elijah, had already been sent to them in the person of John the Baptist ; and they had done unto him whatever they listed, and were rejecting the testimony in which he bade them gather around the Lamb of God That taketh away the sin of the World. And again He alluded to His Own decease by adding, that, as the people had dealt with John, so would they also deal with the Son of Man.

The Demon-possessed Youth. The Temple-tax

When the Lord and His companions had nearly reached the plain at the foot of the mountain, the discordant sounds which grated upon their ears reminded them, that they were yet in the realm of sin and Satan. For, during their Master's absence, the nine disciples, whom He had bidden to await His return, had fallen into woeful trouble. A father had brought to them his demon-possessed son, and, in piteous tones, entreated them to cast out the foul fiend. This they had readily essayed to do; but the demon had proved too strong for them, and had defied all their efforts. Moreover, certain Scribes, which were among the bystanders, had been quick to take advantage of their failure, and of the embarrassment which it had caused to them. And so, the derisive jeers and laughter of their foes were mingled with the entreaties of the agonized father, the screams of the tormented boy, and their own apologetic explanations or frantic, but unheeded, commands to the spirit to release his prey.

But the face of the Lord, from which the rays of glory had not yet altogether died away, was seen approaching, and, in a moment, all was changed. He sternly rebuked the disciples, the Scribes, and the crowd, expressed His weariness of that faithless and perverse generation, and then imperatively commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the lad, and to enter no more into him; and His command was instantly obeyed.

Just, then, as the scene in the mountain-top formed a miniature of the Kingdom, the Lord being personally present in His glory, while Moses and Elijah repre-

sented the raised and changed saints respectively, and the disciples the inhabitants of the earth; so this incident in the plain depicted what would be the state of the world, when its Rightful Sovereign should return, and the fact, that none but He could eject the Power of Darkness from it.

At the earliest opportunity, the baffled disciples came privately to the Lord, and inquired the cause of their failure, not, perhaps, without an accent of reproach—Thou gavest us power to cast out demons: why, then, did we fail in this case, and fail so shamefully before the eyes of the Scribes and the multitude? Because of your little faith, was the reply. For, had you faith as a grain of mustard seed, you would be able to remove mountains, and nothing would be impossible to you. But you had not even so much; and, consequently, while you succeeded in casting out ordinary demons, you were utterly unable to control this more powerful spirit. Of course, the Lord implied, that, as Children of the Kingdom, they ought to have had sufficient faith and power to perform what they had undertaken. His suggestion of the necessity of prayer and fasting was a hint, and a very plain hint, of the true cause of their failure. For they had regarded His gift of spiritual power too much as their own property, as a faculty to be exercised at their own pleasure and for their own glory, and so had neglected that close communion with God by means of which alone the gift could be maintained in its strength.

Now that the Lord had manifested the power of His Resurrection to some of His disciples, He, for the second time, spoke of the sufferings and death which must precede His Resurrection. And the Twelve did not set themselves in violent opposition to the

disclosure, as on the previous occasion, but were plunged by it into deep sorrow: apparently, however, on account of their own loss, and because their carnal ideas of the Kingdom were dissipated by the unexpected prediction, that the King must be delivered into the hands of wicked men, and be slain by them. For it does not seem to have occurred to them to inquire, why these things must befall Him; while their unbelief would not suffer them to draw consolation from His promise to rise again on the third day.

Then followed the incident of the Temple-tax, the half-shekel contributed by every Jew toward the maintenance of the Sanctuary and its services. The collectors, having met Peter, inquired of him, whether his Master did not pay the half-shekel; and he replied in the affirmative. But when he afterwards returned to the house, the Lord anticipated what he had to say with the question, "What thinkest thou, Simon? The Kings of the Earth—from whom do they receive toll or tribute? from their sons, or from strangers?" Peter, of course, replied "From strangers." To which the Lord rejoined, "Therefore, the sons are free. But, lest we cause them to stumble, go thou to the sea, and cast a hook, and take the fish that first cometh up; and, when thou hast opened its mouth, thou shalt find a shekel: that take, and give it unto them for Me and thee."

Now, in this answer the Lord placed Peter on the same level as Himself, so far as liability to the Temple-tax was concerned. For He spoke of "sons" in the plural, and said, "Lest *we* cause them to stumble;" while His direction for the disposal of the shekel was, "Give it unto them for Me and thee." Hence there is here an important Dispensational hint, namely, that

the Lord regarded His disciples as being, in Himself, already freed from Jewish obligations, and was not ashamed to call them brethren ; because He had made them sons of God,¹ and joint-heirs² of the earth and its Heaven with Himself Who was the Last Adam.³

He thus recognizes them as having heard His voice and come forth out of the Mosaic fold to follow Him ; and so, could never afterwards have put them back again into their old Jewish position. Here, then, is a reason which, together with others, proves, that, in the twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth chapters of this Gospel, He addresses them as Christian believers, and not as Jews.

Interesting.

The Parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard

Matth. xx. 1-16

We had hoped to continue our brief comment upon Matthew to the end of his Gospel, and to show throughout, that the teaching from the Lord's Own mouth, which it records, is almost entirely concerned with the Kingdom of the Heavens and the conduct and disposition required of him who would partake in its glory and joy. But want of space compels us to forego this purpose. We must, therefore, leave the reader to work out for himself the discourse in the eighteenth chapter, concerning the childlike humility, and absence of all ambition and self-seeking, which should characterize every aspirant to the Kingdom ; and must also omit other things of which we would fain have spoken. There are, however, two Parables whose importance to our subject demands their consideration, those of the Labourers in the Vineyard and the Marriage-Feast.

¹ John i. 12, 13.

² Rom. viii. 17.

³ 1 Cor. xv. 45.

At the statement that the Kingdom is not like the sa me as et er na l l i f e, this is indubitably true. But as to the first resurrection, being a l i f e which not all the saved will attain - this involves a special conviction of the author - not shared by all disciples.

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And to the first of them we will now direct our attention.

As the rich young man—who thought that he had kept all the commandments, but failed when the Lord put him to the test—was departing in sorrow,¹ the Lord said to His disciples ;—

23. "Verily I say unto you, It is hard for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of the Heavens.

24. And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye than for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of God."

Now, this saying would have presented little difficulty to the disciples, had they been already acquainted with the fact, that the Kingdom is not the same as Eternal Life, but involves the First Resurrection, to which all the saved do not attain. Being, however, ignorant of this, they were naturally dismayed, and cried out in despair, "Who, then, can be saved?" And the Lord, casting upon them a look of love, replied ;—

"With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible."

And in these words we may find the germ of the great doctrine, so soon to be fully revealed, that we are saved by the grace of God, through faith; for that by the deeds of the Law there shall no flesh be justified in His sight. But Peter, who by this time had recovered his composure, had already begun to contrast his own conduct with that of the rich young man, and expressed his thoughts in the question;—"Lo, we have left all and followed Thee; what, then, shall we have?" What treasure in the Heavens hast Thou in store for us?

¹ See Matth. xix. 16-22.

The Lord's answer was very gracious ; for, before He rebuked His self-seeking Apostle, He declared His Own purpose in regard to him and his companions, and thus admitted that there was some justice in his claim. In a sense he had, indeed, abandoned all that he owned in the world for his Lord's sake ; but he was yet to manifest, by his own conduct, how imperfect the renunciation had been, and how much of selfishness he still retained in his heart. For the moment, however, the Lord ignored this, and revealed what He had in store for the Apostles, who were the first to follow Him. In the glad Millennial days, when He would be sitting upon the Throne of His Glory, they, also, should take their seats upon twelve thrones as rulers of the Twelve Tribes of Israel. They were the faithful attendants who continued with Him in the trials of His humiliation ; and, in the hour of His triumph, they should have the chief place of honour at His side.

And not only so, but, in the same hour, every one who should be found to have given up beloved ones, or things dear to himself, for the Lord's sake, should receive a hundredfold, and inherit Eternal Life.

The order of the last two clauses is deeply significant, in that the Reward is first mentioned and Eternal Life after it. For the Reward will be given at the return of the Lord Jesus ;¹ but those who are barely saved by believing on Him, or whose service shall be found to be below His standard, will not be raised up to the Resurrection of Life, until the Last Day,² a thousand years, at least, later.

The Lord had thus given a glorious answer to the question addressed to Him : but He perceived that a

¹ Rev. xxii. 12.

² John vi. 40, 44.

severe warning was also necessary ; for the eagerness of Peter to know what he would personally gain had revealed a clinging selfishness, which, unless it could be removed, would bar the Apostle's very entrance into the Kingdom of the Heavens. And the solemn words which followed may be thus rendered ;—

“ But many shall be first, though they were last ;
and last, though they were first.”

The Parable which illustrates this warning, namely, that of the Labourers in the Vineyard, is very difficult. We have searched in vain for a solution of it in the works of others ; and it is with great diffidence that we suggest one of our own. But, first, it will be well to give a rendering of the Parable itself.

1. “ For the Kingdom of the Heavens is like unto a man that is a householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard.

2. And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard.

3, 4. And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing in the market place idle ; and to them he said, Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you. And they went their way.

5. Again he went out about the sixth and the ninth hour, and did likewise.

6. And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing ; and he saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle ?

7. They say unto him, Because no man hath hired us. He saith unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard.

8. And when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the labourers, and pay them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first.

9. And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny.

10. And when the first came, they supposed that they would receive more; and they likewise received every man a penny.

11, 12. And, when they received it, they murmured against the householder, saying, These last have spent but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.

13. But he answered and said to one of them, Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny?

14. Take up that which is thine, and go thy way; it is my will to give unto this last, even as unto thee.

15. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? or is thine eye evil, because I am good?

16. So the last shall be first, and the first last."

Now, the interpretation of these words would seem to depend mainly upon three things. First, upon the context, which, as we already know, springs from the offer of reward to the rich young man, and the consequent inquiry of Peter. Hence the general subject of the Parable is, not Everlasting Life, which is the free Gift of God, but the reward of service rendered after Life has been bestowed.

Secondly, upon the warning which both precedes

and closes the Parable; from which we gather a reference to an unexpected change in the order of precedence among the servants of God, by which some of those who were first in the Vineyard, that is, in service upon earth, will be found among the last before the Judgment-seat of Christ, when the hour of payment has come.

And, thirdly, upon the meaning given to the *denarius*, or penny, which cannot be Everlasting Life, because it is a reward for labour; and cannot be the Kingdom, because those who are not chosen ultimately obtain it. Apparently, then, there is but one thing left that it can represent, namely, the Heavenly calling,¹ which, we must remember, is by no means necessarily involved in Eternal Life. For the Lord, in His general promises of the latter to those who believe in Him, does not add that it shall be spent in Heaven; and His Apostle Paul, while claiming to have already received Eternal Life as a free Gift, speaks of his earnest strivings to obtain the Prize of the calling above, that is, of the Heavenly calling.

The labourers who are engaged in the early morning agree to work on the basis of a settled and definite wage. But, in the spirit which they ultimately display, we can detect a likeness to those believers who are not constrained to labour solely by the love of Christ, but are stimulated by the hope of a reward greater than that of others, and are accustomed to compare themselves favourably with their brethren, and to reckon up, as it were, the superior wage to which they consider that they shall be entitled when the day's work is done. And the Lord gives this disposition to those

¹ As opposed, of course, to the earthly, or Israelitish calling.

to receive their reward before the others; and so, become first, although they were last. And, since, both in the introductory and the concluding words of the Parable, great stress is laid upon this precedence, it must indicate something of importance, and is, probably, to be explained of the First Resurrection, to which those who have now become first will attain; while those who were called first will not be deemed worthy of it.

The murmuring of those who were called first may, perhaps, in the interpretation of the Parable, be no more than an indication of the manner of their spirit while they were upon earth, which caused them to lose the Millennial reign. At the same time, we cannot positively affirm that there will not be something corresponding to this incident before the Judgment-seat of Christ. For He Himself—as we have already seen—has told us, that, in the Great Day, many will say to Him, “Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy Name? and in Thy Name cast out demons? and in Thy Name done many wonderful works?” and that He will be compelled to reply, “I never knew you: depart from Me, ye that work lawlessness.”¹

The answer of the householder is at first couched in terms of friendly explanation. He points out to the murmurers, that they have no just ground of complaint; for that he has fulfilled his contract with them to the letter. Therefore, let them take that which belongs to them, and go home for their rest. As to his treatment of the others, his will is a sufficient justification of that; for he may do as he pleases with his own.

If, then, the labourers had been troubled by a mere

¹ Matth. vii, 22, 23.

misconception, they had now received an explanation, and the matter was ended. But, lest their discontent should have sprung from pure envy, the householder added;—"Or is thine eye evil, because I am good?" This was not a direct charge, but a hint, that, if, after his explanation, the feeling of discontent still remained, it could only be attributed to the evil and selfish disposition of the murmurers.

In the conclusion of the Parable, "So the last shall be first, and the first last," the articles indicate, that these "first" and "last" are the same as those of whom the Lord had spoken in introducing it. But He had then described them as "many that are "last" or "first." Hence He does not here include *all* the last and first, but only the many cases among them to which He had previously referred. For there are some first upon earth who will, also, be first in the Heavens, and some last upon earth who will always remain last.

From this interpretation it will be seen, that we judge those to be mistaken who understand this Parable to be concerned with Dispensations or eras. Such a subject would be out of place here; for the context is concerned solely with individual believers and their rewards. Moreover, those who are called at the eleventh hour are assumed to have been standing idle from the time when the first were engaged. Hence the day must be the span of human life:¹ and we must suppose our Lord to have taken His examples from a single generation, and interpret the

¹ Compare the Lord's words;—"We must work the works of Him that sent Me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work."—John ix. 4.

hours of calling, primarily, at least, of the time of life in which each man was converted. In a secondary application it may, of course, be referred to other advantages besides mere length of time, such as spiritual gifts, personal qualities, health, rank, wealth, or any other talent, means, or opportunity, for service.

The Parable of the Marriage-Feast

Matth. xxii. 2-14

2, 3. "The Kingdom of the Heavens is likened unto a certain king, which made a marriage-feast for his son, and sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the marriage-feast: and they would not come.

4. Again he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them that are bidden, Behold, I have made ready my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come to the marriage-feast.

5, 6. But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his merchandise: and the rest laid hold on his servants, and entreated them shamefully, and killed them.

7. But the king was wroth; and he sent his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned their city.

8. Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they that were bidden were not worthy.

9. Go ye, therefore, unto the partings of the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage-feast.

Verse 4. A.C.G.
Says that the words
"My Oxen & My
Fatlings are killed"
refer to the death
of Christ the One
Sacrifice, which
is offered between
the 1st & 2nd
summons —
"All things
are ready."
The

Note the 3-fold "sent" — 2 embassies of Grace & 1 of Judgment.

10. And those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was filled with guests.

11, 12. But when the king came in to behold the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding-garment: and he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding-garment? And he was speechless.

13. Then the king said to his ministers—*διακόνοις*—Bind him hand and foot, and cast him out into the outer darkness; there shall be the weeping and gnashing of teeth.

14. For many are called, but few chosen."

It was in Jerusalem, just before His death, that the Lord uttered the Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen, in which He exposed the treachery and ever-rebellious spirit of Israel. And one special object, which He seems to have had in view, was to reveal the fact, that the leaders of the people were about to put Him to death, and would do so in full knowledge that He was the very Son of God, and the rightful Heir of the Vineyard. He likewise foretold the consequences of their hideous crime, that is, the speedy destruction of their City and Sanctuary and people, and, also, the transfer of the Kingdom to another nation, which would prove itself more worthy of the trust.

His thrilling words were at last understood by the Chief Priests and Pharisees; but stirred up no feelings of awe and repentance in their hearts, forced no cries for pardon and mercy from their lips.

The Spirit of God had abandoned these miserable men: the madness of sin held uncontrolled sway over

their hearts ; and, could they have dared, they would have seized the Lord at once, and fulfilled His prediction by slaying Him on the spot. But, although they feared neither Himself nor His Father, they were certainly afraid of the people ; and so, were yet again driven to a counsel of craft.

The Lord's answer to their malicious thoughts was another Parable, in which He exhibited the householder's son—whose rejection and murder had just been depicted—as a king's son, for whom a marriage-feast was to be made. Hence this Parable, while it does, indeed, refer to the proclamation of the Kingdom among the Jews, is more specially concerned with the preaching of the risen and exalted Saviour, to the Jew first, and afterwards to the Gentile. It is thus a prophecy of the call of the Church. And not only does it foretell the rejection of the Jews and the destruction of their city, but also goes on to predict the judgment of those who attach themselves to the professing Church, although they have no connection with the real Body of Christ. And thus it carries us on to the End of the present Age.

Now, when we inquire what is represented by the marriage-feast, we must remember that we are dealing with a Parable—a form of instruction which does not set before us the actual subject of its teaching, but conveys its lesson indirectly by means of a similitude drawn from something else.

For instance, in the First of the Seven Parables, there is no intention to instruct us in the literal sowing of corn and the accidents which affect its growth, but to describe the preaching of the Gospel, the circumstances of which resemble, in certain points, the sowing of corn.

Similarly, the Second Parable speaks of Tares, but

is really designed to warn us against those Sons of the Evil One, who, throughout the present Age, will be continually foisting themselves in the congregations of believers, even as Tares are ever found springing up amid the Wheat. And the Third, under the figure of a Mustard-plant breaking the creation-law by growing on until it becomes a tall tree, depicts the Nominal Church, despising the lowly position in which her Lord had commanded her to wait until He should return, and accepting earthly power and glory from the Prince of this World.

And, bearing this rule in mind, we at once perceive, that the narrative of the Rich Man and Lazarus is no Parable, but a veritable history, related by the Lord as a warning to those who are still numbered with the living.

Hence, in the passage before us, which is introduced as a Parable, the marriage-feast will mean something joyous as such a festival would be, and, in certain points, resembling it.

And, what this something is, the context reveals. It is the Kingdom of the Heavens, the Prize of our upward calling. And the Lord here describes God's offer of it to mankind, and predicts the results of its proclamation, under the figure of Eastern customs connected with a royal wedding-banquet.

The expression "made a marriage-feast," implies that the invitation to the guests had been given, so that they were already "the bidden," or "the called"; for they represent the Jews, who, as the chosen people, received the first invitation to enter the Kingdom of the Heavens. The special summons at the time of the feast is in accord with a well-known Eastern custom, and finds its historical fulfilment in the missions of

John the Baptist, of the Lord, of the Twelve, and of the Seventy. But this first summons failed, because the bidden did not care to come: the Jewish nation, though glad to be relieved by the wondrous healing powers of the Lord and His disciples, would not receive Him as the Messiah upon His Own terms. The King, however, did not wish to lose the guests, but again sent His servants to urge that He had prepared His luncheon—the beginning of the marriage-festivities—that His oxen and fatlings were slain, and all was now ready. Still, however, the guests would not come: some were indifferent, and went off to their farm-work or their merchandise; the others were so malignantly disposed that they even laid hands on the servants, and maltreated and slew some of them. This conduct aroused the just anger of the King, and to them His next message was brought by His armies, which destroyed the murderers and burned up their city. And, since the city was razed, the indifferent were, of course, involved in the ruin of the murderers; for they, too, were disloyal, and had maintained their indifference while the others were committing outrage upon the King's servants.

The second sending refers to the preaching in Jerusalem and Judaea, and the servants were once more to urge the speedy coming of the guests, because all things were now actually ready: this must mean that, in the interval between the two sendings, the final preparation had been made by the propitiatory death, the Resurrection, and the Ascension, of the Lord. Therefore, the mission began, on the day of Pentecost, with the address of Peter to those who had crucified the Saviour. But even this second gracious appeal was in vain as regarded the nation. Some were

indifferent, having eyes and desires only for this life. The rest were moved to a furious and murderous frenzy, and that more especially by the display of those very gifts of power which were the seal of the Spirit. We may trace the progress of their malevolence in the *Acts*, where we read of three arrests of Apostles, after the last of which they were beaten. The murder of Stephen followed, and a general persecution at Jerusalem. Then came the murder of James, which so pleased the Jews that an attempt was made to slay Peter also. And, lastly, we have the persecutions of Paul, whose sufferings, as reckoned by himself,¹ afford a terrible example of the maltreatment of the servants. At length the forbearance of God was exhausted, and the Roman armies were sent to take away from the Jews their place and nation.

The bidden ones were unworthy, and yet the feast was prepared. So the servants were commanded to go into the roads that led in all directions out of the city, from and beyond that which had been hitherto the circle of invitation; and no longer to confine their appeals to the bidden, but to gather in all that they could find, the good and the bad alike, the open sinners and the so-called righteous, the profligate and the respectable. For all may be called, but who among those that respond will be chosen, it is for the King, and not for the servants, to decide. If, however, we look back to the Parable of the Two Sons, it will seem probable that those who are rejected will, for the most part, come from the ranks of the apparently righteous. This third sending is, therefore, in accord with our Lord's commandment, that, after His disciples had borne their

The Gentiles.

¹ 2 Cor. xi. 23-27.

testimony in Jerusalem and Judaea, they should go on to Samaria, and to the uttermost part of the earth.¹ And the gathering in of this mission, and the sitting in the Banquet-hall, has now been going on for more than eighteen hundred years.

Thus far, to the end of the tenth verse, this Parable corresponds to that of the Great Supper: but with the eleventh verse a second part begins. The Lord has now been pleased to accomplish the number of His elect; the intermediate period of Christendom has passed by, and the King appears in the Person of His Son, to Whom He has committed all judgment. And, just as He destroyed the unworthy guests who refused to come, so must He now remove, from among those who have come, every one who is proud and hypocritical in spirit.

His eye immediately discerns among the guests a man who is not clothed in a wedding-garment. Since this garment, now called the caftan, is presented to every invited guest, there was, of course, no excuse for him who failed to appear in it; for in the ante-room at the palace garments would be ready for all, even if any one had not been previously presented with one. This man, however, had made a robe for himself, so like the true garment in appearance that the servants had suffered him to pass in. But the fraud could not escape the piercing eye of the King.

For the wedding-garment is the righteousness of Christ, which is given to us after He has loosed us from our sins by His Blood—"imputed first," as Wesley has well said, "then implanted." The figure is common, in the New Testament.

¹ Acts i. 8.

Yes. The believer
 is said to have
 "put on Christ"
 419 not the right-
 eousness of
 Christ—but
 Christ
 Himself.

"For as many of you as were baptized into Christ did put on Christ."¹

And again,

"But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof."²

Like an innumerable multitude of professing Christians, the man was confident that he could manufacture a robe quite good enough for the King's feast; for he did not despise the feast, but only the conditions on which alone one may partake of it. He, therefore, came clad in his own righteousness, and declined to submit himself entirely to the grace of God, and to humbly receive that which had been offered to him as a free gift. His conduct was criminal, and an insult to the King, Who, when he could not excuse himself, ordered the ministers—not the servants; for angels are here meant, not mortals—to bind him hand and foot, and to cast him into the darkness without.

Who IS the
 believer's
 righteous-
 ness.

hil.
 2:9
 Rom.
 1:3.

The Lord's comment;—"For many are called, but few are chosen," means that many will share the fate of this miserable man, and approach, like Bunyan's Vainhope, to the Gates of the Celestial City only to be carried down from thence to the prison of the lost.

And so, the Parable was adapted to each class of hearers—to the Pharisees and other Jews who would never believe in the Lord, and now heard from His lips of their impending doom; and, also, to the disciples and those who were likeminded with them, who would presently form part of the Church, but were here warned that they, too, must be subjected to judgment,

¹ Gal. iii. 27.

² Rom. xiii. 14.

mistaken terms.
See pages
419 r
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and could partake of the feast only if they had accepted and put on the perfect righteousness of Christ.

This Parable, then, teaches us, that the same gracious offers which are now being pressed upon us were first proposed to the Jewish nation; and, had the whole people accepted them, and laid hold on the Kingdom of the Heavens while it was yet within their grasp, the Banquet-hall would have been at once filled, and the Kingdom might have been established. But, since only a few, comparatively, listened to the voices of the preachers, they were not sufficient in number to carry on the government of the Kingdom.

Therefore, other members had to be sought out among the Gentiles, and the manifestation of the Kingdom delayed, until they could be found. ✓

The Failure of the Apostles to fulfil the Lord's Commission

The third mission of the servants, which was to extend beyond the gates of the City of Judaism, and to be carried on in the highways of the Gentiles, corresponds to the Lord's mandate to His Apostles, to go and make disciples in all nations, and to be His witnesses "in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea and Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."

But the eleven were not willing to perform the whole of the commission, as they certainly ought to have done. We say *the whole*, because their disobedience was confined to the latter half of it. They did preach and make disciples in Jerusalem and in Judaea; and, wherever they went, they scrupulously baptized and taught those who repented and believed in the Lord Jesus. But they did not continue their mission even as far as Samaria, much less to the

See note
at bottom
of page
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uttermost part of the earth. And we can readily detect both the cause and the punishment of their disobedience.

It was their Jewish prejudice that impelled them to wrestle with God against the last of the directions given to them: their strong feeling on this point may be detected in several passages of the *Acts*. They were willing enough to preach in Jerusalem and in Judaea; but, to Samaria and the nations beyond it, they would not go.

They were allowed ample time to repent of their disobedience; and it was only when their determined obstinacy became too apparent that the Lord began to take severe measures with them. But, at length, He suffered Satan to raise a persecution so fierce that it broke up the Mother-church at Jerusalem, and scattered her members abroad among the nations, whither they ought to have previously gone in obedience to His mandate. By this means Philip, the Deacon and Evangelist, was driven into Samaria, and began to proclaim Christ there with mighty power. Indeed, so numerous were the baptized converts that Peter and John were sent from Jerusalem, to pray that they might receive the Holy Spirit, and to lay their hands upon them. And, as they were returning to Jerusalem, the two Apostles preached in many villages of the Samaritans, and so formally recognized Samaria as being within the limits of their commission.

Forthwith the Lord honoured the obedience of Philip by sending him to convert and baptize the Ethiopian Eunuch. This was, apparently, another hint to the Church to push on to her work among all nations, without further delay. The Ethiopian may, however, have been a Jewish proselyte, in which case the

The idea set forth here, is also on page 294, that the 12 Apostles were obstinately disobedient in not carrying the Gospel to the Gentiles is a new one to me, & if true it has to receive. Still it may be true.

incident would not have been likely to attract much attention.

Many other believers, also, were dispersed among the Gentiles by the persecution, and did actually preach Christ in Phoenicia and Cyprus, and at Antioch, but, to Jews only. A little later, however, some disciples came to Antioch from Cyprus and Cyrene, and communicated the glad tidings to Greeks also. As to the Apostles, they would not be driven away from their beloved City.

Then, by means of visions and a direct command, Peter was sent to convert and baptize the Roman Centurion Cornelius and his friends, and the baptism took place in the presence, and with the consent, of other Jews; not, however, until the Lord had broken down their opposition by a display of His power. But even this manifestly Divine call to fulfil what was still lacking to the accomplishment of the commission produced no effect: nay, some of the leaders at Jerusalem were indignant with Peter, because he had gone to uncircumcised men, and had eaten with them.

And, although they were compelled for the moment to yield, when they heard what he had to say; and were, perhaps, even roused to a temporary enthusiasm; yet they quickly settled down again to something like a mere sullen acquiescence, and no arrangements for preaching to the Gentiles were made either by them or by Peter. And that their prejudices still remained is evident from later passages in the *Acts*.

Another persecution followed: one of the Apostles was slain, and Peter, also, would have fallen, had not the Lord sent His angel to open the door of the prison. Still we hear of no movement in the direction of obedience.

At last, the Lord's patience was exhausted, and He summoned another agent for the execution of His orders. He brought forward the most prominent of the persecutors, whom He had previously transferred from the authority of Satan to the Kingdom of His Own dear Son, specially appointed him to go to all nations,¹ inspired him with knowledge, and endowed him with power, so that he was "not a whit behind the chiefest of the Apostles," and gave to him the honour which had been offered to them.

And, since the will of Paul was obedient to the Divine call, the Lord advanced him in the knowledge of the Mystery far beyond the rest of the Apostles, though it was, also, revealed to them.²

Now, a summary of the Mystery referred to is given in the Epistle to the Ephesians;³ and, lo, it is found to be wholly concerned with that very part of the commission which the other Apostles had neglected to carry out.

But Paul did not neglect it; and, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, he and his converts worked with such zeal that he was presently able to speak of "the Gospel, which ye heard, which was preached in all creation under heaven." It appears, then, that, even in that generation, *the commission was fully carried out.*

But there is, also, another important point to be remembered. In receiving the commission, the Eleven, and the other disciples who were with them, did so as representatives of the whole succession of believers throughout the Church-period, and this is unmistakably signified by the Lord's promise to be with them

¹ Eph. iii. 7-9.

² Eph. iii. 5.

³ Eph. iii. 6.

"always, even to the end of the Age"—πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας ἕως τῆς συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος.

Thus the working out of the commission, commenced by those who personally received it, was to be continued, and finally completed by others, who should subsequently turn to the Lord in the course of the present Dispensation. The process, then, is still going on: indeed, we may almost say that the Gospel has been preached to all nations—even to the Tibetans—in our own times.

CHAPTER VIII

THE APOCALYPSE

CHAPTER I.—INTRODUCTION

IT is a well-known fact, that the authenticity of the last Book in the Bible has been sorely assailed. From very early times, the great body of nominal Christians have slighted, and too often set aside and altogether rejected it. "In the Council of Laodicea,"¹ says Gibbon, "the Apocalypse was tacitly excluded from the Sacred Canon by the same Churches of Asia to which it is addressed; and we may learn from the complaint of Sulpicius Severus,² that their sentence had been ratified by the greater number of Christians of his times."³

Nor have subsequent centuries diminished this feeling of aversion in any perceptible degree; however precious the Book may have been to a few, it still continues, even in this twentieth century, to be lightly esteemed by, and unintelligible to, the masses of Christendom.

¹ The date of this important Council is a disputed point. Probably, Beveridge who assigned it to A.D. 365, and Hardouin who prefers A.D. 372, are the nearest to the truth.

² This complaint occurs in his *Sacred History* (ii. 31), a work composed in the early part of the Fifth Century. In it, he speaks of the persecution under Domitian, during which the Apostle John "wrote and published his book of the holy Revelation, which, indeed, is either foolishly or impiously not accepted by many."

³ Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*, chap. xv., note.

But the explanation of the fact is very simple and obvious: the teachings of the Apocalypse oppose themselves at every turn to the tendencies of human thought.

For, in the first place, the Book deals, more largely than any other inspired writing, with the supernatural, and that, not the supernatural of the past, which men will sometimes endure, but of the future, which is intolerable to them. Consequently, they have endeavoured to rationalize it, to treat it as a book containing nothing but figures and symbols, which it is not; and, having thus changed its appalling truths into a vague, uncertain, and, one might almost say, inarticulate sound, they have naturally ended by discarding it altogether.

Again, it describes the true Churches upon earth in a manner unbearable to the worldly mind; while it exhibits the Nominal Church and the World as they appear to the eyes of God, and pronounces His judgment upon them. And, finally, it tells us, that both of them will grow worse and worse, until the present Age passes away in the flames of the Lord's appearing.

Any idea which men may have of the regeneration of the world by culture, by art, or by any human effort, even in the preaching of Christianity itself, is for ever swept away by this Book. And rightly so, as we ourselves must confess; for all the experience of the present and the past teaches us, that civilization and its concomitants have no power whatever to purify the heart; and, in themselves, can only make men more clever, and refined, and hypocritical, in their modes of sinning.

Lastly, the appalling threats of wrath and judgment, with which this Book teems, have also been a great cause of its unpopularity.

Nevertheless, these same denunciations, when hurled in the power of the Spirit upon ungodly men, have sometimes made the world to tremble, and, like Herod, to do many things. Such, for instance, was their effect, when, thundered from the mouth of Savonarola in the densely crowded Duomo at Florence, they forced the quivering libertines to bring out their wicked pictures and statuary, and to burn, or break them to pieces, in the streets. But, alas! such repentances, like that of Nineveh, are shortlived as regards the masses of the affected; and presently a reaction sets in, and evolves a bitter hatred of that which caused them.

If, however, we turn our eyes toward the people of God, we shall find, that, distasteful as the Apocalypse has proved to the worldly-minded, it has always been the refuge of true believers in times of persecution and peril, of the real members of Christ whenever they have been oppressed for the Word of God and the Testimony of Jesus Christ.

For to them it speaks of hope, of the great deliverance, when the silence of Heaven will at last be broken by the long-awaited bidding, "Come up hither!" when, in a moment, all the complicated snares of Satan will be rent asunder, and the released captives joyously ascend as birds to their nest. It assures us, that, in the meanwhile, the eyes of the Lord are upon all that is being done on the earth beneath Him, and reveals His knowledge and judgment of the oppressing world. And, when sorrow and anguish are prevailing among His loved ones below, and their hearts are wrung for their own miseries and those of their fellows, and for the whole Creation that is groaning and travailing in pain together with them, it draws back

the blue curtain of Heaven, and lo! the Lord, Whose is the Kingdom the Power and the Glory, stands behind it, restraining Himself only until His Own, who are in the world, can be gathered in, and the armies that are to follow Him can be assembled in Heaven. Then, suddenly as the flame that leaps from the summer-cloud, He will rend the Heaven and come down; those that are corrupting the earth will be destroyed, and, after all the weary centuries of oppression and misery, a King will rule in righteousness.

Lastly, this Book contains a description of the golden City, which, by and by, will be the glorious metropolis and centre of the earth, and the beacon of its joy; a City, "the inhabitant of which shall not say, I am sick; the people that dwell therein shall be forgiven their iniquity."¹

"And they shall see His face; and His Name shall be on their foreheads. And there shall be night no more: and they need no light of lamp, neither light of sun; for the Lord God shall give them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever."²

"And He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and death shall be no more; neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain, any more:"³

Then, indeed, will the dear Lord see of the travail of His soul, and be satisfied. And what wonder that so enrapturing a description should even now have power, among His people, to quiet the restless pulse of care, to light up the wan face of the dying with a joyous smile: what wonder that many, as they

¹ Isa. xxxiii. 24.

² Rev. xxii. 4, 5.

³ Rev. xxi. 4.

looked on the "little while between" in this light that streams directly from the Throne of God, should have felt that they were able to do, or to suffer, all things through Christ Which strengthened them !

●

The Date of the Apocalypse

Before we proceed to consider the contents of our Book, there is one question which must be briefly discussed, that of its date; for this, in the case of the Apocalypse, is a matter of some importance.

Now, we may say generally, that all writers of the first three centuries, whose statements are explicit, agree in referring the exile of John and the writing of the Apocalypse, to the latter part of the reign of Domitian, the last of the Twelve Caesars, that is, to A.D. 95 or 96.

The first and greatest witness of all is Irenaeus. For he was a pupil of Polycarp, who himself had been one of John's disciples. Hence he is far more likely to have received a true account of the Apostle's closing days than any other writer whose works have come down to us. And, when speaking of the strong probability that the name of the Antichrist would be Teitan, he gives the following definite testimony;—

"We will not, however, run the risk of a mistake in this matter, by confidently affirming, that he will have this name; for we know, that, if it were meet that his name should be proclaimed at the present time, it would have been announced by him who saw the Revelation. For it was seen at no distant time, but almost in our own generation, at the end of the reign of Domitian."¹

¹ *Adv. Haer.* V. xxx. 3.

Such evidence as this is conclusive and sufficient in itself: nevertheless, it does not lack confirmation. In Tertullian we find the subjoined apostrophe to the church in Rome;—

“How happy a church is that on which Apostles poured out all their doctrine, with their blood! where Peter endures a suffering like to that of his Lord; where Paul has for his crown the same death as John;¹ and the Apostle John, after having been plunged into boiling oil without suffering any harm, was banished to an island.”²

Here Tertullian informs us of two facts;—first, that John was banished; and, secondly, that the place of his exile was an island. In another passage, after mentioning the persecution by Nero, he continues;—

“Domitian, too, who was somewhat of a Nero in cruelty, had essayed the same thing; but, since he was, also, a human being, readily ceased from his attempt, and even restored those whom he had banished.”³

Thus he intimates, that banishment was the usual penalty inflicted upon Christians by Domitian; while, so far as extant records go, Nero was accustomed to put them to death. It is, then, probable, that the mention of John's banishment in the first passage is an indication that he suffered under Domitian.

Clement of Alexandria does not mention Domitian by name; but probably intends him, when he speaks of the “tyrant,” after whose death John returned from exile.⁴ At least, Eusebius, in his quotation of the passage,⁵ understood him to do so.

¹ That is, John the Baptist.

² *De Præser. Haer.* xxxvi.

³ *Apol.* i. 5.

⁴ *Quis Dives Salvetur?* xlii.

⁵ *H. E.*, iii. 23.

Origen merely designates the persecutor as "the King of the Romans," and elsewhere remarks, that John does not tell us which Emperor it was.

Victorinus of Petau, the author of the earliest extant commentary on the Apocalypse, explains the words, "Thou must prophecy again concerning peoples and nations and tongues and many kings," as follows;—

"He spoke thus, because, when John saw this vision he was in the island of Patmos, having been condemned to labour in the mine by Caesar Domitian. There, then, he saw the Apocalypse; and when, now advanced in years, he was beginning to think that he should obtain his reception into rest through his sufferings, Domitian was slain, and all his sentences were cancelled. And thus, John, after he had been set free from the mine, delivered this same revelation which he had received from the Lord."

Again, when discussing the Eighth King, mentioned in the seventeenth chapter, Victorinus tells us, that the sixth was Domitian, in whose reign the Apocalypse was written.

Eusebius, in three passages, states that the banishment of John took place in the reign of Domitian;¹ and, indeed, for the first three and a half centuries no writer appears to have suggested any other date.

But, in the latter half of the fourth century, this harmony was broken by Epiphanius of Salamis, whose testimony, however, is absolutely worthless against that which has been cited, to say nothing of the fact that it is incredible in itself. For Epiphanius was one of the most careless and inaccurate of ancient writers.

¹ *H. E.*, iii. 18, 20, 23.

His remarkable statement is, that John returned from exile, at the age of ninety, in the reign of Claudius.¹ Now, Claudius was assassinated in A.D. 54 : therefore, if John had attained to his ninetieth year by that time, he must have been some thirty-three years older than the Lord, and in his sixty-third year when he was called to be an Apostle ! It is clear, then, that the Claudian date may be summarily dismissed.

Jerome, Sulpicius Severus, Orosius, Primasius, and others, support the Domitianic date ; but, in the Sixth Century, the preface to the Syriac version of the Apocalypse affirms, that John was banished to Patmos by the Emperor Nero. Such testimony is, however, too late to be worthy of notice in the face of that which has been adduced above. Hence the balance of external evidence is overwhelmingly in favour of the Domitianic date.

Moreover, the internal evidence, also, is equally strong in the same direction, as will appear from the following considerations ;—

(1) The state of the Churches as described in the Seven Epistles would have required a development of twenty or thirty years from their condition in Paul's time ; and not merely of five or six, which would be all that the Neronic date could allow.

(2) There had already been, at least, one martyr in Pergamum ;² and, John, in addressing the Churches of Asia, speaks of himself as having become their companion in tribulation by his banishment to Patmos for the Word of God and for the Testimony of Jesus Christ.³ Moreover, the

¹ *Adv. Haer.*, *Haer.*, li. 12, 33.

² *Rev.* ii. 13.

³ *Rev.* i. 9.

believers in Smyrna were just about to experience a trial of their faith, even unto death. It is thus evident that a persecution was raging in Asia, at the time. And this must have been the persecution of Domitian : for that of Nero does not appear to have extended beyond the immediate neighbourhood of Rome ; nor does it seem to have vented itself in banishment ; but only in capital punishment.

(3) The Balaamites had found time to establish themselves in Pergamum.¹

(4) Jezebel had not only risen to influence in Thyatira, but space for repentance had also been given to her.²

Thus the Domitianic date of the Apocalypse is supported both by external and internal evidence.

But, perhaps, it may be asked, What difference can it make to us whether the Book was written in the reign of Nero or in that of Domitian ?

The answer is ;—That in these days the matter is one of considerable importance : for that the desire to establish the early date has been lately revived by certain Rationalistic teachers, with whose sceptical theories it would well agree. For they would have us to believe, that the awful utterances of the Apocalypse had no reference beyond the burning of Rome, the early persecution of Christians, the destruction of Jerusalem, and other events of those times ; and would make the prophecies of the Beast, or Antichrist, to exhaust themselves in Nero. Thus the whole Book would be reduced to nonsense ; for, manifestly, its predictions would then appear to be far more terrible

¹ Rev. ii 14.

² Rev. ii. 20, 21.

than their fulfilment, and one of the keenest of the swords of the Spirit would be blunted and rendered useless.

Now, in order to effect their purpose, it is evident that these Rationalists must establish a Neronic date; for, if the Apocalyptic visions were not seen by John until the days of Domitian, the last of the Caesars; then the burning of Rome would have been forgotten, Nero himself would have passed away, and many years would have gone by since Jerusalem had become as a ploughed field.

But, as we have already seen, there is no evidence worth a moment's consideration on which to base the earlier date. And the great Rationalistic argument, that the Apocalypse refers to Jerusalem as a city then standing, as it was in the times of Nero, but not in those of Domitian, is peremptorily rejected by all who believe, that the Spirit of God was revealing what should happen to a restored Jerusalem, many centuries after its destruction by Titus and Hadrian, and in the Seventieth Seven of Years, immediately before the return of the Lord.

The Place of the Apocalypse in the Prophetic Scheme

Although the relation of the Apocalypse to God's great scheme of Prophecy might be easily gathered from the first volume of this series, we will, nevertheless—for the sake of those who have not read our other works—briefly recapitulate what we have already considered in detail.

Nothing in the Word of God is more striking than its consistency. Although the process of its communication occupied some fifteen or sixteen centuries, and was effected through many minds, varying in

power of apprehension, in sentiment, and in disposition, it is yet found by humble and prayerful students to be in perfect agreement with itself in all its parts.

Moreover, in the setting forth of its revelations, it is gradual and logical, beginning with fundamental truths and generalities, and afterwards proceeding to particulars, which depend upon, and can only be explained by, what has gone before.

Hence it is vain to think of interpreting its later prophecies, unless we have first learnt, from the earlier revelations, something of God's plan, whereby He is leading men through sin and painful discipline to righteousness, peace, and everlasting joy.

To discover this plan, we naturally turned, in our first volume, to the prophecies concerning Israel in the Books of Moses. For that highly favoured people has been selected as the first that shall be redeemed upon the earth, and it is destined to be set on high above all other nations, and to become a terrestrial Kingdom of Priests, by means of which God will ultimately rule and teach the whole human race. And, as soon as the chosen people have been made ready for their work, the Lord Jesus will descend to establish them in their sovereignty.

It is clear, then, that, if we would comprehend the course of sublunary events until His appearing, we must understand what He has purposed in regard to the House of Israel; for Israel is the hinge upon which the whole world turns. And, as we have already pointed out, before the twelve Tribes had crossed the Jordan and entered Palestine, He had revealed, that four distinct Epochs would be necessary for the completion of their discipline. These Epochs we found to be as follows;—

- I. The period of the bringing out of Egypt, the wanderings in the wilderness, and the settlement in Canaan.
- II. The centuries of probation in the Land, which, after repeated apostasies and chastisements, resulted in total failure, and the dispersion of the remnant of the people by Titus and Hadrian.
- III. The Age of the Great Exile.
- IV. A brief period—that is, Seven Years—of fearful signs, troubles, terrors, and plagues, amid which the Twelve Tribes will be brought to repentance, and at the close of which the Lord will appear to restore the Kingdom to Israel.

Now the Second of these Epochs had ended with the destruction of the City and the Sanctuary,¹ some five and twenty years before John beheld the Apocalyptic Visions. Therefore, the first nineteen chapters of his Book must be concerned either with the Third or the Fourth Epoch, or with both. And, as we shall see in due course, the first three contain predictions of "the things which are," that is, of the present Age or Church-period, which exactly coincides with the Third Israelitish Epoch, or time of the Great Exile.

Now, the prophecies of Moses characterize the latter, not only as an Age of desolation for Palestine, and of suffering for the dispersed sons of Jacob, but also as the era of a new band of witnesses, without the pale of Israel, and now known as the Church. We say, "without the pale of Israel," because the Song of Moses is indisputably addressed to all of the Twelve Tribes, without exception. When, therefore, it foretells the provocation of Israel by a no-people

¹ Dan. ix. 26.

and a foolish nation,¹ it must be understood to refer to a people and a nation, not descended from Jacob, but altogether alien to Israel.

Lastly, Balaam predicted,² that conquerors should come from the West and have dominion—as we now know from history that they have done—during the whole of the Third and Fourth Epochs;³ while Moses hinted that the cognizance of these conquerors would be the eagle.⁴

Hence there are now, and will be almost to the End, three distinct peoples upon earth, who are involved in the prophecies of God, Israel, the Church, and the Gentiles.

All that remains, then, is to inquire for which of these three classes the Apocalypse was designed. And, on this point, we may obtain sure information from the very first verse of the Book, which tells us that God gave it to Jesus Christ, in order that He might reveal the future to His servants. Now, the Gentiles are not His servants; for they walk in their own ways, and neither know God nor obey the Gospel of our Lord Jesus. The Jews would not suffer themselves to be so designated; for they look for another, and will not own Him as their Messiah and King. But the true members of the Church evince their love for Him by keeping His commandments; they are His servants, and for their guidance, instruction, and strengthening, the Book was given. For “the secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him;”⁵ and the precious gift of the Apocalypse is the fulfilment of His promise, that

¹ Deut. xxxii. 21.

² Num. xxiv. 24.

³ See *The Great Prophecies of the Centuries concerning Israel and the Gentiles*, pp. 124-7.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 139-40.

⁵ Psa. xxv. 14.

the Spirit of Truth, Whom He would send, should declare unto them the things that were to come.¹

But we must now hasten to examine the Book itself.

✓ *The Title History and Blessing of the Apocalypse*
Rev. i. 1-3

1, 2. "A revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave Him, to show unto His servants the things which, *in their entirety*, must come to pass with speed. And He sent and signified it by His angel unto His servant John; who bare witness of the Word of God and of the Testimony of Jesus Christ, even of all things that he saw.

3. Blessed is he that readeth and they that hear the words of the prophecy, and keep the things that are written therein; for the time is at hand."

The title often prefixed to this Book, namely, "The Revelation of St. John the Divine"—that is, "the Theologian"—is not genuine. There is nothing like it elsewhere in the New Testament; the MSS. have many variants; and it would seem that there is no instance of the application of the distinctive title of "Theologian" to John earlier than the end of the fourth century. Moreover, the Apostle could scarcely have called his Book *A Revelation of John* and *A Revelation of Jesus Christ*, in the same breath. The first three verses form the title, and we cannot assume that any other was originally prefixed.

In the first verse, then, we are told, that the Book is an Apocalypse, or Revelation, of Jesus Christ. And the Greek word "Apocalypse," which is exactly

¹ John xvi. 13.

are justified in expecting the prophecy to be simple and easy of comprehension ; and any system of interpretation which makes it seem otherwise is, by that very fact, proved to be false.

During the Lord's sojourn upon earth, He often veiled His meaning in Parables when He was predicting events in the present Age of Mystery ; but here He unveils mysteries, and, for the most part, speaks openly and plainly.

The Jews have not yet discovered the real import of their Law and Prophets ; but even unto this day, when Moses is read, the veil is upon their hearts.¹ Nor will it be removed from them, as a nation, until they have looked on Him Whom they pierced.²

And, as Isaiah tells us, there is also a covering cast over all peoples, and a veil spread over all nations,³ which will not be destroyed until the Lord comes.

But either Jew or Gentile, if he has believed on Jesus of Nazareth, may read this Book, and have the veil at once removed ; for, by its spiritual apprehension, he will perceive the true relationship between God and the earth, and none of the things which the Lord is about to do will come upon him unawares.

In connection with the fact, that God gave this Revelation to the Lord Jesus, we may note, that although the Lord's Divinity is by no means concealed in this Book, He is, nevertheless, *specialy* set forth as the Last Adam, the True Prince of the World, to Whom all power over the earth and its inhabitants reverts, because He is the only Perfect Man. And, in this character, He receives all that He communicates.

¹ 2 Cor. iii. 15.

² Zech. xii. 10.

³ Isa. xxv. 7.

As God, He knows all things; but "a man can receive nothing, except it have been given him from Heaven."¹

The Revelation was given to the Lord Jesus in order that He might communicate it to His servants, or bond-servants—the term by which Paul, Peter, James, and Jude, delight to express their relation to Him.² In other places the Lord calls His followers brethren, or friends; but here bond-servants. For it is their service that is specially dealt with in this Book, which treats of the Judgment of the House of God, as well as of that of the world. It speaks of the time when He shall call together His bond-servants, to reckon with them, and to reward them according to their deeds, and then command His enemies to be slain before His eyes; and when a broad distinction shall, at last, be made between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth Him not.

The Revelation is, then, for the bond-servants. Not for those who say, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which He has commanded; but only for such as are actively engaged in His service: for to them alone will He reveal His secrets.

Unless, therefore, we are about His Father's business; unless, in this sinful world, we are striving to bring back rebels to their rightful King by proclaiming the Glorious Gospel of the Blessed God; unless we are carrying His message of mercy and love to the fallen, to the miserable, to the sick, and to the dying; unless

¹ John iii. 27. Comp. John xii. 49; also Mark xiii. 32 and Rev. xiv. 14-16.

² Rom. i. 1; 1 Pet. i. 1; James i. 1; Jude i.

A very interesting comment. The Lord Jesus chose to take His place as a MAN in perfect dependence upon His heavenly Father.

we are strengthening, and ministering to, our brethren in the Lord, using for them whatever spiritual gifts may have been bestowed upon ourselves, and urging them, by word and example, to work before the night comes—unless we are doing these and such-like things, it is useless for us to think of understanding the Apocalypse; for the Spirit reveals it only to the bond-servants. To all others, simple though it be in itself, it is an enigma that can never be solved. And this fact seems to throw much light upon the causes of the general obscurity and confusion in Apocalyptic interpretation.

The words which follow are of the utmost importance, since they disclose in plain terms the object of the Revelation. It is to show to the bond-servants "things which in their entirety must come to pass with speed" or "in rapid course:" that is, events which, when they have once begun to happen, will follow each other in quick succession, until all is over. For, according to the well-known use of the aorist tense, which occurs in this clause,¹ the literal rendering of the Greek text is, "things which must have come to pass with speed," which, in English idiom, means, things which *in their entirety* must come to pass with speed.

The object of the prophecy is, then, to reveal God's intention to bring about a whirl of events, terrible, indeed, but of very brief duration, at a point of time not as yet disclosed. And these events are presently found to be the judgments which He is about to send abroad upon the earth, the "marvels such as have not been wrought in all the earth, nor in any

¹ ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι.

nation,"¹ which He has declared that He will do before He restores the Kingdom to Israel.

Hence the briefness of the appalling visitation: for judgment is His strange work,² in which he has no delight. Therefore, He defers it, until it is absolutely necessary: then His Day will have come: He will arise in the glory of His majesty, to shake terribly the earth,³ to make His arrows drunk with blood, and to cause His sword to devour much flesh.⁴ But, how swiftly He will accomplish this judgment, we may read in Paul's quotation from a passage of Isaiah, which deals with the very events revealed in the Apocalypse;—

"For the Lord will execute His work upon the earth, finishing it and cutting it short."⁵

Similarly, the Lord Himself, when predicting the same season of judgment, says, "That generation"—for so the words should be idiomatically rendered—"shall not pass away till all these things be fulfilled." That is, the generation which sees the commencement of the fulfilment will also see its close.

The meaning, then, of our clause is, that the Revelation is the disclosure of a rapidly passing series of events, all of which, from the first to the last, must be included within a very brief period. But, as regards the point of time at which the series was to commence, whether it was to be in the immediate future or after the lapse of centuries, we have, so far, no hint.

The next clause informs us, that the Lord sent and signified the Revelation by His angel to His bond-servant John. And we need not wonder that, while Paul and

¹ Exod. xxxiv. 10. See the first volume of this series; pp. 65-74.

² Isa. xxviii. 21.

³ Deut. xxxii. 42.

⁴ Isa. ii. 19, 21.

⁵ Rom. ix. 28 (R.V.).

others received their communications directly from the Lord Jesus, an angel was, in this case, sent to John; for the main object of the Apocalypse is not to deal with matters pertaining to the common salvation, or with the conduct and privileges of believers, and the ordering of Churches. But it draws back, as it were, the blue curtains of Heaven, and discloses the Almighty Creator seated on His Throne as the Supreme Lord and Judge of the universe. It summons all men, each in his own order to stand before Him as the Omnipotent One Who has, at length, arisen in terrible majesty to claim His long-forgotten rights, to save the submissive and the loyal with a great salvation, but to break in pieces the obstinately rebellious. Therefore, at so awful a crisis, the distance between Himself and His people must be felt, even though the latter be represented by the beloved disciple; and, accordingly, an angel is sent to act as mediator.

Of this angel we shall have to speak presently, when we come to the first indication of his presence in the tenth verse. But it will be well to notice at once a point most important to the interpretation of these visions. The revelation of the events which must in their entirety be accomplished with speed is declared to have been signified to John by an angel.

Therefore, if, in the course of the Book, One Who is not an angel should appear and communicate messages to the Apostle, what He announces would form no part of the rapid whirl of events, nor would it necessarily have to be fulfilled in a short space of time.

The Greek verb which is rendered "signified"¹ has often been put forward as a plea for the symbolical

¹ ἐσήμανεν.

We do not see that this is exactly the reason
 for an angel being sent to John.

Vatican 4

interpretation of the Book, as though it meant "to communicate by symbols."

But it is doubtful whether the word could have such a meaning: certainly it could not in connection with so long and involved a communication as the Apocalypse.

It is primarily used in the sense of pointing out, or intimating, by a sign, such as a nod, a raising of the hand, or a word. Hence it is the ordinary term for giving the signal to soldiers to march, attack, or retreat; and also for the indication of an omen. But its most common meaning, perhaps, is just that of our verb "to signify," that is, to convey information, to announce, to declare.

In the New Testament, it occurs only in five passages, besides the one which is before us. In the fourth Gospel, it is twice used of our Lord's expression, "if I be lifted up," as *signifying* by what death He should die.¹ Here, however, there is no symbol, but a literal, though veiled, indication of what would actually take place in crucifixion. And the same remark applies to the Lord's prediction of Peter's death, in which the process of crucifixion is again described in veiled terms.² So, in the eleventh chapter of Acts, we have no hint of symbols when Agabas *signified* by the Spirit, that there should be a great famine throughout the Empire;³ nor did Festus intend to use them when he wrote, that it seemed "unreasonable to send a prisoner, and not withal to *signify* the charges against him."⁴

Thus, no shadow of support for the idea, that the Apocalypse is a series of symbols, can be deduced from the verb *to signify*, as used in the New Testament.

¹ John xii. 32; xviii. 32.

³ Acts xi. 28.

² John xxi. 18, 19.

⁴ Acts xxv. 27.

And, indeed, were it otherwise, such an idea would be confuted by facts, for the Book is described as a simple unveiling of things that must come to pass, and not as a collection of enigmas.

It does, however, contain a few symbols ; for certain appearances in the first chapter are explained as such. Moreover, the parenthesis contained in the twelfth and thirteenth chapters is expressly said to be symbolical.¹ And, in the seventeenth chapter, the symbolical Beast of the thirteenth reappears, and is ridden and directed by the Harlot, who is the base counterfeit of the Woman clothed with the sun, in the twelfth. So far, the Book is symbolical ; but, generally, it is a literal prediction of things that must have a swift accomplishment.

Such, then, being the case, was there no special reason for the choice of such a verb as *signify* to express the communication of the angel to John ? Certainly there was ; and our examination of the next verse will disclose it to us.

We are now told, that John not only received the Revelation, but also "bare witness of the Word of God and of the Testimony of Jesus Christ, even of all things that he saw." It will be noticed, that we have omitted the "and" of the Authorized Version, which is not found in the Greek text.

Now, by the expression, "the Word of God," which has usually a more general meaning, John seems here to indicate the Apocalypse alone, for we must, probably, explain the phrase by the previous clause, "which God gave unto Him;" just as "the Testimony of Jesus Christ," apparently, points back to the words, "and He sent and signified it."

¹ Rev. xii. 1, 3, R.V

And when the "and" before the words, "of all things that he saw," has been removed, that clause is no longer a third subject, but stands in apposition to the other two, and thus indicates the manner in which "the Word of God and the Testimony of Jesus Christ" were conveyed to John. For the contents of the Book, so far as they were communicated by the angel, are mainly a description of what the Apostle beheld with his eyes. The words, "I saw," are often repeated, and some passages imply that John recorded what was actually going on before him at the time. For instance, in the fifth verse of the fourth chapter, the rendering should be, "And out of the Throne are proceeding lightnings, and voices, and thunders."

We can, therefore, readily understand why a verb of so wide a meaning as "to signify" is chosen to express the communication of this prophecy, seeing that, with a few exceptions, it was to be revealed, not by word of mouth, but by a panoramic display, representing the events that were to take place, and, for the most part, representing them literally.

But, before we pass on to the third verse, we must see to it that we lose not a great lesson of the second. For, when we find that the Revelation conveyed in these visions is not only affirmed, in the first verse, to have been given by God to the Lord Jesus, but is, also, emphatically declared in the second to be "the Word of God and the Testimony of Jesus Christ," does it not seem as if every means had been taken to give weight to the Apocalypse, and to set it forth as a Book of supreme importance? We cease to wonder at the conviction of Isaac Taylor, that God will ultimately use it for the purpose of separating those who are truly His Own from mere professors. For, at the time

of the End, which seems now so near, it is not likely that any one will be able to withstand the wiles of the Devil, and to break through the Satanic spells which will be woven around him by the great signs and wonders of the false Christs and false prophets, unless he has studied, believed, and imbibed the spirit of, this last of his Lord's messages.

Indeed, even the past history of Protestantism has repeatedly shown, that a general knowledge of Scripture, without a spiritual apprehension of the Apocalypse, is insufficient to check the gradual inroads of worldliness and unbelief, or to detect and meet the stealthy approaches of a Pagan Catholicism.

Nor should this fact cause us any surprise; for, if God has given us the Book, He has certainly done so because it is necessary to us, and because we are not fully armed against our foes without it. And, since He has not only given it, but has also added, both at its commencement and its close, a solemn injunction to heed its warnings, there can be no doubt that it forms a most important piece of the believer's armour, the lack of which, should we go into the battle without it, may leave some vital part exposed to the fiery darts of the enemy.

While, then, the first and second verses proclaim the Divine source of the Revelation, the third pronounces a special blessing upon him who reads and those who listen to the words of its prophecy; but only upon the condition, that they, also, keep the things that are written therein. Now, the change of number evidently points to a public reader and an attentive audience. How solemn, then, is the charge here given to ministers and all who are called of God to testify to their fellows; and yet how rarely is one found who responds to it, and

presses the teaching of this Book upon all who come within his influence!

But obedience to it is always blessed, and often attended with a manifestation of great power. If we glance through past times of persecution and days of darkness and mourning for the beloved of the Lord, we shall find that the Apocalypse has ever been the solace of His saints in their distresses, moving them to rejoice in tribulation, and to be faithful even unto death.

And, again, whenever, in seasons of corruption and sloth, a preacher of power has been sent forth by the Holy Spirit, to startle men from their slumber, and to terrify them out of their carnal security, we usually find that he draws many of his themes from this part of God's Word. And it is scarcely possible that any believers will be found watching when the Lord comes, save those who have sought to understand His final Revelation.

In the following clause, "and observe the things that are written therein," the Spirit of God exposes a strange but common fallacy. It is not enough to read or to hear, we must also observe and keep the things that are written. And yet, even in That Day when the Master of the House shall have risen up and shut to the door, many will plead, "We did eat and drink in Thy Presence, and Thou didst teach in our streets." But they will only draw forth the inexorable answer, "I tell you, I know you not, whence ye are; depart from Me, all ye workers of iniquity."

The reason why readers and hearers of this Book are specially blessed is, because the season of its fulfilment is near. For its great purpose is to prepare the people of God for the events which He is bringing on, and to make them understand His estimate of persons and

systems by the destinies which He has appointed for them.

But there is some difficulty in the words, "for the season is near," seeing it is implied in the tenth verse, that the rapid series of events will not take place until the Day of the Lord—a period which must, at least, be more than eighteen hundred years later than the date of the Apocalypse.

The attempt to explain this difficulty by quoting Peter's saying, "that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day," is altogether irrelevant. For, when God vouchsafes a revelation to men, He speaks in their language, and in a manner which is intelligible to them.

We can, therefore, only suggest, that what was near was the commencing fulfilment of the first part of the Book; that is, as we shall presently see, the first and second of those seven phases of the Church upon earth which the Lord Jesus reveals in the second and third chapters, and which span the interval between the date of the vision and the Day of the Lord.

The Introductory Address

Rev. i. 4-8

4. "John to the Seven Churches which are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from Him Which is and Which was and Which is to come; and from the Seven Spirits which are before His Throne;

5, 6. And from Jesus Christ, the faithful Witness, the First-born of the Dead, and the Ruler of the Kings of the Earth.

Unto Him That loveth us, and loosed us from our sins by His Blood; and He made us to be a

Kingdom, to be priests unto His God and Father ; to Him be the glory and the dominion for the Ages of the Ages.¹ Amen.

7. Behold, He cometh with the clouds ; and every eye shall see Him, and they that pierced Him ; and all the Tribes of the Land shall mourn over Him.² Even so, Amen.

8. I am the Alpha and the Omega, saith the Lord God, Which is and Which was and Which is to come, the Almighty."

In the fourth verse, as in the first, the abrupt introduction of the name John, without further description, indicates one well known and recognized by all believers, who could, therefore, be no other than the beloved Apostle.

The following words show that the Book is, in form, an Epistle, addressed to Seven Churches with which John must have been intimately connected. Two of them, at least, were founded by Paul, or under his direction : hence we see that John had entered into Paul's labours after the death of the latter, just as Peter did during Paul's first imprisonment. For all the Apostles were working for the same Master, and for the same end.

But for what reason were Seven Churches chosen to be the first recipients of this Book ? Evidently because they were to be regarded as representatives of all the Churches then in existence ; and, also, as we hope presently to explain, because they were to be used in a forecast of the history of the whole of the

¹ That is, for ever and ever.

² Literally, "at Him." That is, their mourning shall be directed towards Him as its object (Alford). This meaning is well expressed in the A.V. by "because of Him."

Nominal Church in seven successive phases, extending from the time of the vision until the End of the Age. For, in the Scriptures, seven seems to be the number, not of absolute, but of Dispensational fulness and perfection; and so, to indicate the perfection of that which comes to an end. To find a possible explanation of this meaning, we must remember that seven is made up of three added to four.

Now, three is the number of God, as we may gather by inference from the Old Testament, and may find plainly revealed in the Ever Blessed Trinity of the New.

But four, on the other hand, is associated with the earth and its inhabitants.¹

Hence three added to four, or seven, may, perhaps, indicate God in contact with, or acting upon, the sons of men, which is His attitude toward them during the Dispensations; while three multiplied into four, or twelve, may signify God dwelling among men, as in the Eternal State,² and so, imply absolute and everlasting perfection. This may be the reason why twelve, or some multiple of twelve, is found to be the predominant number in the Heavenly Jerusalem.³ And, very remarkably, three institutions which God established long ago, with the purpose that they should survive the wreck of time, and appear in the Celestial City, are also in twelves; namely, the Twelve Apostles,⁴

¹ See Isa. xi. 12 and Rev. vii. 1; Rev. xiii. 7; Acts x. 11, 12; Rev. vii. 9; Ezek. xiv. 21; In Dan. ii. and vii. we read of Four World-empires, and in Ezek. i. and Rev. iv. of Four Cherubim, or Living Creatures, representing the Four Earth-tribes which God purposes to redeem.

² Rev. xxi. 3.

³ Rev. xxi. 12, 14, 16, 17; xxii. 2.

⁴ Rev. xxi. 14.

Interesting

the Twelve Tribes,¹ and the Twelve Months of the Year.²

By Asia, we are not to understand the great Continent which is now included under that name, but merely Proconsular Asia, that is, the Roman Province, which was made up of Mysia, Lydia, Caria, and Phrygia. Now, the Churches in seven cities of this district were chosen by God to be brought into special contact with John; and so, to become the first recipients of the closing words of revelation. And, as we shall presently find, the Epistles to these Churches, containing a prophecy of "the things that are," or of the present Church-period, are dictated by the Lord Himself, while "the things which shall be after these things," that is, in the Seventieth Seven of Years, are communicated by the angel.

But, before John relates the circumstances in which the Epistles were given, he prays for the Seven Churches, that grace and peace, the favour of God and the peace that results therefrom, may be theirs—and this he asks from all the Persons of the Blessed Trinity.

In the words, "Who is and Who was and Who is to come," we recognize a paraphrase for the great Name—Jehovah: just as it is explained by the Jerusalem Targum as meaning "Who was, is, and shall be."

The expression, "the Seven Spirits That are before the Throne," points to the One Spirit of God, here represented as Seven Spirits, or Energies, in order to indicate the completeness and universality of His temporary work during the Dispensations. For the

¹ Rev. xxi. 12.

² Rev. xxii. 2.

number seven, as we have just seen, signifies Dispensational, but not absolute, universality, plenitude and perfection.

These Seven are evidently the same as the Seven Eyes of the Lamb, "Which are the Seven Spirits of God, sent forth into all the earth."¹ Here is an indication, that, by means of Them, the Lord Jesus exercises His watchful care over the earth; so that, as Paul puts it, "by Him all things cohere,"² or hold together. And, in special, by means of Them He ever watches, directs and protects His Churches, as well as individual believers, thus fulfilling His promise, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the End of the Age." Hence it is that, in His address to the Church in Sardis, He speaks of Himself as "He That hath the Seven Spirits of God." And, doubtless, Zechariah refers to the same Spirits when he describes

"Those Seven : They are the Eyes of the Lord
Which run to and fro through the whole earth."³

So, too, does Hanani the Seer, in the words ;—

"For the Eyes of the Lord run to and fro
throughout the whole earth, to show Himself
strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect
toward Him."⁴

Both in the passage which we are considering, and in the fifth verse of the fourth chapter, the Seven Spirits are distinguished as Those Which are before the Throne. For, since the Throne is the central figure of the Apocalypse, therefore, the Holy Spirit takes His title from His relation to It.

And here we may mention, that attempts have been made to revive an old interpretation which identifies

¹ Rev. v. 6. ² Col. i. 17. ³ Zech. iv. 10. ⁴ 2 Chron. xvi. 9.

the Seven Spirits before the Throne with "the seven angels that stand before God."¹ This theory has been supposed to derive support from the words of Paul to Timothy;—

"I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels."²

The elect angels, it is urged, are here mentioned together with God and the Lord Jesus: why may they not also occupy the same position in the Apocalypse? The quotation is, however, absolutely irrelevant. The mention of angels in close connection with God and the Lord Jesus raises no difficulty, provided that Paul's order be preserved, and the created angels be placed after God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

But here the Seven Spirits are inserted *between* God and the Lord Jesus Christ, and John *prays* to Them for grace and peace. Moreover, in the fifth chapter, when all created beings, including the Living Creatures and the Elders, fall down and adore Him That sitteth upon the Throne and the Lamb, the Seven Spirits do not join in the worship; because They Themselves are a Person of the Blessed Trinity. Should, then, any one who is acquainted with these facts regard the Seven Spirits as created angels, he would be guilty of blasphemy, and his teaching would logically involve the worship of angels as those who are equal to the Persons of the Trinity, and from whom grace and peace may be obtained by prayer.

It is, therefore, impossible to interpret the Seven Spirits Which are before the Throne in any other way than as the One Spirit of God in His Sevenfold operations; and, as we have shown above, this is

¹ Rev. viii. 2.

² 1 Tim. v. 21.

This is very interesting

by no means the only passage in which He is so represented.

But now another difficulty arises ; for the usual order of the Persons of the Blessed Trinity is here changed, the Holy Spirit being placed Second and the Son Third. For this arrangement there are, perhaps, two reasons ;—

(1) The description of the Lord Jesus which immediately follows refers only to His manhood ; and in that He is inferior to the Holy Spirit.

(2) The Lord Jesus may, also, be placed last for the sake of convenience ; because His titles are to be followed by an indication of the effect of their announcement upon each of the three great classes of mankind to whom something, at least, of His revelation has been vouchsafed. ✓

In praying to Him for grace and peace, John describes Him as “the Faithful Witness, the First-born of the Dead, and the Prince of the Kings of the Earth.”

He was the Faithful Witness when on earth, even as His Own words declare ;—

“To this end have I been born, and to this end am I come into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth.”¹

And to His testimony He remained faithful, even unto death. Who, then, can doubt His words when, after rising from the dead, He presently declares the true condition of the Churches.

He is the First-born of the Dead, and He became so as a direct consequence of His faithful testimony.

¹ John xviii. 37 ; 1 Tim. vi. 13.

For, as man, He could never have risen from the dead had He not been a Faithful Witness. Had He sinned, there would have been no expiating substitute for Him, as there is now for us.

Lastly, He is "the Prince of the Kings of the Earth," a title which is the natural outcome of the other two. By His Resurrection from the dead, His faithfulness and sinlessness were proved. Therefore, He stood forth as the only perfect Man; and so, as the rightful and sole Heir to all the gifts and promises which God has given to man, and as the Lord of the human race. Thus, after all, He will, as man, obtain from His Father that which He rejected when it was offered to Him by Satan, "all the Kingdoms of this world and the glory of them."

Let us not forget, that we, too, are called to follow in these steps of our great Lord and Saviour. "Ye shall be witnesses unto Me," were among His last words as He was leaving the confines of earth. We must, then, be faithful witnesses now, must be in the world even as He was in the world. Then the First Resurrection, and a glorious reign with Him over the whole earth, will be ours.

The mention of the Lord as King of the whole earth moves John to utter words by which the Spirit, apparently, indicates the different effects that will be produced upon the Church, Israel, and apostate Christendom, at the proclamation of this last title.

In the fifth and sixth verses, the Apostle seems, as the representative of the Church, to utter her rapturous welcome and glowing ascription of praise. Her members had not joined in the rebel-cry, "We will not have this Man to reign over us!" Nay, though Satan and the Power of Darkness seemed to be everywhere

supreme, they have testified their loyalty, and confessed to the Only True God;—"Thine is the Kingdom, and the Power, and the Glory!" Therefore, well knowing that the advent of their King will for ever end the days of their oppression and mourning, they break forth 'into the jubilant song;—

"Unto Him That loveth us, and loosed¹ us from our sins by His Blood—and He made us to be a Kingdom, to be priests unto His God and Father—to Him be the glory and the dominion for ever and ever!"

Here we must be careful to avoid the mistake of the Authorized Version, which turns the present "loveth" into the past "loved." For, following a common usage of the present tense, the former indicates the abiding disposition toward His Own of Him Who is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever, and so includes in itself the sense of past, present and future.

Of His love in the past the great manifestation took place when, once for all, at the End of the Ages, He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. For then it was that He loosed us from our sins by His Blood, that is, ransomed us from the consequence of sin, which is death, by giving up His Own Life in the stead of ours.

Yet His love for us went far beyond a mere ransom from Death and Hell: He also "made us to be a Kingdom, to be priests² unto His God and Father." But why this strange expression, "to be a Kingdom, to be priests," instead of "to be kings and priests"?

¹ We have preferred the reading *λύσαντι*, "loosed," to the better-known *λούσαντι*, "washed."

² This, undoubtedly, is the correct reading. Very little support can be found for the "kings and priests" of the A.V.

Evidently to show, that, while the saints ought to be priests individually and now, they can neither be kings nor may act as such, until their full numbers are gathered in, and the Kingdom is complete. For it is only then that the Lord will take to Himself His great power, and commence that reign in which His faithful ones will share.

But, while the Church can reign only in the next Age, when all her members are assembled and their King is with them, these same members may even now, in some degree at least, act individually as priests. Each one of them can offer up the only acceptable sacrifice by pleading for others in the Name of his crucified Lord; they can, one and all, teach their fellows what the Lord has taught them.

We have, however, entered more fully into the meaning of this clause in another volume.¹

In the Age-to-Come, God's earthly people will hold a position analogous to this present office of the Church: for to them, also, He has given the promise, "Ye shall be unto Me a Kingdom of priests, and a holy nation."²

It is characteristic of the Apocalypse that the Church is here said to be a Kingdom and priests to His—that is, to Christ's—God and Father. In such a passage Paul would, doubtless, have written "to our God and Father;" but this Book is not intended to reveal the Almighty God as the Father of believers; but as the Father of the Lord Jesus, and the Sovereign and Judge of men and angels.

Even now all true members of the Body of Christ,

This "Sacer-
fici" which
the spiritual
priests of the
dispensation—
that is, all be-
lievers—
are
to offer to God
is the one
mentioned
in Heb.
13: 15—See
also verse
16 of the
same
chapter

¹ *The Church the Churches and the Mysteries*, pp. 21-4.

² *Exod. xix. 6.*

both those which are still upon earth and those that have already passed into the Paradise of God, are eager to ascribe the glory and the dominion to their Saviour and Lord : with what joy will they do so on the great Day of His Appearing.

Having thus acted as the mouthpiece of the Church, and expressed the joy which her members will feel in the Presence of their Lord, John now turns toward the Children of Abraham ; but his words are no longer those of a representative. He is now a prophet, standing without the pale of Israel, and predicting the manner in which the chosen but fallen people will receive their Messiah, when they shall behold Him marching in the greatness of His strength, glorious in His apparel, and proclaiming Himself Mighty to save.¹

“Behold,” the Apostle exclaims, “He cometh with the clouds !” Of course, as the sequel shows, those who are directly addressed are the Israelites who will, at the time, be in their own Land. For them the Lord will come enveloped, at first, in thick clouds, in a manner that was always characteristic of His approach to Israel.

The Pillar of Cloud and Fire, which led the people in their wanderings, and rested upon the Tabernacle, will readily occur to us. Again, in the nineteenth chapter of Exodus, the Lord announces His impending manifestation upon Mount Sinai in the words ;—

“Lo, I come unto thee in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with thee, and may also believe thee for ever.”²

So, too, Daniel, in his great vision of the Four

¹ Isa. lxiii. 1.

² Exod. xix. 9.

Beasts, sees One like unto a son of man coming with the clouds of Heaven to the Throne of the Ancient of Days, to receive dominion over the earth—a dominion in which Israel will be the ruling nation.¹

But, although the Lord will bow the Heaven, and come down in thick clouds, those clouds will soon cleave asunder; and then “every eye shall see Him.” Apparently, however, the expression, “every eye,” is limited by the context to those Israelites and Gentiles who will be in the neighbourhood at the time: for the Lord’s Personal descent will be local, and visible only in that part of the world in which it takes place. Nevertheless, the whole earth will be lightened with the Glory of His Presence, which will fall as a devouring flame upon Magog and them that dwell carelessly in the isles, that is, upon Russia and the countries surrounding the Mediterranean.²

Among those who will behold Him when He descends upon the Mount of Olives will be they who pierced³ Him.⁴ But by this expression we are not to understand the actual perpetrator of the deed, who was a Roman soldier, nor yet its direct instigators, who were the Jews of our Lord’s time. For the piercing is regarded as the deed of the Jewish nation, which, by its continual rejection of Christ, and its bitter feeling toward Him, identifies itself with His actual murderers.

But others, also, who are not Jews, will see Him: for “all the Tribes of the Land shall mourn over Him”—not merely the Two Tribes. The circumstances of this mourning, together with certain details,

¹ Dan. vii. 13, 14.

² Ezek. xxxix. 6.

³ Zech. xii. 10.

⁴ John xix. 34.

? of
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be!

are given by the prophet Zechariah.¹ It will be a repentant and godly sorrow, with the merciful result, that, "in that day, there shall be a fountain opened to the House of David, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness;"² and a free pardon and glad reconciliation will follow.

What wonder, then, that the Apostle, as he looked down the vista of prophecy, and saw whither the mourning would lead, was unable to refrain his joyous "Yea, Amen!"

He has now welcomed the Lord in the name of the Church, as being himself a member of the Body; and has added a prophecy concerning Israel. But there is yet a third class of persons, namely, the multitudes of apostate Christendom, to whom the Lord's coming will bring unmitigated terror. To them a message is conveyed directly from the mouth of the Lord;—

"I am the Alpha and the Omega, saith the Lord, Which is, and Which was, and Which is to come, the Almighty!"

But many of those who are about to perish beneath His wrath will have been wont to acknowledge this claim, will have called Him, Lord, throughout their lives, and will have done many things in His Name.

¹ Dean Alford does, indeed, insist that they which pierced Him must be the literal murderers of the Lord, because the Greek word, *οφθαλμοι*, marks them as a class taken out from among the great number designated as "every eye." And, doubtless, they are regarded as a distinct class. But, as the next clause informs us, there will be Israelites who are not Jews in Palestine at the time, to say nothing of a multitude of Gentiles in the armies of the Antichrist. And we must remember that those were exclusively Jews, and not men of all the Tribes, who said, "His blood be upon us and upon our children."

² Zech. xiii. 1.

Yet, with all this profession, their actions will have been hypocritical, and their teachings have tended to ignore Him, either by thrusting the Church into His place or by practically setting Humanity upon His Throne: the things done in His Name will have been for the most part things which He never commanded, or, perchance, even forbade. And, generally, while boasting to be His, they will have been strenuously engaged in carrying out schemes and systems dictated by their own interest and self-will, caring meanwhile nothing for Him or for the precepts written in His Word.

But, when the Heaven is opened, and His lightnings encircle the round earth, they will be speechless, having the fact, that they are without defence, manifested before their eyes in His glorious Presence, and knowing well that the time to sue for mercy is now past. Therefore, no utterance or expression of feeling will come from them: but, as He is about to slay them with the sword that proceeds out of His mouth,¹ they will hear Him say;—"I," Whom you have despised and destroyed, "am the Alpha and the Omega, Which is, and Which was, and Which is to come, the Almighty!"

Should any one, with that taint of Arianism which is so common in our days, feel a secret and, perhaps, half-unconscious doubt, whether the Lord Jesus and the Father are so entirely One that these words can be applied to the Lord, let him remember the teaching, even of the Old Testament, in the great prophecy of Isaiah;—

"For unto us a Child is born: unto us a Son is

1 Rev. xix. 21.

given; and the government shall be upon His shoulder; and His Name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." ¹

Thus the four verses, which we have been considering, ² seem to resolve themselves into a prediction of the manner in which the Lord will be received by each of the three classes which have some knowledge of Him.

The waiting members of His Church will greet Him with joyful acclaim.

His people Israel will, at first, be overwhelmed with penitence and mourning for their great sin. But their sorrow will be turned into the joy of pardon and deliverance. And soon the glad word will go forth;—

“Cry aloud and shout; thou inhabitant of Zion; for great is the Holy One of Israel in the midst of thee.” ³

But the nations of Christendom, in the very heat of their feverish energy, will be suddenly arrested by the brightness of His appearing—like a swiftly running creature unexpectedly caught in a snare. They will become conscious, that the awful moment of collision between themselves and Him, Whom they have despised and defied, is all at once upon them, and that they have been dashing themselves against the thick bosses of the shield of the Almighty. And so, as He proclaims His Divine titles over their terror-stricken heads, they will perceive that the meaning of His words to them is, “Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish!”

¹ Isa. ix. 6.

² Rev. i. 5-8.

³ Isa. xii. 6.

The Vision of the Lampstands and Stars

Rev. i. 9-20

9. "I John, your brother and partaker with you in the tribulation and Kingdom and patience in Jesus, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the Word of God and the Testimony of Jesus.

10, 11. I was in spirit in the Day of the Lord, and I heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet, saying, What thou seest write in a book, and send it to the Seven Churches ; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamum, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea.

12, 13. And I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. And, when I had turned, I saw Seven Golden Lampstands ; and, in the midst of the Lampstands, One like unto a son of man, clothed with a garment down to the feet, and girt about at the breasts with a golden girdle.

14. And His head and His hair were white as white wool, as snow ; and His eyes were as a flame of fire ;

15. And His feet like unto glowing brass, as if they had been refined in a furnace ; and His voice, as a voice of many waters.

16. And He had in His right hand Seven Stars ; and out of His mouth was proceeding a sharp two-edged sword ; and His countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength.

17, 18. And, when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as one dead. And He laid His right hand upon me, saying, Fear not ; I am the First and the

Last, and the Living One; and I was dead, and, behold, I am alive for evermore; and I have the keys of Death and of Hades.

19, 20. Write, then, the things which thou sawest, and the things which are, and the things which shall come to pass after these things; the mystery of the Seven Stars¹ which thou sawest upon My right hand, and the Seven Golden Lampstands. The Seven Stars are Angels of the Seven Churches; and the Seven Lampstands are the Seven Churches."

In the ninth verse, we are informed of the circumstances in which John saw his visions.

The first general persecution of Christians, that by Domitian, was now raging; and the believers in Asia had not escaped its horrors. Hence John describes himself, to those to whom he is writing, as their fellow-partaker "in the tribulation and Kingdom and patience in Jesus." The order of these three words has been regarded as somewhat strange, or even as no order at all: nevertheless, if we carefully mark the circumstances, it seems sufficiently natural.

It is through much tribulation that we must enter into the Kingdom: therefore, as soon as we begin to suffer persecution for the Word of God and the Testimony of Jesus, we perceive that God is leading us toward the Prize. But there is another item in the reckoning. It is not by a momentary effort, but only by patient endurance in tribulation, that we can make our calling and election for the Kingdom sure. "If

¹ H. B. Swete understands ver. 20 to be the commencement of a new sentence, and renders, "As for *the secret* of the Seven Stars . . . and as for *the secret* of the Lampstands."

we endure,¹ we shall also reign with Him ;”² but not otherwise. For to reign is something far more than that Eternal Life which is the absolute Gift of God. On this point, however, we have enlarged elsewhere.³

Let us not forget, that the fellowship of which John speaks is “in Jesus:” it has nothing to do with that self-willed, partizan, and even vainglorious spirit, which, if we may believe the records, some even of the martyrs seem to have exhibited.

A glance at the map will show, that, while on the rocky and desolate island of Patmos, John was almost in the centre of the prophetic earth. On the opposite coast, to the East, were the Seven Churches of Asia; and, beyond them, Babylon and the Euphrates, and then the Land of the Medes and Persians. To the West lay Greece and Rome; while the country of Gog was in the North; and Palestine and Egypt to the South.

John was in exile “on account of the Word of God and the Testimony of Jesus.”⁴ That is, because he had preached the Word and borne the Testimony. Such labour for the Lord often involves sorrow in the present life; but, toward the end of the Book, the Apostle reveals its issue in the next Age.⁵ The expression, “the Word of God and the Testimony of Jesus,” must here be used with a more extended meaning than that which it seems to have in the

¹ ὑπομένομεν, literally, “If we stand our ground,” as soldiers who repel a charge.

² 2 Tim. ii. 12.

³ See *The Church the Churches and the Mysteries*, pp. 20-96.

⁴ Comp. Rev. vi. 9.

⁵ Rev. xx. 4.

I think we may safely assert (I am sure) that no teacher who has not all eternal life will reign.

second verse, the first term apparently indicating the subjects of the Old Testament, and the second those of the New.

The beloved Apostle had been banished to Patmos, but presently found that his Lord was there, even as the three Hebrews had previously met Him in the furnace of fire. Such surprises are experienced by all His loving and trusting disciples: in the dark and dangerous days of their pilgrimage, they are sure to discover that He is near them, and most graciously does He manifest Himself to them in the hour of death;—

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or anguish, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? . . . Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him That loved us.”¹

John now relates, that, in a certain hour of his sojourn upon the lonely island, he became, or suddenly found himself, in spirit² in the Day of the Lord, or, as some prefer to translate, “on the Lord’s Day.”³ In other words, the first part of this announcement means, that he fell into a spiritual ecstasy, or trance, by which his consciousness was transferred from the material to the spiritual sphere. But, before we can proceed with the interpretation, it will be necessary to determine which of the alternative renderings is correct—“in the Day of the Lord,” or, “on the Lord’s Day.”

¹ Rom. viii. 35, 37.

² Both the A.V. and the R.V. have “in the Spirit.” But, since there is no definite article in the Greek, the rendering which we have given seems much more appropriate to the context.

³ ἐν τῇ κυριακῇ ἡμέρᾳ.

Now, to the latter, there are two very strong objections, one of which is, that the phrase invariably used in the New Testament for what we call, "the Lord's Day," is "the first day of the week;" and that our expression is not to be found in Scripture, unless we choose to make the present dubious passage a solitary instance.¹

Again, the translation, the Lord's Day, would have little or no bearing upon the context; whereas the alternate rendering, as we shall presently show, casts a flood of light upon the whole prophecy.

On the other hand, *ἡ κυριακὴ ἡμέρα* is not, indeed, found elsewhere for "the Day of the Lord," which is always *ἡ ἡμέρα Κυρίου*, or *τοῦ Κυρίου*. But the two expressions are precisely the same in meaning, and only differ slightly in form—the adjective in the one case taking the place of the genitive in the other. And we may find a very close parallel to the rarer phrase in Paul's use of *ἀνθρωπίνη ἡμέρα* for "the Day of Man" in contrast to "the Day of the Lord."²

It has, however, been strongly urged, that, if the meaning were "I became," or "found myself, in spirit, in the Day of the Lord," we should have had *ἐγενόμην εἰς*, instead of *ἐγενόμην ἐν*, according to the usual Greek idiom. And, had the Apocalypse been written in Attic Greek, this difficulty would have been insurmountable. But, since such is not the case, the difficulty becomes

¹ It is customary to cite *κυριακὸν δεῖπνον* (1 Cor. xi. 20), "the Lord's Supper," as a proof that *ἡ κυριακὴ ἡμέρα* might mean the Lord's Day. There is no doubt that it might, so far as the mere words are concerned; but that fact does not remove either of the objections to such a rendering which we have adduced above.

² See 1 Cor. iv. 3-5. The reading in the A.V., "man's Judgment," is a gloss, not a translation.

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expression mean
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- for, so far
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Christ -
John -

less formidable; and it vanishes altogether when we observe the same loose construction in the preceding verse—*ἐγενόμην ἐν τῇ νόσφ*—where the meaning cannot be disputed. John was not a Greek by birth, and, probably, had in mind rather the fact, that he found himself in the Day of the Lord, than that he had been projected thither.

Yet another objection has been raised to the interpretation, "Day of the Lord."

It has been said, that the Vision of the Lampstands is inconsistent with such a rendering, seeing that they represent Churches, and that Churches belong to the things that are, and must disappear before the Day of the Lord sets in.

But the Lampstands do disappear, and John only catches a momentary glimpse of them, just as the Lord is leaving the Sanctuary, and the present Age is closing. This fact is distinctly brought out by the tenses of the Greek verbs. "What thou seest, write," is said to John in the eleventh verse, before he has turned round to look. And, almost immediately after he has done so, the Lord commands, "Write the things which thou sawest"—the Greek aorist intimating, that the vision had already vanished from sight.

The Lord Himself does, indeed, tarry for a short while, that, before the angel begins his revelations, He may communicate to John His judgment of the Churches as a preliminary to the rest of the Book: for Judgment must begin at the House of God. Then He, also, disappears, leaving the Sanctuary of the present Dispensation; and, shortly afterwards, John sees Him before the Throne, claiming the Title-deeds of Earth as His rightful possession. Thus the beloved Apostle beholds the Lampstands only as they are passing away,

John's vision

at the very moment of transition from this Age to the Day of the Lord.

It would seem, then, that there is no valid objection to the rendering "Day of the Lord," by which we retain a vigorous sense, and one which bears powerfully upon the whole prophecy. And the appropriateness of such a meaning will strike us the more if we remember, that, from the fourth chapter, the Revelation is presented rather to John's eyes than to his ears, that he sees the events of the last Seven Years, that is, of the Day of the Lord, pass before him in panoramic scenes, just as they will actually occur.

Thus the words, "in spirit," describe John's internal condition—his consciousness had passed from the visible to the spiritual sphere. On the other hand, the expression, "in the Day of the Lord," points to the external surroundings in which he now found himself, and furnishes us with a general clue to the interpretation of the vision. Both of these conditions are well illustrated in the second verse of the fourth chapter;—

"And immediately I was in spirit, and, behold, a Throne."

Let us not forget, that "the Day of the Lord" is the season in which He will begin to speak, and to judge, and to manifest His power, thus breaking the long silence which He has maintained during the still continuing Day of Man.

And, since John was, in spirit, projected into "the Day of the Lord," in order that he might see the things that are to be done with speed, it follows, that the hurried succession of events, of which we have already spoken, is to take place in the Fourth Epoch. And the character of this Epoch may be

learnt, also, from a verse which we have elsewhere considered ;—¹

“Behold, I make a covenant: before all thy people I will do marvels, such as have not been wrought in all the earth, nor in any nation; and all the people among which thou art shall see the work of the Lord; for it is a terrible thing that I will do with thee.”²

As soon as John had become conscious in the spirit-sphere, he heard behind him a great voice, sharp and rousing as a trumpet-blast. From this comparison, it would appear that the voice was not that of the Lord Himself, which is very differently described in the fifteenth verse; but the voice of the angel who was sent to communicate the Revelation to John.³ It is again heard in the first verse of the fourth chapter, where it commands the Apostle to ascend into the First Heaven, from whence he is to behold visions of the Day of the Lord.

The words inserted in the Authorized Version—“I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last; and”—which would be inconsistent with our interpretation, are generally admitted to be spurious. The eleventh verse should be read as follows;—

“Saying, What thou seest write in a book, and send it to the Seven Churches.”⁴

John is to write what he sees in a book; for God knows, that, among men, oral tradition cannot but become corrupted and changed. Therefore, He has

¹ See *The Great Prophecies of the Centuries concerning Israel and the Gentiles*, pp. 67-74.

² Exod. xxxiv. 10.

³ Rev. i. 1.

⁴ The words added in the A.V., “which are in Asia,” are spurious.

given, not only this, but all His revelations in writing ; so that every man may have it in his power to know certainly what those revelations are. For Satan has too successfully made void the Old Testament by the traditions of the Rabbis, and the New by the so-called Apostolical or Ecclesiastical tradition.

But, if we turn from the Scriptures of Truth to either of these traditions, we have rejected the instruction of God, and are seeking that of Satan.

In this case, what was written was to be sent first to the Seven Churches, as representatives of the whole Church. For whatever God gives to us is for the help and instruction of others : we dare not keep it to ourselves.

At the sound of the voice, John turned to see who it was that had spoken, but did not discern the form of the angel that had called to him. What he did see was a Sanctuary ; but he could not for a moment have supposed it to be the Holy Place of the Tabernacle. For he quickly perceived an absence of familiar objects : there was neither Altar of Incense nor Table of Shewbread. Nor was he gazing upon any of those Heavenly realities which were shown as a pattern to Moses when he was on the Mount. For, although seven lamps were burning before him, they were fixed, not upon a single seven-branched frame, but upon Seven distinct and separate Lampstands of gold, connected only by their common association with a glorious Human Form That was walking in the midst of them.

It was the Sanctuary arranged for the present Dispensation, that is, for the Church-period. And, consequently, the symbol of Christ's intercession,¹ and

¹ That is, the Golden Altar of Incense.

those of Israel's Twelve Tribes and their testimony in the power of the Spirit before men,¹ were removed; and, in their place, John saw the glorious Person of the Lord Jesus in the midst of Seven Golden Lampstands, the significance of which he did not comprehend.

But he describes the radiant Form That was moving among them as like to a son of man; that is, it was a Human Form, being the glorified Body of the Word Who had been made flesh, and had tabernacled among men.

He was watching the Lamps, to see if they were burning brightly; and the fact that they were burning indicated that the time was night. For, in God's Temple, the Lamps were lighted in the evening to burn through the night.

“And thou shalt command the Children of Israel, that they bring unto thee pure olive oil beaten for the light, to cause a lamp to burn continually. In the Tent of Meeting, without the veil which is before the testimony, Aaron and his sons shall order it from evening to morning before the Lord.”²

From another passage³ we learn that Aaron dressed the lamps in the morning, and lighted them at even.

And so, also, in the speech of Abijah to Jeroboam and his army, there is mention of “the Lampstand of gold with the seven lamps thereof, to burn every evening.”

Hence we may see, that, in the history of Samuel's call, the words, “ere the lamp of God went out in the

¹ That is, the Table of Shewbread and the Golden Lampstand.

² Exod. xxvii. 20, 21.

³ Exod. xxx. 7, 8.

Temple of the Lord," mean, "before the dawning of the day."

It is, then, in the night that God's lamps must burn brightly. Do we remember this, and are we striving to let our lights shine now, before we see the Morning Star on the horizon, and know that the night is gone? Are we blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom we shine as lights in the world, holding forth the Word of Life?

Unless we are so doing, we shall soon lose our opportunity, and that for ever; for the night is, indeed, far spent, and the day at hand. And, throughout all the Ages of Eternity, when, with our sinless spirit and immortal body, it will be so easy to serve the Lord, do we not think that He will look with special favour upon those who shone for Him in the black night of sin; who were eager to use up the first feeble powers of Life, which they received from above, for Him, and only for Him; who were most outspoken in their loyalty during the usurper's reign?

Are we, then, shining in the Night? Is there night in our own dwellings? Are there with us those that are still sitting in darkness, and have never yet seen the Great Light?

And are we letting our little reflection of it so shine before them that they cannot but glorify our Father Which is in the Heavens, and long to know the Source of our illumination? Is our gentle reasonableness known unto all men, our self-denial, and the fact that, like Jesus, we please not ourselves? Do we plainly declare by our conduct, that we *seek* a country, and are but strangers and pilgrims here? Is the love of our Lord and Saviour ever in our hearts, and His praises

upon our lips; and do we rejoice to speak often of Him to others?

Let us see to these things: the time for the shining of Christ's lamps in the night will soon—we know not how soon—have passed by for ever.

The Lord, then, was seen by John standing in the Sanctuary that had been prepared for this Dispensation, which, however, He was just about to leave; for John was now in the Day of the Lord: the Morning Star had arisen, and the Lights of the Night had vanished. And so, in the next scene, the Apostle beheld the Lamb, as though It had been slain, approaching the Throne to ask of His Father the nations for His inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for His possession.

Hence He had not yet assumed the royal apparel, and the many diadems; for He was clad in a long robe reaching to the feet, and girt about at the breasts with a golden girdle. The robe would be of fine linen; and, since no colour is mentioned, was doubtless white.¹ It may have corresponded to the consecrated linen tunic which the High Priest wore on the Great Day of Atonement, though it differed from the latter in two particulars.

For the material of the girdle was gold, and not fine white linen; and it was worn at the breasts, and not on the waist.

In the Holy Place of the Tabernacle all the objects were of gold, which does not tarnish, and the precious metal may, also, point to the Lord's immortality, and, therefore, to the truth of which Paul says;—

“And they, indeed, have been made priests many in number, because that by death they are

¹ Rev. xix. 14.

Psalm
2.

hindered from continuing: but He, because He abideth for ever, hath His priesthood unchangeable."¹

Again, the position of the girdle just under the arms—so different from the girding up of the loins for toil—may indicate that this Priest's service is finished. Indeed, the Lord appears to have reached that stage in His redemptive work which was represented, on the Great Day of Atonement, when Aaron, after he had offered the sacrifices, presented the blood, and dismissed the scape-goat, retired into the Holy Place, to put off the white linen apparel, and to clothe himself in his garments of glory and beauty; so that he might lift up the veil of the Tabernacle, and appear to the people, no longer in the garb of humiliation, but all-glorious in his splendid array.

"His head and his hair," the Apostle continues, "were white as white wool, as snow;" and it is in similar terms that Daniel describes His Father, the Ancient of Days.² "And His eyes were as a flame of fire," able to pierce through all things, even to the bottom of human hearts.

The word *χαλκολιβάνω*, to which His feet are compared, is very perplexing. Its easiest meaning would be "brass from Lebanon;" but no superior metal is known to have been brought from that mountain, nor has any other satisfactory explanation been proposed. Provisionally, therefore, it will be better to translate, by the help of an apparently similar expression in the Book of Daniel,³ "like to the gleam of burnished brass."

Finally, an effort is made to convey some idea

¹ Heb. vii. 23-4.

² Dan. vii. 9.

³ Dan. x. 6.

of the fulness and majesty of His voice by the glorious comparison, that it was "as a voice of many waters."

Such was the radiant Being That stood before John, of Whom we are further told, that Seven Stars were in His right hand, possibly as a wreath or garland; and that a sharp two-edged sword was going forth out of His mouth, according to His Own words spoken through Isaiah the Prophet.¹ For the time had all but come for Him to smite the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips to slay the wicked.²

Lastly, "His countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength;" that is, as the sun shines in a clear sky, veiled neither by cloud nor mist.

John was, as he has already told us, in spirit; nevertheless, he could not bear the sight of the Divinely Glorious Being in Whose Presence he found himself, and so, fell at His feet as one dead. In former days he had leaned without fear on the breast of his Lord; but those were times in which the Son of God had emptied Himself of His glory; and now they have gone by, never again to return.

But, although the Lord's conditions had been changed in every other respect, His love, at least, remained the same as it ever had been. For His hand was immediately stretched forth, and, by His touch, and words of power, strength was instantly restored to the prostrate body.

As his consciousness was returning, John heard the words;—

"Fear not, I am the First and the Last, and the Living One; and I became dead, and, behold,

¹ Isa. xlix. 2. Comp. Rev. ii. 16; xix. 21.

² Isa. xi. 4.

I am alive for evermore; and I have the keys of Death and of Hades."

The expression, "I am the First and the Last," is used of Jehovah in three passages of Isaiah;¹ while in the Apocalypse it is thrice applied to the Lord Jesus by Himself.²

"I am the First, and I am the Last; and beside Me there is no God,"³ is the declaration of Jehovah Himself; and surely there is none other who could make it, save the Father and the Son Who is One with the Father. Again we read;—

"I am the First, I also am the Last. Yea, Mine hand hath laid the foundation of the earth, and My right hand hath spread out the heavens."⁴

"The First," then, seems to refer primarily to the creation of the world. By it living beings were called into existence; hence, in the remaining passage of Isaiah, we find,

"Who hath wrought and done it, calling the generations from the beginning? I the Lord, the First, and with the Last, I am He!"⁵

Thus the phrase appears to be an unfolding of the great Name Jehovah: it sets before us the Most High as the One Who was before all things, for He created them in the beginning; and, also, as the One Who will arise at the End to see that not one jot or one tittle of His word and purpose has failed. But, of the practical application of this thought to individual believers, we may have something to say

¹ Isa. xli. 4; xlv. 6; and xlviii. 12.

² Rev. i. 17; ii. 8; xxii. 13.

³ Isa. xlv. 6.

⁴ Isa. xlviii. 12.

⁵ Isa. xli. 4.

in our remarks on the Epistle to the Church in Smyrna.

Such, then, is the meaning of the title, "the First and the Last:" when, therefore, the Lord Jesus applies it, as He does three times, to Himself, He thereby assumes the full prerogatives of the Godhead.

He claims, also, to be the Living One, that is, apparently, the absolutely Living One, the Eternal from everlasting to everlasting. And His death for us, in His human nature, in no way impairs that fact; for now He is alive for evermore.¹ Surely these last words must have thrilled the heart of John, as he remembered the gracious promise, "Because I live, ye shall live also."²

Finally, He has the keys of Death and of Hades; for such is, probably, the true order. This expression is very mysterious. The names are found together in two other passages of the Apocalypse.³ In the sixth chapter, the name of the Rider upon the livid horse is Death, and Hades follows after him. And, in the twentieth, the same two are said to give up the dead that were in them, and are themselves cast into the Lake of Fire. In both of these passages, Death and Hades are apparently persons:⁴ hence

¹ The "Amen" of the A.V. should be omitted.

² John xiv. 19.

³ Rev. vi. 8 and xx. 13, 14.

⁴ This is evidently the case in Rev. vi. 8, and probably so in Rev. xx. 13, 14. For, although, in the latter passage, Death and Hades are said, like the Sea, to give up the dead which were in them, yet the Sea is not, like Death and Hades, cast into the Lake of Fire. And if the expression, "the dead which were in them," seems to make against the personal interpretation, it is, at least, remarkable that the Complutensian Polyglott reads "their dead"—*τοὺς ἐθνῶν νεκροὺς*. It will be remembered that, in 1 Cor. xv. 26, Death is personified by Paul—"The last enemy that shall be destroyed is Death."

it seems likely, though not certain, that they are so, also, in the verse before us.

But then another question arises. If this be so, are they simply personifications of places: or are they real potentates, so called as being lords of the realms of death and the unseen world? We are inclined to the latter alternative, both from the fact that Death and Hades are, finally, cast into the Lake of Fire; and, also, because we can find a good parallel in the King of the Locusts, who is said to be "the Angel of the Abyss."¹

Having thus declared Who He was, the Lord now proceeded to give John his commission. "Write," He said, "the things which thou sawest,² and the things which are,³ and the things which shall come to pass after these things."⁴

Here, then, is the Lord's Own summary of the contents of this Book. It is divided into three parts, without a clear discrimination of which it is impossible

¹ Rev. ix. 11.

² The aorist tense εἶδες, which must be rendered "thou sawest," and which is repeated in the following verse—"The Seven Stars which thou sawest," implies that the vision had already passed away, and that Jesus only remained with the Apostle. See p. 470. In the fourth and succeeding chapters, the Sanctuary is altogether different. The Laver, the Altars, and, finally, the Ark of the Covenant, reappear, showing that the prophecy is then concerned with a period in which Israel is again the people of God.

³ According to Dean Alford, this clause should be rendered, "What things they signify." The change is not necessary, and, if preferred, does not affect the interpretation. For the exposition of what John saw must still reveal the things that are, or the present Church-period as symbolized by the Lampstands in the Sanctuary. And the first verse of the fourth chapter will none the less mark the transition from this Dispensation to Daniel's Seventieth Seven of Years.

⁴ μετὰ ταῦτα.

to understand the Revelation of Jesus Christ. We may, indeed, make a revelation of our own out of it, as, alas! too many confident aspirants to interpretation have done; but we cannot comprehend the Lord's meaning, unless we scrupulously attend to His directions. Provided, however, that we be willing to do this, we shall have little difficulty either in discovering the divisions or in interpreting the Book.

As regards the first of the three divisions, there can be no controversy; for the only things which John had already seen were the Seven Golden Lampstands, and the Lord in the midst of them with the Seven Stars in His hand. And this scene is described in the first chapter.

Again, of the third division we may affirm with equal certainty, that it begins with the first verse of the fourth chapter. This is proved by the command of the angel to John, "Come up hither, and I will show thee the things which must come to pass after these things."¹ For it will be noticed, that the angel uses the very same words as those with which the Lord described the third subject of the Book.

Hence the second and the third chapters are all that are left for a revelation of things pertaining to the second division. This latter deals with "the things that are," and is communicated by the Lord Himself. Consequently, its events are not included among the things which must be done with speed,² but appear to extend through the whole length of the present Dispensation, and so to form a connecting link between the time of the vision and the fulfilment of its third and most important section.

¹ Rev. iv. 1.

² Rev. i. 1. See p. 444

The construction of the whole Book is thus exactly similar to that of Daniel's four great prophecies, all of which, like the Apocalypse, are mainly concerned with the Time of the End. But whether they tell of the destruction of the Image or of the fall of the Little Horn, of the King of Fierce Countenance or of the King of the North, the final catastrophe is invariably connected with the days of the prophet by a slight chain of prediction passing, without interruption, through the whole of the interval between the vision and its fulfilment.

interesting

The revelations of the second division are, however, based upon the Lampstands and Stars that were seen in the first. It will, therefore, be necessary to examine the Lord's exposition of these symbols. They represent, He tells us, a mystery—a secret which the eye cannot see nor the unaided mind comprehend, and which, therefore, must have remained unknown to us, unless He had chosen to reveal it. For the Seven Stars are the Angels of the Seven Churches, and the Seven Lampstands are the Seven Churches.

Now, by the term "angel," the Lord undoubtedly intends to convey the meaning which the word invariably bears in the New Testament. The angel is a celestial being, and, if unfallen, the messenger and minister of God. Hence he has charge over the people of God, and is sent forth to minister unto them that are to inherit salvation,¹ and especially to the little ones, whose angels have constant access to the Father in the Heavens.² Angels also have the care of the elements, of the winds,³ of fire,⁴ and of water.⁵

¹ Heb. i. 14.

² Rev. vii. 1.

³ Rev. xvi. 5.

⁴ Matth. xviii. 10.

⁵ Rev. xiv. 18.

selves be punished for the state of things which their unfaithfulness has induced, as well as the oppressors and extortioners whom they ought to have checked.

We cannot, however, for a moment suppose, that angels of Satan are permitted by God to preside, over assemblies which He recognizes as Churches. What the history and circumstances of those who are entrusted with such a charge may be, we know not: the matter is shrouded in mystery. Possibly, they may be angels in a probationary state, striving to exercise aright that power which Satan and his followers abuse. We are not without Scriptural hints, that God sometimes charges His angels with folly;¹ and, for aught we know, the reference may be to certain celestial beings, who, although they did not attach themselves to Satan in his rebellion, were, nevertheless, not so absolutely faithful as they should have been, and, consequently, needed some kind of discipline and probation.

It is, however, worse than useless to speculate on such matters, which, since they are not revealed in Scripture, fall into the category of those secret things which belong unto the Lord our God.² We must, therefore, leave them until a time of more perfect knowledge, and, for the present, receive as little children that which He has thought fit to reveal to us.

There are, of course, many who would cut the knot of this difficulty by giving an unnatural meaning to the word "angel," and understanding it to indicate a presiding Elder or Bishop of the Church. But, without going further, the fact, that a single angel only is addressed in connection with each Church forbids us

¹ Job. iv. 18.

² Deut. xxix. 29.

to think of any minister in the flesh. For, in those days, there was no officer who corresponded to a Bishop in our sense of the term, or even to the pastor of a congregation. Each Church was ruled by several presbyters or *episcopi*, these terms being at the time synonymous; and we have no hint either in Scripture, or in the Didache, or the Epistle of Clement, that any one of them took precedence of the rest. Certainly Diotrefes, who loved to have the pre-eminence in his Church, may be cited as a solitary exception to the rule. But the remarks which his conduct evoked from the Apostle John do not invite us to imitate him.

After the removal of the Apostles, a tendency to hierarchy soon appeared in the Churches, and continued to increase, until it culminated in Bishops, Archbishops, Patriarchs, and Popes.

We may add, that the celestial character of these Angels of Churches is, also, plainly indicated by their symbols. For they are most appropriately represented by Stars, which have their home in the Heavens; while the Churches are likened to Lampstands, which rest upon, and give light in, the earth.

Turning now from the Stars above to the Lampstands beneath them, we find that the Lord declared the latter to be Seven Churches. But although John was commanded to send the Epistles to the Seven Assemblies in Asia, yet it is certain, that the mystery of the Stars and Lampstands cannot be restricted to those Assemblies. For the Lord is in the Sanctuary, surrounded by Seven Lampstands and no more. But there were many other Churches besides those in the Roman Province of Asia, and we know that He walks in the midst of *all* of them. Therefore, it is evident that "Seven" must here be regarded as the

number of Dispensational completeness, and the Seven Churches as, in some sense, representing all the Churches upon earth.

This is in perfect accord with our Lord's designation of the Stars and Lampstands as a mystery. And, in the eleventh verse, there is, perhaps, a first hint of the change of meaning from the literal to the mystical in the fact, that the words, "in Asia," are omitted, and never afterwards re-appear. In the twentieth verse, again, where our Lord explains the symbolism, the best reading is, "The Seven Lampstands are Seven Churches," not "*the* Seven Churches" as in the Authorized Version. A still further advance is made in the second and third chapters; for the appeal at the end of each Epistle calls upon him that hath an ear to "hear what the Spirit said unto the Churches." Here even the Seven is omitted, and all the Churches of God are manifestly intended.

So, too, in the Epilogue—for, after the third chapter, the Churches are never again mentioned, until we reach the twenty-second—we read;—"I Jesus sent Mine angel to testify unto you these things concerning the Churches."

Thus the Seven Churches of Asia, to which the Apocalypse was addressed, were merely a group selected to be representative of all the Churches of Christ upon earth.

Now, in the Sanctuary of the previous Dispensation, Israel's testimony was represented by a single but seven-branched Lampstand. Why, then, are the Churches typified by Seven distinct Lampstands, connected only by the fact that they belong to, and are dressed by, the One High Priest Who walks in the midst of them?

The reason is very simple. Israel was chosen to be the visible Kingdom of God upon earth, and to rule over the nations. Hence it was necessary that those who were entrusted with such a commission should have Jerusalem as a metropolis, and a great central Temple, in which the glory of God might be manifested, and worship be offered, at certain appointed times, by the whole people assembled from every quarter of their Land. Also a hierarchy of priests was needed, with a High Priest at their head. For, in an earthly and visible Kingdom, there must be an earthly and visible order, and an earthly and visible centre, in which the Presence of God may be recognized, and from which the Law may go forth. Every Kingdom must have a manifested unity in its own sphere, or confusion and anarchy will set in.

But God never intended that such aspirants to the Heavenly calling as might happen to be upon earth at the same time should range themselves in a world-embracing visible organization: they belong to a spiritual and Heavenly Kingdom, and the time for their reign is not yet. They are branches of Christ, the True Vine; and That Vine, the centre of their life and union, is in the Heavens. And, although at present many of the branches hang down even to the earth, nevertheless, they do not belong to the earth, or to its present rebellious Prince; they, moreover, are represented as strangers and sojourners here; and, therefore, can have no abiding city or metropolis, no central Temple, no vast spreading organization, no mighty hierarchy, in an alien land.

They are a spiritual people, and it is no earthly bond that unites them: they are knit together only because each one of them, individually, is joined to

their One Lord in the Heavens. And, when He shall appear to the world, they, also, will appear with Him, and their perfect union, both with Him and with each other, will, at last, be manifested to all men.

They can, however, show but partial union upon earth, until that time comes. Those of them who dwell near to each other in one place, should, indeed, meet together in the Name of their Lord, to worship, and to eat the Supper of His Communion. Then they will be recognized by Him as His Church in that place—a miniature of the whole Church. And, as the figure of the Lampstand testifies, their duty will be to give light to the dark world around them. For—to pass from the Apocalyptic metaphor to that of Paul—they cannot claim to be a Church of the Living God, unless they be found to be a pillar and ground of that Truth which is revealed only in Scripture.

Yes.

But there is no sign that the Church in one place was united by any earthly or visible bonds to that in another: for the Lampstands are distinct and independent. It was sufficient that they should be connected by their obedience to One Lord, Who moved among them to see and to judge.

Hence the view that is here set before us of the Churches of our Dispensation precludes the idea of anything like a hierarchy, or combined body. And, in perfect harmony with this fact, the Seven Churches which were in the one province of Asia were called the Churches, and not the Church, of that province.

Another very important point must, also, be noticed. Each of the Lampstands represents the whole Church in a single place. There is no recognition of human divisions or sects: but all the Lord's people who dwell in the same city, or district, are regarded by Him as

one assembly, whatever their outward differences may be.

Of anything like divisions or factions among believers, the Bible speaks with abhorrence. For, whenever such a tendency begins to discover itself, the union of love is broken; while, if it be encouraged and developed, the spiritual soon becomes carnal, and the personal attachment and obedience to the Lord Jesus are changed into an earthly and formal religion.

It was an early instance of this mischief which Paul rebuked in the Corinthians, when they were falling apart into four sections named after Paul, Apollos, Cephas, and Christ.

"Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were ye baptized into the name of Paul?"

he indignantly demands.

Afterwards, when about to speak of the Lord's Supper, he returns to the subject,

"For first of all, when ye come together in the assembly, I hear that divisions exist among you, and I partly believe it.

For there must be even sects among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you."

Now, the four factions mentioned above had not yet definitely separated. They still met in the same room for the Lord's Supper; but each party waited only until its own members had arrived, and then proceeded with the Supper, without reference to the rest of their brethren.¹ Paul, however, warned them, that their divisions would soon harden into permanent sects,

¹ 1 Cor. xi. 33.

Sects are
now allowed
among the
members of the
Flesh -
See Gal.
5:20
translated
"heresies" in
A. V.

which God would use, as He does other works of the Devil, to bring out the difference between His faithful people and the quarrelsome, ambitious and self-willed servants, or the mere professors.¹ For divisions and sects provide something on which the carnal mind of the latter classes can feed; and they become so absorbed in the struggle with those who differ from them—perhaps, but slightly after all—and in the effort to sustain and improve the position of their own party, that the real end of faith gradually fades from their thoughts, which are now fully employed in earthly things. And so, it comes to pass, that, in the hearts of many, their own particular Church or Sect successfully usurps the place of the Lord Jesus and of the things that are above, where He sits at the right hand of God.

In the New Testament, the word *eritheia*² is specially

¹ 1 Cor. xi. 18, 19.

² *ἐριθεία*. This word occurs seven times in the New Testament, as follows;—

Rom. ii. 8. "But unto them that are *factious*, and obey not the truth, but obey unrighteousness, shall be wrath and indignation." Here Paul implies that those who are inspired by party-spirit are sure to forsake the Word of God, in order to serve their party; and so, are found to be obeying unrighteousness and not the truth.

In Gal. v. 20, party-spirit is mentioned as one of the manifest works of the flesh. The group in which it is placed consists of rivalries—or jealousies—outbursts of wrath, *caballings*, divisions, and organized and permanent sects. In this case our word is in the plural; and, in Greek, an abstract noun often becomes concrete in the plural. Hence *ἐριθείαι* would mean acts resulting from party-spirit, intrigues, or *caballings*.

In 2 Cor. xii. 20, the same word is found in a somewhat similar group;—"Lest by any means there should be strife, jealousy, outbursts of wrath, *caballings*, backbitings, whisperings, swellings, tumults."

Phil. i. 17;—"But the other proclaim Christ out of *party-spirit*,

used to indicate this state of mind; but its true meaning has been missed in the Authorized Version, in which it is wrongly translated, sometimes by "contention," sometimes by "strife." For a very general opinion obtained, that the word was merely a lengthened form of *eris*,¹ strife; although it was positively distinguished from the latter in two passages.² Now, however, the old derivation is acknowledged by all scholars to be false, and that which follows is substituted for it.

For the abstract noun *eritheia* is formed from *erithos* a hireling, hired labourer, and specially a partizan, or canvasser, hired by political leaders to forward their cause. Hence *eritheia* came to mean the spirit which such hired canvassers would manifest, party-spirit, or, in the case of Christian believers differing among themselves, Sectarianism.

Now, if such a feeling be allowed to grow in the heart of professed believers, it soon becomes the paramount motive for work, and sets aside that of love to the Redeemer and Head of the invisible and only

not sincerely, thinking to raise up affliction for me in my bonds." And, again, in ii. 2, 3, "Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be of the same mind, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind; doing nothing through *party-spirit* or vainglory, but in lowliness of mind each counting other better than himself." From these and other passages—e.g. i. 27; ii. 1-4, 12, 14; iv. 2—divisions seem to have been rife, at Philippi.

In Jas. iii. 14-16, there is a very strong censure of party-spirit;—"But if ye have bitter jealousy and *party-spirit* in your hearts, glory not and lie not against the truth. This wisdom is not a wisdom that cometh down from above, but is earthly soulish demonlike. For where jealousy and *party-spirit* are, there is confusion and every vile deed."

¹ *ἔρις*.

² 2 Cor. xii. 20; Gal. v. 20.

true Church. On the other hand, so far as it affects their attitude toward brethren who do not follow them, it reveals itself in the guise of Sectarianism—a feeling which tends to substitute Church, Chapel, or Meeting-room, as the case may be, for the Lord Jesus, deprives Christianity of its spiritual force, and powerfully fosters earthly-mindedness, ambition, strife, and even hatred. Moreover, it quickly obliterates the Lord's ideal of local and independent Churches upon earth, connected only by His Presence and influence, as represented by the Seven separate Lampstands with Himself walking in the midst of them.

It would thus appear, that the lessons taught by this vision are simple and obvious. But they are neither received nor regarded by the vast majority of professing Christians. For earthly hopes and ambitions cannot exist in their light: the dream of a great Universal Hierarchy, of One United Catholic Church upon earth, pales and dies before them.

CHAPTER IX

THE EPISTLES TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES

Rev. ii., iii

WE have considered the introductory vision of the Apocalypse, and must now proceed to examine its second and third chapters, which contain the Epistles to the Seven Churches.

And, first, in regard to the purpose of these letters, there can be little doubt that they were primarily intended for the communities to which they were addressed, and dealt with actual circumstances of the time.

But, as we have already seen, they are also treated collectively as "the things that are," in contradistinction to the things that shall be after them, in another Dispensation.

Hence it seems clear, that the Churches selected must have been chosen because of their representative character. And, taking, also, into consideration the order in which they are placed, we may, probably, see in these Seven Epistles—apart from their literal application—a twofold purpose, affecting all the Churches of God's people upon earth.

For, firstly, if we regard them as a whole, we may, probably, detect in them specimens of every kind of circumstance, temptation, or trial, which God's fore-

knowledge saw in the future of Christian believers. Hence He is enabled, by means of them, to give advice, comfort, exhortation, or warning, to any of His Own disciples, and at any time during the course of the Church-period.

And, secondly, if considered in the order in which they were given, they will be found to foreshadow the successive predominant phases through which the Nominal Church was to pass, from the time of the vision until the close of the Age.

We may thus discover two powerful reasons for the selection of these particular Churches, to the exclusion of others of equal or even greater importance, but whose circumstances at the time would not have been suitable to the Lord's purpose; and, also, for the fact, that the number of the Epistles is Seven, which here, as elsewhere, points to Dispensational fulness or completion.

In this volume, we are, of course, mainly concerned with the Epistles as prophetically foreshadowing the great changes which should succeed each other in the condition of the nominal and visible Churches. And this they do in a striking manner, although their import is partially veiled.

For, when we examine the first of them, we find that its predictions are addressed to a people whose doctrine and conduct are still unexceptionable, but in whom the great motive power of love has imperceptibly waned. This is the very symptom for which we should naturally look in the earliest stage of spiritual declension; for, when the fervour of first impressions is beginning to cool, modes of life and action are often continued for a while, either from habit, or to save reputation, and are no longer the genuine outcome of

a burning zeal. Moreover, the condition of believers in Ephesus harmonizes wonderfully with the actual state of things in the Churches at the time when all the Apostles, save John, had passed away.

Again, if we turn to the Seventh Epistle, that to the Church of the Laodiceans, we perceive that it describes features which, according to other Scriptures, will characterize the closing days of this Age. For those who are addressed persist, indeed, in retaining a certain form of godliness, but neither regard its significance nor feel its power. They are self-satisfied and complacent on the very eve of judgment. And the Lord, Who is in the act of rejecting them, has withdrawn from their midst, and is only lingering for a moment at the door, to make a last offer to individual believers, and to utter a final warning.

Hence the First and the Seventh Epistle fall naturally into their places as the beginning and end of a series, and correspond precisely with all that we learn from history and prophecy of the epochs which they foreshadow.

And the very fact, that they so clearly delineate the earliest and final periods of Christianity, at once suggests the probability, that the remaining five, also, may take up the story, and depict the intermediate phases of the same history.

And this, as we hope presently to show, they do in a very remarkable manner; indeed, in the case of all the Seven Epistles, and apart from their corroborative details, the bare names of the Churches addressed suggest seven ecclesiastical epochs. Those names we now subjoin, before examining the Epistles themselves, and add their significations, and the periods of Church-history in which they appear to find their fulfilment.

Ephesus = relaxation. The waning of love at the close of Apostolic times.

Smyrna = bitterness; also myrrh, an unguent especially used for embalming the dead. The epoch of the Ten Great Persecutions.

Pergamum = a tower. Earthly greatness of the Nominal Church, from the accession of Constantine.

Thyatira = she that is unwearied in sacrifices. The Catholic Churches, with their perpetually repeated Sacrifice of the Mass.

Sardis = renovation. The results of the Reformation.

Philadelphia = brotherly love. The gathering in of those who believe the love of Christ to be a stronger bond of union than any ties of sect. This gathering evidently involves preparation for the Lord's return.

Laodicea = the custom, or judgment, of the people. The period in which the people constitute themselves judges of what is right, and so altogether set aside the Word of God. They are, consequently, rejected of the Lord Jesus.

Thus even the mere names of the Churches furnish us with a slight sketch of the history of Christendom, until the End of the Age, and the outline, as we shall presently see, is wonderfully filled in by the Epistles themselves.

But, if this be so, the question naturally arises, Why did the Lord choose so peculiar a form for His revelation? The answer is simple. Because He did not wish the prophetic import of the Epistles to be distinctly understood, until the Last Days had come. For, while these two chapters have been at all times most useful for reproof, correction, instruction, and exhortation,

their predictions were scarcely likely to be discovered, or even suspected, until they were all but fulfilled. And so, they would never, by suggesting events that must first happen, cause believers to say, "My Lord delayeth His coming." And, on the other hand, when, at the time of the End, the Spirit should unveil their meaning, He would, by so doing, bring a deep conviction of the nearness of the Advent to every thoughtful and reverent mind.

And there is also another cause of obscurity in this form of prophecy. For, from the very nature of the case, such predictions cannot be direct and literal, as the prophecies of single events in the fourth and following chapters are, but can only dimly foreshadow things to come, though, if the clue be once obtained, with an outline sufficiently distinct.

Lastly, we must notice, that in this prophecy, as in that of the Seven Parables, a phase that has once commenced may be continued, though often with contracted area, far beyond the time of its predominance, even, indeed, until the Lord's return. There is a plain intimation that this will be so in the case of Pergamum—for the Lord has not yet fought against the Balaamites with the sword of His mouth; in that of Thyatira—for the remnant are bidden to hold that fast which they have, until He come; in that of Sardis—for she is told, that, unless she watches, He will come upon her as a thief: and in that of Philadelphia—for He promises her that He is coming quickly, and charges her to hold fast that which she has, that no one take her crown. Indeed, the Nominal Churches will, probably, in their last days, as in their first, embrace communities which, taken together, will exhibit all the characteristics mentioned in the two chapters; so that each of the

Epistles will retain its directly practical value until the End. But, at that time, the prevailing phase will be the Laodicean.

*The Epistle to the Church in Ephesus*¹

The believers in Ephesus had, as a Church, enjoyed the greatest privileges; and, stirred by the ministry of Paul, Apollos, Timothy, Tychicus, and others, they had so far advanced in holiness and the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ that Paul, in his Epistle to them, was able to speak in terms of high commendation.

But the letter from the Lord Himself, which we are now to consider, was dictated some thirty years later, and then the symptoms of a deadly decay were beginning to appear. Another generation had arisen, which still held fast the tradition of earnest devotion to Christ, but had lost much of its motive power. Good works, and, in many things, even righteous judgment, were still tarrying with them; but love, the self-ignoring and ardent love of earlier days, was silently passing away. And so, this Church, with its suggestive name of Ephesus, or relaxation,² could aptly represent that waning of love in all the Churches, which, even in Apostolic times, had begun so to lower their spiritual powers that they were gradually lapsing into indifference and carnality.

To the Ephesian believers, then, the Lord presents Himself as the One Who keeps in full control the Seven Angels of the Churches, and walks continually

¹ The translations of the Seven Epistles are omitted to save space: will the reader, therefore, kindly peruse them in the Revised Version?

² Ἐφεσος, perhaps from ἐφίημι, which sometimes means "to let go," "to loosen the rein."

in the midst of the Lampstands, that is, of the Churches themselves; for such facts were likely to have been forgotten by those who had lost their first love, and whose hearts were, consequently, becoming alienated from Him.

The result of His ceaseless watching is, that He knows, not merely every word and deed, but even every thought, of the Ephesian believers; and most graciously does He first mention what is deserving of praise.

Their works, and labour, and patience, on behalf of all who were in the professing body, have not escaped His notice. He has observed their hatred of those that were evil, and their carefulness in testing and detecting the false Apostles, of whom they had been forewarned.¹

He has seen, too, their attitude towards those that were without, their steady and patient endeavours to lead them to Him, and their willingness to bear persecution for His sake; and He has marked, that, spite of ceaseless hindrance and opposition, they have not grown weary in well-doing.

He had no complaint to make in regard either to doctrine or to work. There is both orthodoxy and zeal; and, moreover, a praiseworthy determination to be separated from evil. And yet all this cannot avail. Upon the seemingly perfect Church, there is a slow-spreading plague-spot, which causes Him suddenly to change His tone. The praise He has bestowed is deserved; but He is compelled to add;—"Nevertheless, I have against thee that thou didst leave thy first love."² The teaching, the labour, the patience, and the zeal, of Ephesus are blameless; but

¹ See Acts xx. 28-30.

² The "somewhat" of the A.V. is not found in the Greek, and its introduction conceals the severity of the reproof.

her love is waxing cold, and, therefore, she is rapidly becoming as sounding brass or a clanging cymbal.

Nevertheless, He does not abandon her. He calls upon her to remember her former condition; to look back upon what she was, that she may mourn for what she is, and cry, "Oh that I were as in months past!" For, after all, this Church, which to the eyes of men seemed perfect and wanting in nothing, is found to be fallen!

A threat follows. Unless she repents, and resumes her first works—not merely feels once more her first feelings, but actually does the works which should spring from them—the High Priest will remove her Lampstand: she shall be His witness no longer.

This chastisement does not involve everlasting destruction, but only the withdrawal of power to bear effectual testimony. Many an unfaithful and worldly minded believer is smitten by it, and thenceforth walks the earth deprived of all power to speak for his Lord. He may utter words, but they carry no weight: the influence of the Spirit does not accompany them. For the sins of his covetousness, for his selfishness, for his carnal indulgence, and because his soul cleaves to the dust of earth, he has been bereft of the gifts which he was abusing, and the precious seed-time of life is stealthily gliding by: he cannot hope to have boldness in the Day of Judgment, much less to reign with Christ: the anguish of a terrible loss will be his lot, and to be saved only "so as through fire."

So searchingly does the Lord use His eyes of flame; and, as we shall presently see, in laying bare the condition of the Ephesian believers, He reveals to us the earliest symptom of decline which appeared in the universal Church, that is to say, the wane of love.

But what depths of His tenderness are shown in this Epistle! He first speaks at length of those things which he could commend; and then, after a very few words of censure, again reverts to praise. Yet He does rebuke: He will not overlook our faults for the sake of our virtues.

The last thing for which the Church in Ephesus can be commended is, that she hates the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which the Lord also hates. These Nicolaitans were evidently a party of the day which was endeavouring to press its views upon the Ephesian believers, but whose efforts, so far, had failed. Of their history nothing is known; for all notices of them in early writers are manifest conjectures, framed to explain the Lord's allusion. If, then, we wish for further information, we have absolutely nothing to fall back upon, save the meaning of their name. But, since an investigation of this point is more particularly connected with the prophetic aspect of the Epistle, we will defer it until the next section, merely remarking for the present, that their opinions seem to have tended to a dangerous exaltation of the officers of the Church. There were evidently some in the Ephesian assembly who had the spirit of Diotrephes; but, up to this time, the believers had remembered their Lord's words, "Neither be ye called masters; for One is your Master, even the Christ;" and, consequently, they had opposed and baffled the ambition of such men.

✓ For the time, then, the Ephesian believers had rejected Nicolaitanism; but the significant manner in which the Lord acknowledges this fact, together with the emphatic addition of the words, "which I, also, hate," may, perhaps, be a hint, that, although the Church was still standing in that particular, she had

grave reasons to take heed lest she should fall. For, if any Church ceases to love the Lord, and no longer holds fast the Head, how can it avoid becoming a mere earthly organization under human leaders?

So far, then, the Lord has spoken to the whole body of professed believers at Ephesus. To these He has manifested Himself, and revealed His intimate knowledge of their every action and most secret thoughts. He has, moreover, given them what praise He could, pointed out and reproved their apostasy, and warned and threatened them. But, hitherto, no words of promise have passed His lips. For every visible Church upon earth includes within its fold insincere and half-hearted persons, who are trying to make the best of both Worlds; cowardly believers, who will hold to Christ only if they may do so without persecution or reproach; and many other kinds of false brethren, who, according to the Lord's Own words, will seek to enter in at the strait gate of the Kingdom, but will not be able. For, although, like Herod, they may be willing to do many things, they will not give up their whole heart to the Lord, but will retain some carnal desires, some darling sins. For such He has no promises; to these He can offer no prize. And so, He ceases to speak to the whole Church, and addresses Himself to a select few of her members.

These are characterized as having an ear, and are, therefore, exhorted to hear what the Spirit is saying to the Churches. There can be little doubt that the reference is to the spiritual believers as distinguished from the carnal, those who have been baptized in, or filled with, the Spirit, in contradistinction to such as have merely received the Spirit. For the latter,

although they have been saved, have not been joined to the Lord, and become One Spirit. Hence they cannot understand the mysteries, the deep things, of God. And so, whenever—as here, and in the case of the Seven Parables—the Lord is about to utter dark sayings, things into the depths of which unaided human minds cannot penetrate,¹ He uses the formula, “He that hath an ear”—or, “ears”—“to hear,” “let him hear.”² For such revelations are beyond the intellect of man; the things of God none knoweth save the Spirit of God.³ Only those, then, whose ears are opened by Him are exhorted to hear “what He is saying to the Churches.”

Yet, again; those only who have been baptized in the Spirit are able to overcome in that war against the world, the flesh and the Devil, which every saint must carry on from the day of his conversion, until the moment of his death. This is the struggle in which Paul described himself as engaged, when he wrote to the Philippians.⁴ And, to him that overcomes in it, a promise is given, both here and in each of the other Epistles.

In this case, the promise is, that the overcomer shall eat of the Tree of Life which is in the midst of the Paradise of God. Now the reference cannot be to the simple Gift of Everlasting Life; for that is given unconditionally to all believers. It must, therefore, be to something far beyond that, and since it is to be won by a victorious conflict, is evidently of the nature of a prize or reward.

¹ Matth. xiii. 35.

² Matth. xiii. 9.

³ I Cor. ii. 10, 11.

⁴ Phil. iii. 10-14. See *The Church the Churches and the Mysteries*, pp. 36-48.

Probably, there is here an allusion to the Paradise on the summit of the Heavenly Jerusalem,¹ and a hint, that, so far as believers of this Age are concerned, those only who overcome will attain to dwell in that abode of God and the Lamb. For, apparently, the fruit of the Tree of Life is for His servants who serve before the Throne, while the leaves are for the healing of another order of His people, called the nations. And, although the City is the Bride,² as being the habitation of just Israelites made perfect, yet, since the glory of the Lord will reside upon the summit of its Pyramid, His Body the Church must also be there, and her members are, doubtless, the servants more immediately around the Throne.

Thus the meaning of the first promise seems to be, that every overcomer will regain what Adam lost, the right of access to the Tree of Life. But how different will be his condition from that of Adam before the Fall. For Adam was in a state of innocence, because he was without knowledge; there was but one sin which he could commit, a single test only of his loyalty to his Creator and God. Yet, even in the matter of that single test, he failed: he wickedly stole the forbidden knowledge of good and evil, when he had power to choose the one and reject the other. And, therefore, his immediate expulsion from Paradise was imperative, lest he should put forth his hand, and take, also, of the Tree of Life; and so, live for ever, hopelessly guilty and sinful as he then was.

But in a very different condition will the overcomer approach the life-giving fruit. He will know well, and that through sad experience, the difference between

¹ Rev. xxii. 1-5.

² Rev. xxi. 9, 10.

good and evil, and will have overcome evil by the Blood of the Lamb, and the regenerating and sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit.

No possible evil will lurk for him amid the fair trees which adorn the banks of the River of Life. No Tempter will be there ; no power of sin ; no ambush of death, or of sorrow, or crying, or pain ; for Holy will be the Place, and God and the Lamb will be dwelling there. Nor will there be any flaming sword to bar his way with its threatening flashes. For he will be the redeemed of God, the called and chosen and faithful servant of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Historic Fulfilment of the First Epistle

We have already shown, that the Seven Epistles were so arranged by the Lord as to convey a prophetic as well as a literal meaning ; and that, as a prophecy, they must be taken consecutively, and understood to refer, not to any particular assembly, or assemblies, in Apostolic times, but to the aggregate of the professing Churches upon earth throughout the whole of the present Age. And that, in this way, they were intended to form a connecting link between the time of the vision and that of the End, with which the remainder of the Revelation is concerned.

In adopting this interpretation, we cannot but feel that the letter addressed to the Ephesian believers must be of paramount importance ; because, as being the first of the series, and, therefore dealing with the very earliest period of Christianity, it will necessarily contain the Lord's view of the causes which so quickly led to corruption and apostasy.

And these causes, as we may gather from the Epistle, were as follows ;—

- I. Forgetfulness of the Lord's Almighty Power, ceaseless Presence among His people, and knowledge of all that they were doing, or thinking of doing.
- II. A consequent weakening and gradual disappearance of love for, and attachment to, His Person. And, although, for a short while, no serious effect either upon their doctrine or conduct was apparent, yet both were being stealthily perverted.
- III. Ceasing to be satisfied with Christ as their Head, many were seized by a desire for human leaders; while others sought to establish themselves as heads of the various Churches.

Now, the first of these causes is very manifestly implied by the Lord in the beginning of the Epistle. For it is evident that He described Himself as "He that holdeth the Seven Stars in His right hand," and, "walketh in the midst of the Seven Golden Lampstands," because He foresaw how quickly His disciples would forget, that all authority had been given to Him in Heaven, the home of the Stars, and upon earth, the floor of the Lampstands. So, too, He added, that, as the result of His continual Presence and vigilance, He knew all their works and thoughts; for He was well aware, that the suggestions of Satan were gradually obscuring their vivid consciousness of His omniscience.

With the second cause He charges them in plain words; for, after commending their zeal and untiring efforts to do and to preserve the truth, He adds, "But I have against thee, that thou didst leave thy first love."

Since, however, in this case He confined Himself to dealing with the inward working of the mischief,

when as yet it had effected no visible deterioration—or, at least, none that could be easily detected—we have, of course, much difficulty in pointing to the precise fulfilment of His prediction ; for He Alone can try the heart and the reins. But we have His word for it, that the germ of all corruption is quickened as soon as the fear and love of Himself begin to be diminished in the heart of believers. And we can, at least, cite primitive Churches, in which the inward sin was in the act of revealing itself to the ears and eyes of men.

Take, for instance, the body of professing Christians among whom the “*Didache*,” or, “*Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*,” originated—a Church Manual, the date of which must have been very near to that of the *Apocalypse*. Now, it would seem that the state of the Church in that district was generally admirable. Her members were evidently possessed of a high moral code, founded almost entirely upon the Lord’s Own words : they were careful and correct in regard to the two Ordinances, and had added no other to them. The prayers appointed for use at the Lord’s Supper are beautiful and unexceptionable, so far as they go, and express a due regard and affection for the whole Church. Here are specimens ;—

“As this broken bread was scattered upon the mountains, and, after having been gathered together, became one, so let Thy Church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into Thy Kingdom ; for Thine is the glory and the power through Jesus Christ for ever.”¹

“Remember, O Lord, Thy Church, to deliver her from all evil, and to perfect her in Thy love ;

¹ *Didache* ix. 4.

and to gather her together from the four winds, her who has been sanctified for Thy Kingdom, which Thou didst prepare for her.”¹

“Let grace come, and let this world pass away!

Hosanna to the God of David!

If any one is holy, let him come.²

If any one is not holy, let him repent.³

Maranatha. Amen.”⁴

The remarks on local government by Bishops and Deacons are correct and Scriptural; and here, again, no addition is made to the teaching of the New Testament; for only two orders of local Ministers are mentioned. And, finally, the believers of this district were looking for the Lord's return, and were well aware of the trouble that was to precede it, and of the appearing of the Antichrist, “the World-deceiver, as Son of God.”⁵ Indeed, so far as its moral and prophetic doctrine and outward conduct are concerned, it would be difficult to find, in the Christendom of to-day, a Church so scripturally perfect as this must have been.

Yet, alas! we quickly detect a terrible deficiency in its fundamental doctrines. For the Manual makes no mention of the Blood of the Lord Jesus as the great and only expiation for sins—no, not even in the very

¹ *Didache* x. 5. From the first two quotations, it would appear, that, in those times, the Kingdom was identified with the glorified Church—an explanation both simple and true. It was that Heavenly Kingdom, unto which Paul trusted that the Lord would preserve him (2 Tim. iv. 18); the Prize of the Heavenly calling, and so, not the same as the calling itself.

² “Let him come,” that is, to the Lord's Supper.

³ “Let him repent,” that is, let him repent, and then come.

⁴ *Ibid.* x. 6.

⁵ *Ibid.* xvi. 4.

Communion-service itself! Still worse, another mode of doing away with sins is recommended, as it is so often in early Christian writings;—

“If thou hast possessions, thou shalt give with thy hands a ransom for thy soul.”¹

How completely, then, must this Church have left her first love: how deep must have been her fall, seeing that she had forgotten the greatest and most enduring work that her Lord had done for us—that work but for which we had all been at this moment without God, and without hope, in the world. And many other Churches were, doubtless, in a similarly sad condition; for there is very little Gospel-truth to be found among “the Fathers” of this time.

To explain the third step in the direction of apostasy, it will be necessary to investigate the meaning of the word, “Nicolaitans,” which we omitted to do in the previous section. As we there remarked, in the literal sense of the Epistle, the Nicolaitans were evidently a sect or party of the day, whose advocates were striving to propagate their views among the Ephesian believers, but had met with a temporary check. We further stated, that no reliable information concerning them could be obtained from ancient sources; and so, that nothing was left for us, but to learn what we could from their name, which we will now endeavour to do.

Literally, the word means “subjugators of the laity,” or “people;”² and in the prophetic interpretation of

¹ *Didache* iv. 6.

² *Νικολαῖτος*, from *νικάω* “to conquer,” “overpower,” and *λαός*, “people.” From the latter word comes the English term “laity,” through the adjective *λαῖτος*. The name Balaam, which is brought into connection with the Nicolaitans in the Epistle to Pergamum, has a still stronger meaning, and signifies “devourer of the people.”

the Epistle, it is probably used in a typical sense, like Balaamites, Jezebel, and Sodom and Egypt, in other parts of the Apocalypse. Its introduction here seems to intimate, that the Apostolic arrangements for the government of the Churches were beginning to be abused; that some were already striving to act as lords over the charge allotted to them, endeavouring to establish a hierarchy, a clerical caste, which should be distinguished from, and superior to, the great body of believers. No authority for such a scheme could be found in the New Testament, and those who were guided by the Word and Spirit of God must have foreseen how disastrous its results would be. For, if successfully carried out, it would turn away the eyes of the Church from her great High Priest, and fix them upon human leaders; it would quickly arouse party-spirit, cause schisms, and tend to secularize that which should be purely spiritual: and it would soften, and, finally, obliterate, the line between the Church and the World, and lead the Church to use the tactics, and to adopt the decadence

Paul anticipated New Age were the address to the Ephesian Elders the Lord Jesus, and

"I know that as the Only Head of the Church, the grievous wolves shall endeavor to divide the flock. And ye men arise, ye shall be overseers."

the disciples proved by an examination of the following And these men 7, 28; Titus i. 5-7; 1 Pet. v. 1, 2. In Phil. i. 1, yet yielded to those who said that had been another order. So, in 1 Tim. iii. 1-7, those who said that and, then, in vv. 8-13, goes on at once to detected, and found

Rome uses Bishop and Presbyter as inter-
Teaching of the Twelve Apostles contains
 therefore, for yourselves Bishops and

¹ Acts xx. 29, 30. (v. 1).

Peter also throws out a hint, that the evil was spreading in other Churches, when he intreats the Elders, to whom he is writing, not to exercise the oversight of their flocks as if they were lords over the charge allotted to them.¹ And John refers to a particular case, and speaks of one Diotrephes, who loved to have the pre-eminence, and was casting out of the Church those who would not submit to him.²

But all this mischief had been foreseen and reprobated by the Saviour Himself in the memorable words ;—

“Ye know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Not so shall it be among you : but whosoever would become great among you shall be your minister ; and whosoever would be first among you shall be your servant.”³

Some twelve years after the dictation of this letter, Ignatius addressed an epistle to the Ephesians, which contains unmistakable evidence, that a hierarchy was then being established among them. Ignatius supports it, and gives the most extravagant injunctions respecting obedience, which culminate in the words ;—

“It is expedient for us, that we ought to obey the bishop, as we would look

tracting general
often alludes to
s, allows himself

¹ Matth. xx. 25-7.

² Ignat. Ad. Eph. vi.

“As, therefore, the Lord does nothing without the Father—‘For I can,’ He says, ‘of Mine Own Self do nothing’—so also do ye nothing without the Bishop; whether ye be Presbyters, or Deacons, or laymen?”¹

Ignatius is the first writer who uses the term Bishop in something more like the modern than the Apostolic sense. Yet the Bishop of which Ignatius speaks is no more than the Chief Pastor of one assembly. For the Apostles instituted only two orders of ministers, Elders, or Presbyters, and Deacons; and there were several Elders, of equal rank, attached to each assembly. But, when Churches began to be organized among the Gentiles, as well as in Palestine, the Greek term Bishop² was often substituted for Elder. The two words were, however, strictly synonymous,³ until the beginning of the second century, when, as we learn from Ignatius, it became customary to set one of the Bishops over the rest, and to call the latter Presbyters only.

Thus, then, the signs of decadence among professing Christians of the first Age were the waning of deep and heartfelt love to the Lord Jesus, and a consequent discontent with Him as the Only Head of His Body,

¹ Ignat. Ad. Magn. vii.

² ἐπίσκοπος, that is “overseer.”

³ This may be readily proved by an examination of the following passages;—Acts xx. 17, 28; Titus i. 5-7; 1 Pet. v. 1, 2. In Phil. i. 1, Paul salutes the Bishops and Deacons: he would not have left out the Presbyters if they had been another order. So, in 1 Tim. iii. 1-7, he speaks of Bishops, and, then, in vv. 8-13, goes on at once to Deacons. Clement of Rome uses Bishop and Presbyter as interchangeable terms, and the *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* contains the command;—“Appoint, therefore, for yourselves Bishops and Deacons worthy of the Lord” (xv. 1).

the Church—a feeling similar, perhaps, to that which prompted the Israelites to demand a king who should go before them. And so, men began to form human organizations, which, whatever their nominal sovereignty, soon proved by their deeds that they owed allegiance, not to Christ, but to the Prince of this World.

The allusion in the promise to the overcomer in this Epistle is singularly appropriate to the Prophetic interpretation.

The parents of our race were created in innocence, and should have eaten of the Tree of Life; but were commanded by God not to touch the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Then another being, the Tempter, appeared upon the scene, and induced them to break God's commandment on the ground of expediency.

Thus they turned from Jehovah and obeyed Satan; they ate of the forbidden fruit, and were, consequently, driven out of the garden, and far away from the Tree which would have made them live for ever.

So, in these early days of the Church, Satan craftily enticed her aside from her Lord; and, as her love toward Him began to wax cold, suggested that His spiritual Presence was no sufficient connecting bond for the assemblies of His people upon earth, and that believers must, therefore, endeavour to weld themselves into societies by adopting such forms of government as are usual in the world.

To these seductions she yielded, and, despising the wisdom which is from above, chose rather to be led by that which is earthly, soulish, and demonlike. So her early purity became as the morning dew: she was quickly, as a corporate society, thrust out of the Heavenly Places, into which she had been

called to sit with Christ: her organization began more and more nearly to resemble those of this world: and she was soon fain, by minding earthly things, to seek consolation for the loss of that spiritual power which now remained only with some of her individual members.

The Epistle to the Church in Smyrna

We have seen that, in the first, or Ephesian period, the Church was losing the fervour of her love to the Lord Jesus. In the second, we may discern the correction of this declension, the severe chastening which followed closely upon the early symptoms of corruption. And this is foreshadowed in the Epistle to Smyrna, the very name of which is deeply suggestive: ¹ for its root-meaning is "bitterness;" and it then comes to signify "myrrh," an unguent commonly used in connection with death.² The love of the Church for Christ is diminishing; therefore, the world, which is attracting her, must be made bitter: she must be cast into affliction and suffering, even unto death. But the loving sympathy of the Lord shines forth in this painful crisis: He has no censure for the persecuted Church,³ but only gracious words

¹ *Σμύρνα* is used for *μύρρα*, that is myrrh. It is connected with a Hebrew root which shows that "bitterness" is its primary meaning.

² John xix. 39, 40.

³ Not that she had no faults; but because her affliction was sufficiently correcting them. In the Ephesian period, the Church was required to work; and this she did, spreading the knowledge of the Lord Jesus throughout the world. But, in so doing, she lost the warmth of her love for Him. And now, in the Smyrna-period, her part is to suffer; for suffering brings us back to Christ, and restores our souls to the paths of righteousness. And so, the Smyrna-Church,

of praise and encouragement, and a tender exhortation to His Own to be faithful unto the end, that He may give them a Crown of Life.

He describes Himself to them as the First and the Last: and how comforting is the thought conveyed by this title to those who are suffering and depressed. For, at times, when hope has been long deferred, it seems to sickening faith as if God had departed from our world, and none were left to check the cruel power of the Enemy. But it is not so: whatever may happen in the meanwhile, He that was the First, and gave the promises, will also appear with irresistible power as the Last, to see that they fail not in the very least particular. So that every fainting believer may revive himself with the glorious—though in our version somewhat obscure—words of Job;—

“ I know that my Redeemer liveth,
And that He shall arise as the Last One over
my dust !” ¹

But the Lord also reminds His troubled people, that He is the One “ Which was dead and lived again.” “ When He putteth forth His Own sheep, He goeth before them.” All their sufferings He has endured in His Own Person; therefore, He knows how to succour them: His path of death had led to Everlasting Life; and as it had been with Him, so should it be with His faithful disciples.

while she has not, indeed, done such great things as the Ephesian, does not need the sharp exhortation to repent. The life of an individual believer resembles that of the whole Church: the microcosm is like the macrocosm. Sometimes we are called to action, and the excitement of doing, especially if we be immediately successful, causes such a deterioration of humility and love that suffering must follow.

¹ Job. xix. 25.

With the conditions and trials of this Church, also, the High Priest is fully acquainted: He has marked her tribulation, and the patience with which she endured it. Whenever affliction has altogether ceased, it is to us much as waters that have flowed by: but He remembers in what spirit we bore it, and will by no means forget our trustfulness, if we have been enabled to commit ourselves into His hand as unto a faithful Creator.

The believers in Smyrna were bowed down by oppression, and were also in great poverty; but they had taken joyfully the spoiling of their goods. And the Lord declares, that, in the meanwhile, their treasure in Heaven has been augmenting, and that they will presently find themselves exceedingly rich, and a notable example of the word;—"There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth."

But He not only knows the afflictions of His people, and puts all their tears into His bottle, He also sees the cruelty and blasphemy of their oppressors. In the literal application of the Epistle, those "which say they are Jews, and are not," were probably actual Jews according to the flesh, who in early times were always on the side of the enemies of the Church.¹ And it is worthy of notice, that, in the account of Polycarp's death at Smyrna, certain Jews are mentioned as being active in providing the wood for his martyrdom.

But the Church in Smyrna was not only suffering from the curses and revilings of Jews, it had also known what it was to be despitely used and per-

¹ Rom. ii. 29. The Lord here intimates, that those who were once His people are no longer so, but have become a Synagogue of Satan; just as He had previously told them to their faces;—"Ye are of your father the Devil,"

secuted, and there were yet worse troubles to come. Satan was about to cast some of the disciples into prison, and would even move his agents to slay them. But, while the Adversary would do this for their harm, God would turn it into good: it should prove to be that trial of their faith and patience which, after it had finished its work, should leave them perfect and entire, wanting nothing. And, although men might take away their lives, the Lord would turn the shadow of death into a glorious and everlasting morning. Ten days were, doubtless, the exact time of the hottest persecution in the case of the literal Smyrna: in the prophetic interpretation we may, probably, find a reference to the Ten Persecutions, which began with Nero's cruelties at the close of the Apostolic times. ✓

The promise with which this Epistle concludes is pregnant with meaning. There is an evident allusion in the words, "He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death," to the entrance of the first death into the world, after the revolving flame had cut off all access to the Tree of Life. Now, of the first martyr, Abel, we are told, that by faith he offered a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, and that God testified to his righteousness by accepting him, while He rejected his brother.¹ But the latter "was of that Wicked One:" his envy was excited, and he slew Abel, because his own works were evil and his brother's righteous.² This was the first outburst of enmity from the serpent's seed; and from that time until now, he that is born of the flesh has ever persecuted him that is born of the Spirit. It was not long before the

¹ Heb. xi. 4.

² 1 John iii. 12.

Church in Smyrna discovered this truth by a bitter experience of it.

But she is comforted with the promise, that, if she remains faithful, she shall suffer nothing worse than the first death, and shall never be hurt of the second, which is the Lake of Fire and Brimstone.¹ And so the Lord here repeats in another form the solemn warning;—

“And I say unto you My friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will warn you Whom ye shall fear: Fear Him Which after He hath killed hath power to cast into Hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear Him.”²

But, if it be expressly stated, that the overcomer shall not be hurt of the Second Death, what will be the fate of the overcome? What will happen to him who fears the wrath of man more than that of the Great God Almighty?

Does the Lord Jesus speak vain words, without meaning or serious intent? Unless He does so, He is evidently warning us, in both of these passages, that the believer who refuses to seal his testimony by submitting to the First Death—should he be called upon to do so—must endure the pangs of the Second Death. We have, however, fully discussed this appalling subject in another place.³

The Historic Fulfilment of the Second Epistle

This Epistle predicts a gloomy period of the Church's career, that is, the two centuries and a half in the course of which those who called upon the Name

¹ Rev. xxi, 8.

² Luke xii, 4, 5.

³ See pp. 96-116.

The author does not mean that the Christian should be killed in his testimony. He will be killed in his testimony - but his body will be preserved. He will be killed in his testimony - but his body will be preserved. He will be killed in his testimony - but his body will be preserved.

of the Lord Jesus had to pass through ten dark vales of affliction and death. For, at intervals, from the days of Nero to those of Galerius, the whole power of the Roman Empire was put forth to crush and annihilate them : the most atrocious calumnies were circulated respecting them, with the double purpose of justifying the extreme severity with which they were being treated and of inciting the fury of the populace against them ; and terrible are the stories of their sufferings which have been handed down to us.

But, even in these dread times, Satan was able to extract mischief from that which should have worked altogether for good. The faith of the Martyrs produced such an impression, not only upon their own brethren, but often, also, upon the Heathen who witnessed its triumphant power, that the Churches were filled with unbounded gratitude to them ; and, in the Decian persecution, began to regard them as those who had attained to the greatest possible height of Christian dignity.

Cyprian of Carthage taught, that they would be the Lord's assessors in the Judgment of the world, and that, even while they were still upon earth, the influence of their intercession for others was irresistible. Hence some of the Martyrs became inflated with the adulation which they received, and assumed a tone of arrogance and an authority, for which they had no warrant whatever.

Now, at this time, there was in Africa a vast number of unfaithful believers, who had denied their Lord to save their own lives, and were known as " the lapsed." Naturally enough, much controversy was being carried on as to the possibility and means of their restoration. And, presently, a feeling began to spread, that the

Martyrs had the right to restore them to communion ; and that their authority on this point was even above that of the Bishops.

So, at first, a few petitions began to be sent to the Bishops from Martyrs, who were either detained in prison or working in the mines, requesting that some near relation, or friend, might be again received into fellowship. But the petitions were soon changed into commands ; while their scope was gradually enlarged. The Bishop was bidden to allow so and so and his family to communicate. Finally, the Martyrs claimed the absolute right of restoring as many of the lapsed as they chose, and even the whole number of them. Perhaps, the climax of this unreasonable claim may be seen in the following epistle addressed to Cyprian by a band of Martyrs from the prison in which they were awaiting their death ;—

“ All the Confessors to Pope Cyprian, greeting. Know that to all concerning whom the account of their conduct since the commission of their sin has, in your judgment, been satisfactory, we have granted peace ; and we wish that this rescript should be made known by you to other Bishops also. We bid you to have peace with the holy Martyrs.”

The arrogance of this epistle is astounding : nothing could be more unlike the words of men about to die for the love of Him Who was meek and lowly in Spirit.

As to its meaning, Cyprian, doubtless, had a large number of lapsed under penitential discipline at the time, and he is ordered, as if by an Imperial edict, to restore them all to communion without delay. The command to send the rescript to other Bishops, also, signified that it was to take effect not only at Carthage,

but throughout Africa. And the last clause intimated, that, unless Cyprian obeyed the behest of the "holy Martyrs," they would themselves excommunicate him.

But, probably, some of these Martyrs were mere partizans; or persons so vain that, captivated by the honour and glory ascribed to the Martyrs, they had voluntarily thrown themselves in the way of persecution, in order to attain to a similar pre-eminence.

The death of a Martyr was forthwith communicated to his Bishop, that the latter might arrange for the Commemoration Service. His name was then placed on the list, or Canon, to be read out in the Church, and to be preserved for annual commemoration. It is, of course, from this custom that our word to canonize derives its origin.

Hence arose the saint-worship which, from that time, so disastrously affected popular Christianity. Pilgrimages and processions were made to the tomb of a Martyr on the anniversaries of his death: Churches, supposed to have been erected for the worship of God, were dedicated to dead men: and saints were invoked, at first as intercessors; but it was not long before they were practically regarded as gods, and Heathen Polytheism had reappeared within the pale of the Church.

Very soon Gregory Thaumaturgus, the Bishop of Neo-Caesarea, hit upon a plan by which he hoped to influence the Pagan villagers and lower classes, and to make them—we cannot say followers of the Lord Jesus, but—adherents and partizans of the Catholic Church. This plan was to allow them to turn their Pagan festivals, with the customary excesses, into wakes over the mangled bodies or relics of martyred Christians, which he introduced for the purpose. And so the mingling and corruption went on,

As to those who said they were Jews but were really a Synagogue of Satan, that is, in its mildest interpretation, a Pagan Synagogue, the reference is, doubtless, to the corrupt Catholic Church which was then in process of formation by a skilful blending of Christianity and Paganism. This was the work of the Gnostics, whom we have already described, and whom the Lord designates as the Sons of the Evil One.

It was, however, through the medium of Judaism that the sad change was effected. For it became the fashion to transfer the Jewish hierarchy, visible unity, ritual, frequent sacrifices, doctrine of salvation by works, and other convenient points, to the Church; and then to harmonize them with their counterparts in Paganism. Of course, such confusion would not have been possible, but for the total ignorance of Dispensational truth among the Christians of those days; for had they understood the difference between the earthly and the Heavenly calling, between the Dispensation of the Shadow and that of the Substance, they would scarcely have looked to Moses for direct and practical teaching. But, since they were so ignorant of the World-scheme of God, and since the Mosaic ordinances were much more intelligible to their Pagan mind than the spiritual and Heavenly precepts of the Son of God, there is, from the human point of view, little cause for wonder at the subsequent course of things.

Probably, our best means of illustrating the origin of the movement may be found in the Epistle of Clement of Rome to the Corinthians—dating about A.D. 95 or 96—than which only one possibly earlier uninspired Christian writing is extant.

In many points Clement is Scriptural and Evangelical. He speaks strikingly of the Blood of Jesus

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Christ as affording the only means of salvation, but appears to be ignorant of the manner in which It does so; for he mentions only the moral effects of the Lord's death, and has nothing to say of Him as the propitiation for the sin of the world. He is claimed by Romanists as the third Pope: but had no conception of such an office in his own mind. For he describes himself as one of the elders of the Roman Church, and makes it very clear that Bishops, in the modern sense of the term, existed as yet neither in Rome nor in Corinth.

Nevertheless, it is in his Epistle that we detect the first symptoms of the error, soon to be widely prevalent, which owed its origin to a foolish misappropriation of the Jewish Scriptures. He argues, that the Israelitish High Priest, Priests, Levites, and laity, must find their counterparts in the Christian Church—a theory for which there is no warrant in the New Testament, and which could not fail to result in the establishment of a Priestly Order.

Moreover, from the fact that special times and a special place were appointed for the offerings and worship of the Law, he urges similar observances upon Christians. But he produces no command of the Master in support of his plea, and altogether ignores the fact, that men must now worship the Father in spirit and truth, which are bound by no earthly times or localities.

Finally, his forty-second forty-third and forty-fourth chapters seem to us to suggest the doctrine which has, perhaps, done more harm to the Nominal Church than any other, that of Apostolical Succession. And, after describing the appointment of Bishops and Deacons by the Apostles, he remarks ;—

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“And this they did in no new fashion ; for, indeed, it had been written concerning Bishops and Deacons from very ancient times. For thus saith the Scripture in a certain place, ‘I will appoint their Bishops in righteousness and their Deacons in faith.’”

Perhaps, the reader may wish to know from what part of Scripture Clement obtained this quotation. It is a mistranslated and misappropriated verse from the first chapter of Isaiah, which in our Bible is rendered ;— “And I will restore thy Judges as at the first, and thy Counsellors as at the beginning.”¹

But, although this Epistle was read in the Churches of old, and was frequently fastened together with the New Testament, it contains sufficiently plain indications of human rather than Divine authority. The Corinthians, to whom Clement wrote, had, apparently, revived their doubts concerning the Resurrection ; and, by way of reassuring them, he relates, as if it were a fact, the fabulous story of the Phoenix ; and suggests, that, if God shows forth His power by raising the bird from its ashes every five hundred years, we need not fear that He will fail in His promise to raise us up on the Great Day.

Clement also appeals to the Sybil in proof that the End of the World is near ; and we are thus made to perceive, even when listening to this early and comparatively pure writer, that we have passed out of the pale of inspiration and absolute truth.

With such teaching as this going on in the Church, the victory of the Gnostics was easily achieved ; and

¹ Isa. i. 26. The passage, of course, relates exclusively to the restoration of Israel.

the Christian Platonists of Alexandria acted effectively on their right wing. These latter differed from other Nominal Christians in their professed belief, that the principles of Allegorism¹ were delivered by our Lord to a few chosen Apostles only, and were handed down by a succession of Teachers, and not by Bishops.² And this article of their creed enabled them to introduce with authority whatever doctrine or interpretation they might happen to need for their great purpose of harmonizing the New Testament with Greek culture.

Of other distinctive tenets of this School, Dr. Bigg thus speaks ;—

“On many points—the explanation of those much-contested words, Priest, Altar, Sacrifice, the Body and Blood of Christ, the Power of the Keys, Eternal Life, Eternal Death—they were at variance with the Spirit of the age. Hence they were driven to what is known as Reserve. The belief of the enlightened Christian becomes a Mystery that may not be revealed to the simple brother, for whom the letter is enough. They strove to justify themselves in this by texts of Scripture ; but their Reserve is in fact the ‘ medicinal lie ’ of Plato, the freemasonry of the Gnostics.”³

Of the Alexandrian Clement's doctrine of the Deity, Dr. Bigg remarks, that “it is essentially a Heathen conception, and can be developed consistently only on Heathen principles.”⁴

The other great Teacher of the same School, Origen, gives an account of the human race similar to that which is held by Buddhists and Theosophists, for it

¹ See p. 307.

² *The Christian Platonists of Alexandria*, p. 57.

³ *Ibid.* p. 58.

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 65.

includes Pre-existence and Reincarnation, adding to them a Universal Redemption which is extended to Satan and his angels. We cannot, however, enter further into his teaching, but must content ourselves with the remark, that the doctrines of Christianity which he left unassailed were few, indeed.

The Epistle to the Church in Pergamum

The name Pergamum, connected with πύργος, a tower, was originally given to the citadel of Troy; and may, possibly, have been transferred, after the fall of that famous place, to the city in which the Third of the Seven Churches was sojourning at the date of the Apocalyptic visions. To the latter it was most appropriate. For Pergamum must have looked like a great citadel, situated, as it was, upon an enormous crag that rose boldly from the centre of an extensive plain; and, in the time of its glory, must have presented a peculiarly grand and imposing appearance.

To this Church the Lord is "He that hath the sharp two-edged sword." Against Smyrna the sword of man had been lifted up: but now the sword of the Lord is drawn, and He stands confronting those who are moving toward the world, even as His Angel stood in the way of Balaam.

Pergamum, as is well known, had once been the centre of Paganism, and still retained much of its prestige. It was said to be more devoted to the worship of the deities than any other city of Asia, which is no marvel when we remember how long it had been the head-quarters of the Chaldean Priest-king. "It was," says Mr. Blakesly, "a sort of union of a Pagan cathedral city, a university town, and a royal residence, embellished, during a succession of

years, by kings who had a passion for expenditure, and ample means of gratifying it." Its inhabitants were styled *νεωκόροι πρῶτοι τῆς Ἀσίας*, or First Temple-wardens of Asia, a title which, at that time, indicated, that they had been the first in the Province of Asia to set up the cult of the Emperor, by erecting to his deity a Temple which was supposed to be under the guardianship of the whole city. Subsequently, Ephesus, Smyrna, and other cities, did the same; but could not, of course, deprive Pergamum of her priority.

We must not, however, forget the peculiar significance of this Emperor-worship. Attalus III., the Priest-king of the Chaldean Hierarchy—which had fled before the conquering Persians to Pergamum, and had settled there—had left to the Roman people his Kingdom and Royal Priesthood, the latter of which was first assumed by Julius Caesar. Hence arose the cult of the Roman Emperors, because the legacy of Attalus III. had conveyed to them the dignity of Pontifex Maximus, and an imputed deity. And so, as C. W. King remarks, "in the statues of Emperors, the ring is always engraved with the figure of a *lituus*,¹ to indicate the highest quality of the imperial rank, that of Pontifex Maximus."²

The worship, therefore, in the great Temple at Pergamum was, probably, the same as that which the Chaldean Pontifex had established there. But, however this may be, the Bible does not leave us in uncertainty as to the supreme importance of Pergamum to Heathendom, since it reveals the fact that Satan's throne was still there. In such a city outbursts of

¹ The *lituus* was the Pagan Augur's crook, which afterwards became the crozier, or pastoral staff, of the Catholic Bishop.

² *Ancient Gems and Rings*, vol. i., p. 338, note.

fanatical zeal would be likely to occur, and the Epistle intimates, that the followers of Christ had recently suffered from them. Satan had presented himself as a roaring lion: he had torn some of the Pergamean believers, and driven others into great distress; but had effected nothing. The Church had held fast the Name of her Lord, and would not deny His faith. ✓

And now the Adversary was changing his tactics: he had lulled the storm of persecution, and was working by means of "false apostles, deceitful workers, fashioning themselves into Apostles of Christ." Nay, he was fashioning himself into an angel of light, and using seductive flatteries; so that the Church, which could brave his fury, was yielding to his fascinations. She had ceased to cast out the false teachers, and they were rapidly bridging the chasm between herself and the world.

And this is the charge which the Lord had to bring against the Pergameans, though He would not utter it, until He had first commended their faithfulness in the hour of trial. But ease and prosperity were now rendering them so careless that they were allowing the doctrine of the son of Beor to prevail among them, and did not eject those who held it. This was a symptom of fearful declension: for Balaam, though called of God to be a prophet, had taught Balak, one of the kings of the Gentiles, how to cast a stumbling-block before the Children of Israel, by inducing them to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit fornication. And that which had been done to the mischief of Israel was now being repeated, in order to effect the ruin of the Church in Pergamum.

The first part of Balaam's story is too well known to need repetition: it is sufficiently clear, that, had he

been permitted, he would have been willing, for the sake of gain, to abuse the powers entrusted to him, and to curse the people of God. In this, however, he was checked by the interposition of the Almighty; but, even while the Divine influence was upon him, he continually wavered, and, as soon as it was withdrawn, appears to have given the rein to his covetousness. Through his greed for the wages of the Gentile king, he became anxious to assist him by reducing Israel to the level of Midian; and, with this object in view, tendered the fiendish advice, that all open resistance to the pilgrim-nation should be waived, that the hand of friendship should be extended to them, and the pleasures of sin set before them. If, by such means, they could be drawn into idolatrous abominations, there would no longer be any reason why the special favour of God should rest upon them, or why He should destroy the kingdoms of the world for their sake.

This guileful plan was speedily carried out, and idol festivals, with all their sensual attractions, were held within easy distance of the Camp in the Wilderness. The curiosity of the Israelites was excited: the feeling which had prompted them to eat and drink and play before the calf was again aroused. Many of them went to see the sight; and, perhaps to their surprise, were received as friends by the Midianites, and invited to join the revel. Surely they could do so—just as they had often been present at the orgies of Egypt—and yet neither worship Baal nor provoke Jehovah. And, after all, Jehovah and Baal were but different names for the same Supreme Being, and the Midianites were serving Him according to their light. By such thoughts, it may be, they were allured within the circle of Heathen abominations, and entered the fatal pre-

cincts surrounded—as the people of God always are, if they wilfully approach temptation—by hosts of evil spirits watching for an opportunity of hurling them over the precipice, as soon as they could see them sufficiently near the brink. Perhaps, at first, they intended only to look on; but, if this were so, the allurements of sin quickly overcame them: they were soon feasting at the rich table of Baal, and becoming fascinated with the seductions of the daughters of Moab. Meanwhile, the Lord in the Heavens was whetting His glittering sword, and bending His bow, for judgment upon His Own rebellious people.

This history seems to have been repeated at Pergamum; for, after a bitter persecution, the Pagans were changing their tactics, and endeavouring, under a friendly guise, and by the attractive sensuality of their worship, to lure away those believers whom they had failed to move by fear. And, doubtless, the Gnostics, unwearied mediators between Paganism and a careless Christianity, had crept in among the disciples, and were so bewildering them by skilful blendings and explanations, that they were gradually yielding, and allowing themselves to be drawn into the snare. Their own leaders, too, already accustomed to make a selfish use of their influence, were beginning, like Balaam, to run greedily after the gain which could be secured by conciliating the great ones of earth. And so, as the Church was leaving her appointed camp of separation, the Lord suddenly appeared in the way, and sternly commanded those who were His Own to repent, and cast out the Balaamites, lest He Himself should be compelled to use His flashing sword.

Such, then, appears to have been the condition of the Christian community at Pergamum; and, with this

knowledge of it, we may proceed to consider the prophetic meaning of the Epistle, as setting before us the third period of the Universal Church.

In the promise to him that overcometh, there is again a reference to the times in which Balaam lived. The idea of the hidden manna is not taken from that which formed the daily food of the Israelites, and which became corrupt unless it was immediately eaten; but from the pot of incorruptible manna, which, having been laid up for the generations of Israel, was enclosed within the Ark, and never seen. It represents, perhaps, the nourishment of the resurrection-body, laid up in store for those who, during their sojourn here, abstain from things offered to idols, and who refuse to change the ways of God in order to please the world and obtain its good things. If we can turn from the dainties with which the Prince of This World tempts us, God will feed us with the Bread of Life. And the Great High Priest after the order of Melchizedec will meet us as we return from our warfare with the kings of this world, and will bless us, and bring forth bread and wine, the royal dainties which He reserves for them that love Him.

The promise of the white stone seems to belong specially to those who keep themselves from spiritual fornication, from sinful communion with Satan and the world. There has been much dispute in regard to the metaphor; but we may at once dismiss those explanations which are founded upon Classical allusions, as altogether irrelevant.

The word translated "white" is often used of a bright and dazzling whiteness, as, for instance, that of a sunbeam: hence the white stone may be a glittering gem; perhaps, a diamond. Now the mysterious

implement by which the High Priest was enabled to obtain an answer from the Lord, and which was called the Urim and Thummim, or "Lights and Perfections," was, probably, a diamond; and it is likely that the Name of the Lord was inscribed upon it. The breastplate of the High Priest formed a sort of pouch into which it seems to have been placed; and, in some way which has not been revealed to us, he was able to determine the will of the Lord by means of it.

The Lord will, therefore, give to him that overcometh a glittering stone inscribed with His Own Name, like that which the High Priest bore in the breastplate of judgment; so that the possessor will be enabled to know His will at all times, and to have the privilege of continual communion with Him.

So glorious a recompense is there for him who can keep himself from idols, and renounce the fleeting and insincere friendships and cloying pleasures of this world; and who, turning from the luring phantoms that beckon to him, sets his face as a flint to follow by the way which the Master trod, and to watch with Him during the one short hour of life. ↙

Historic Fulfilment of the Third Epistle

Pergamum, exalted upon its lofty rock in the plain of the Caicus, corresponds to the Mustard-tree, and represents the Nominal Church raised from her lowly position to be the State-Church of the Fourth World-power.

The change was, apparently, so sudden that many have characterized it as miraculous: this, however, is usually done by those who regard Constantine as a Christian believer, and a conscious and willing agent of the Almighty. But, as we have already shown, his

worldly policy, atrocious crimes, and the delay of his open confession in baptism, do not suffer us to agree with them. On the contrary, we think that the Christians of his time were sadly disgraced, and spiritually damaged, by accepting his patronage; especially after the murder of his eldest son Crispus and of his wife Fausta, which stirred up so strong a feeling against him among the Pagans in Rome that he was compelled to fly from the insults which were showered upon him, and to build a new capital for himself on the shores of the Thracian Bosphorus.

As to the change in the position of Christianity, though apparently sudden, it was not really so; but, like most of the world's revolutions, had been long in preparation. And one of the causes which tended to it was the powerful influence of the practical fruits of Christianity upon Pagan society. For, however successfully they might conceal it, thoughtful and honest men could not but be affected by the patience and faith, even unto death, of the Christians in the seasons of persecution, as well as by their probity, orderly lives, and freedom from those frightful, and often unnatural, vices, the prevalence of which among the Pagans was manifest and incontestable. And to the power of this influence they themselves bore testimony in the attempts which they now and then made to raise the standard of their own morality, and to rid themselves of the worst features of Pagan worship.

Moreover, the life and character of the Lord Jesus, and His words, as related in the Gospels, impressed the minds of many, and even suggested the idea of introducing a Pagan narrative of the doings and sayings of some pure, wise and supernaturally endowed man, in the hope that it might have an effect upon the Pagan

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world similarly beneficial to that of the Life of Christ upon the Christians. And, accordingly, in the third century, the experiment was actually made by Julia Domna, the wife of the Emperor Septimius Severus. At her command, Philostratus, a scholar of great literary attainments, wrote a history of Apollonius of Tyana, with the view of setting forth that philosopher and wonder-worker before the world as a Pagan rival of Jesus of Nazareth. But the name of Apollonius proved to be powerless, and quickly faded from the thoughts of men; while, after the lapse of sixteen centuries, That of the Lord Jesus is known in all the world, and is still mighty to save.

These and other causes, especially, perhaps, the rapid spread of Christianity through all nations, had modified, or altogether changed, the views of many Pagans in regard to it; and, among those who were thus influenced, was the family of Constantius, the Emperor of the countries to the west of the Alps.

The times of fiery persecution had now passed by. The slaughtered Apostles were resting with their Lord; and the ashes of the flaming bodies used to illuminate the gardens of Nero had now lain cold for more than two centuries. The cruelties of Domitian, Trajan, and Adrian, were almost forgotten. Lyons had long ceased to shudder at the pains of Blandina and Pothinus; nor would Perpetua be any more worried by the savage beasts of the amphitheatre, or pierced by the sword of the gladiator. Maximus and Decius were dead: the African lime-kiln and the worship of Jupiter were no longer alternatives. The bloody reign of Diocletian and Maximian was ended: Sebastian had endured his second martyrdom, and the last sigh of Timothy and Maura had ascended to God from their crucified bodies,

A new era had commenced : Satan had stayed the persecutions which had proved so ineffectual, and was now trying for better success by means of flattery and corruption, and by tempting the Church to accept worldly power.

For this change he had long been preparing through the agency of the false teachers—those Tares which he had stealthily sown among the Wheat in times of trouble, when hypocrisy was little suspected. By their influence, Nicolaitanism had become an almost universal rule ; so that the Churches were being governed, in much the same manner as earthly communities, by those whose intellectual power, or rank, or wealth, or intrigue, brought them to the front. And, as a natural consequence, many of these leaders were craving an extension of their influence, and manifesting a desire for worldly pre-eminence which soon caused a change in doctrine.

In the earliest times, believers were taught by the Apostles to live in daily expectation of the Lord's return, and recognized no other way of permanent deliverance from the troubles of this world ; but now ideas of a very different kind began to be ventilated. It was suggested, that Christ could not return to a world so unprepared to receive Him ; that persecution would presently cease, and God might then be expected to give great power to His Church and enable her to convert all men by her preaching. In this way the Millennium would be introduced without the need of any personal interference on the part of Christ. And, since some Scriptural support was required for the new doctrine, it was obtained by first affirming, that the Jew had been cast off for ever, and then transferring the prophecies of Israel's future glory to the body of

nominal believers upon earth. Thus the disciples were induced to say with the wicked servant, "My Lord delayeth His coming;" and a spirit of worldliness continued to prevail in the Nominal Church, until, when the fatal hour of prosperity arrived, she altogether ceased to wait for the Son from Heaven, became content with what she had below, and was fully occupied with her efforts to secure or increase it.

It was while these new thoughts and aspirations were agitating the minds of Christians that Constantius died, and his son, Constantine the Great, became Emperor of the countries to the west of the Alps. The persecutions were still raging intermittently in other parts of the Empire; but Constantine did not sanction the cruel treatment of the Christians. For his own countries, Britain and Gaul, were full of professed members of their faith, and his legions were recruited from them. Moreover, for reasons which have been stated elsewhere,¹ he seems to have conceived the idea of establishing Christianity as the religion of the Empire; but was anxious, at the same time, to do so without causing offence either to Pagans or Christians; and some of the devices which he adopted as aids to this conciliatory policy have been already described. As soon, however, as his defeat of Maxentius, and capture of Rome, had enabled him to take a wider view of the situation, he perceived that there were two great difficulties to be faced.

The first of these was a very serious division among the Christians themselves, caused by the Arian controversy. And, regarding the Church as a mere political instrument, he understood how necessary it was, for

¹ See p. 343.

the success of his plans, that the breach should be healed. He, therefore, determined to summon a general Council of Bishops from all parts of the Empire, over which he would himself preside. This Council was to discuss the question at issue, and, after due deliberation, to decide it by their votes. Accordingly, the Bishops assembled at Nicaea, or Nice, in Bythinia; and the Orthodox party triumphed, though not, it is to be feared, without much of the intrigue which is inseparable from such worldly methods of procedure.

But their work was not finally successful; for, although the Emperor banished Arius for the time, it was not long before he recalled him, and the struggle was presently resumed, and continued for more than fifty years after the date of the Council. During this time Arianism, through the favour of some of the Emperors, was not without its seasons of victory. But, in the reign of Theodosius, the heresy was suppressed, within the limits of the Empire, by the secular authority which had raised it to power. Still, however, it tarried for two or three centuries with the Teutonic nations, which were then pressing into the Roman dominion; and, from that time, its spirit has been ever reappearing in new and even worse forms,¹ and under new names; but always with the same blasphemous intent, that is, to diminish the glory of the Son of God, Who is One with His Father.

¹ The Arians taught, that the Lord Jesus was neither Co-eternal with, nor of one substance with, the Father; that He was a created Being, Second to the Father Alone, and above and of different substance from that of both angels and men; that both angels and men were created, and the latter also redeemed, by Him; and that worship was due to Him from all those whom He had created.

By the middle of the sixteenth century, however, Socinus was teaching, that He was no more than man, and of man's nature; but,

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The second obstacle to the plans of Constantine was this perplexing problem, How should he persuade the Pagans to join a community which they had been accustomed to despise and maltreat, which was, for the most part, made up of obscure persons, plebeians, and slaves, whose places of worship were mean, indeed, if compared with the grand temples of the Pagans, whose ministers displayed no gorgeous vestments like to those worn by the Pagan priests, and whose services were usually dull and uninteresting.

This difficulty he proposed to surmount by bribes of State-offices and large sums of money to the Upper Classes; and by suitable gifts to others. And, as a specimen of his mode of action, Gibbon tells us, that, in one year, no less than twelve thousand men, together with a proportionate number of women and children, were baptized into the Christian Church at Rome, to each of whom a white robe and twenty pieces of gold had been promised by the Emperor. Such a patronage, of course, caused multitudes of insincere persons to flock into the Church: the real believers were swamped, and the Bishops and Presbyters elected by nominal Christians.

But, while Constantine thus essayed to make the Christian Community respectable in the eyes of the world, and to swell the number of its adherents, he also endeavoured to impart to its Churches and services

nevertheless, admitted that He was distinguished from other men by His virgin-birth, sinless life, Divine commission, miraculous powers, resurrection, and ascension to the Heavens.

In our days, His virgin-birth, miracles, resurrection, and ascension, are all denied: men find errors in the very words by which they must hereafter be judged (John xii. 48): and some even dare to assail the character of Him to Whom all power is given in Heaven and upon earth. "It is time for Thee, Lord, to work!"

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an external magnificence and splendid scenic effects, which should, not merely rival, but even surpass, the Pagan temples and their ceremonies. He gave to the Christian Bishops, for conversion into Churches, several imposing buildings called Basilicas, which had been used for Royal Courts of Justice, and at the same time was lavish in his gifts of money for the elaborate decoration of the new places of worship, and for the provision of superb vestments for the clergy. And soon the Christian Bishop, exalted on his lofty throne in the apse of the Basilica, clad in costly vestments, surrounded on a lower level by his Presbyters, and with a marble altar, adorned with gold and gems, on a still lower level in front of him, had no reason to fear comparison with the Flamen Dialis, or with any other of the great Pagan priests in Rome. ✓

Constantine also built magnificent Churches at Rome, Constantinople, and Jerusalem; and with such splendid temples and solid possessions here below, how could the Christians any longer regard themselves as strangers and pilgrims upon the earth: surrounded, as they were, in the richly decorated interiors of their Churches, with objects of beauty attracting and engrossing the bodily senses and the soul, how was it possible for them to worship in spirit and truth Him Who is Spirit, and Who dwelleth not in temples made with hands?

Of course, the preaching, also, was changed at this time, as well as the buildings, the robes, and the congregations: it became a mere display of oratory and flowery language; for manifestly one could not utter narrow or severe sentiments before a fashionable and aristocratic audience, which, with very few exceptions, were not really Christian at all. Moreover, there was the duty of praising the Emperor, the giver of the

beautiful things which appealed to them on every side. And so, the Church became, practically, a place of entertainment, and people went to it as to the theatre, and signified their approval of the preacher by a clapping of hands.

And there was yet another way in which Constantine found it possible, not only to tempt the Christians to eat things offered to idols, but also to make it far easier for the Pagans to join their ranks. This was by seducing them to adopt the great Pagan festivals, with little alteration, save in the names or events celebrated by them.

By so doing, they were enabled to free themselves from that which had long been a severe trial to many of them. For some who were not spiritual—or who, it may be, were children of Christians, and had themselves, perhaps, never been really converted—had been wont to look with longing eyes upon the brilliant festal scenes which brought with them so welcome a relief to the monotony of life; and would gladly have shared in the pleasurable excitement, in the attractive and mysterious processions, pageants, and ceremonies, and in the jovial feasts. Moreover, it was not to their taste to be different from their neighbours, and to be compelled, especially at such a time, to testify to their faith by leaving their houses unadorned when those of other people were bright with green branches and garlands of flowers.

Hence many of them had already instituted festivals of their own on some of the Pagan holidays, which furnished them with an excuse for outward conformity to the rejoicing world. And of this device they had availed themselves for more than a century, even as far back as the days of Tertullian, who had stoutly

withstood the cowardly innovation, as the following most instructive passage from his *De Idolatria*¹ will show us;—

“But if we have no right of fellowship in such matters² with aliens, how much more sinful is it for brethren to assort together therein! Who can endure or maintain this? The Holy Spirit reproacheth the Jews for their feast days. ‘Your Sabbaths,’ saith He, ‘and your new moons, and your ordinances, My soul hateth.’ And do we, to whom these Sabbaths belong not, nor the new moons, nor the feast days once beloved of God, celebrate the feast of Saturn, and of January, and of the Winter Solstice, and the feast of Matrons? For us shall presents flow in; new year’s gifts jingle; sports and banquets roar? O truer fidelity of the nations to their own religion, which claims for itself no solemnity of the Christians! No Lord’s day, no Pentecost, even if they had known them, would they have shared with us! For they would be afraid lest they should be thought Christians: we are not afraid lest we should seem to be Heathen!”

This passage exposes, generally, the origin of many of the so-called Church festivals, which were unknown to earlier times, and were adapted from Paganism, and kept on Pagan holidays, because the Christians had grown cowardly, and were no longer willing to bear testimony to Christ by entire separation from the world. They would not remain on the top of the hill, where they could not be hid,³ and so came half-way down toward the valley.

¹ Chap. xiv.

² That is, in Heathen festivals.

³ Matth. v. 14.

The adaptations of Heathen festivals, of which we have spoken, were, probably, not very numerous until the days of Constantine, when they were greatly increased. We will give one specimen of the way in which they were effected.¹

According to Mr. Greswell, who supports his proposition by very able reasoning, our Lord must have been born on the fifth of April. But whether this date be exactly correct or not, it is sufficiently evident that the twenty-fifth of December could not have been the day. For shepherds would not have been "abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flocks by night," at that cold season of the year; since, in Palestine, they are not accustomed to do so later than October. Besides which, our Lord's mother would scarcely have been able, just before the birth of her Son, to travel from Nazareth to Bethlehem in the very depth of winter. "But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter," is

¹ Many would be disposed to say, "Why not suffer the curtain of oblivion to rest for ever upon these lamentable facts? Now, at least, the days are honestly kept as Christian festivals: is it well to disturb men's minds by tracing such observances back to their Pagan origin?" There is, alas! a very urgent reason for doing so. Already there are in circulation among the educated classes infidel books, of considerable ability, in which the Pagan robes of certain forms of Christianity are powerfully and convincingly exposed. And then, since much which they have been taught to deem sacred is demonstrated to have been brought to them from Heathen sources, Christians are invited to believe that all other doctrines and observances of their faith are, also, of a similar character. It seems, therefore, absolutely necessary that we should henceforth accustom ourselves to discriminate between those things which, being ordinances of men, are justified only by their value in the war against the world and Satan, and those which, being direct commands of the Lord and His Apostles, must be firmly retained in spite of all opposition, and of every actual, or possible, consequence.

His Own injunction in the discourse on the Mount of Olives.

How is it, then, that the festival of Christ's birth is always kept on the twenty-fifth of December ?

Now, the twenty-first of December is the shortest day of the year, the time when the sun has reached his lowest point ; and it is not until the twenty-fifth that he begins to lengthen the duration of his light. Hence, throughout the whole Heathen world, the twenty-fifth was regarded as the birthday of the Sun-god, and a high festival, which was celebrated at Rome by the " Great Games " of the Circus. And, for obvious reasons, the Christians determined to commemorate the birth of Christ at the same time.

In his thirty-first homily, Chrysostom, after quoting the directions from the Pagan Calendar, remarks ;—

" On this day, also, the birthday of Christ was *lately fixed at Rome*, in order that, while the Heathen were busied with their profane ceremonies, the Christians might perform their holy rites undisturbed."

He seems, however, to be conscious that the proceeding required some further apology, besides the excuse contained in the latter part of his sentence, and presently adds ;—

" But they—that is, the Pagans—call this day the birthday of the Invincible One¹ : who, then, is so invincible as the Lord That overthrew and vanquished death ? Or because they style it the birthday of the Sun ? He is the Sun of Righteousness."

This is a species of argument which has contributed much to the corruption of Christianity. What confusion

¹ A common appellation of the Sun-god.

of thought was produced by it in the particular matter before us, we may, perhaps, discover in a Christmas Sermon of Leo the Great, who flourished about the middle of the fifth century. In it, the prelate blames certain Christians for causing offence to their weaker brethren by reverencing the festival, not so much on account of Christ's birth, as on that of the "Rising of the new Sun."¹

Thus the reason of the fraudulent change in the date of the Lord's birth, from the fifth of April, or thereabout, to the twenty-fifth of December, is revealed. But its deep significance lies in this fact, that, in Paganism, the Sun means the Sun-god, who was also the False Messiah, and in that character was known as Adonis, Tammuz, Osiris, Horus, and by many other names. Hence, by submitting to the institution of Christmas, the Christians consented to join with the Pagans in honouring the Antichrist as though he were the Christ, and also accepted the Pagan modes of doing so. For, down to times not very remote from our own, the boar's head was prominent at Christmas feasts, that is, the head of the beast which the Pagan's sacrificed to Venus, because her much-bewailed favourite Adonis had been slain by a boar: the buffoonery of the slaves at the Roman Saturnalia was represented by the Mummings and the Lord of Misrule: and Christmas-trees are even now nearly as common among us as they were once in Pagan Rome and in Pagan Egypt.

This instance will suffice to show in what manner the Christians were gradually induced to make compromises, until at last they fell, almost without suspicion, into the snare which Satan had prepared. For the

¹ Serm. II. See *King's Gnostics*, pp. 49, 50.

process of blending Christianity and Paganism was carried on, until a compound religion had been manufactured, of which we may say, generally, that Christianity furnished the nomenclature, and Paganism the doctrines and rites. The other great festivals of the "Catholic Church" will be found, like Christmas, to depend upon celestial phenomena; and this was detected by Sir Isaac Newton, who suggested that they were determined upon an astronomical basis. They were, in fact, arranged by the astrologers of Babylon for the worship of the Host of Heaven, and having been received by the Romans, through the Etruscans, were afterwards passed on to the Nominal Church, as soon as she had become sufficiently corrupted to accept them.

And so, a new community began to spread over the Roman earth, professing to be Christian, but denying one precept at least of its supposed Founder, in that it openly acknowledged two masters: for, while claiming to receive its authority from the Lord of the Heavens, it was willing, whenever its interests could be served thereby, to wield that authority according to the bidding of the Emperors of Rome. Everywhere it indicated its presence by the rise of stately edifices, by gorgeous rites ceremonies and vestments, and by an adoration of the Queen of Heaven, and of heroes and martyrs, somewhat difficult to distinguish from the Polytheism which it was understood to have supplanted.

The Balaamites, who brought about these changes, have never yet been cast out of the visible Church, and are still found, in some form or other, professing Heavenly, but minding earthly things: for the Lord has not yet come to fight against them with the sword of His mouth. But the signs of His coming are thickening around us, and the destruction of the corrupters is near.

Clayton,
get lost
cal,
Chain of
Corruption
& decline

The Epistle to the Church in Thyatira

Next in order comes the Church which is ever offering sacrifices,¹ and to her the Lord presents Himself as the Son of God, thus solemnly vindicating His despised Majesty against her idolatries, and the claims of the false prophetess. For, without any formal rejection, He has been virtually denied by the introduction of other objects of worship, and the heed given to spirits of darkness. And, since Thyatira imagines, that she has concealed her Heathenism under a cloak of Christianity, He speaks of His eyes of flame, which can penetrate the inmost secrets of man, and detect all the depths of Satan; and intimates, that He is shortly coming to trample down His foes beneath the feet which glow like burnished brass.

This Church had evidently made an agreement with idols by some compromise with the Pagans, among whom she was dwelling. Consequently, the great multitude of her individual members were children of the adulterous Jezebel, and only a remnant belonged to Christ. The latter were sincere, but, owing to the corruption with which they were surrounded, in great ignorance; and to them, exclusively, the Lord addresses Himself. He sees much to commend in them, abounding works, love, faith, ministry, and patience: nay, their good fruits were even increasing. But their affection was unbalanced, and their power of resisting evil, consequently, weakened. They were better than the Ephesians in that their love, far from waxing cold, was becoming warmer; but inferior to them in that

¹ *Θυάτεια*, that is *θυῶν ἀτειρής*, she that is never weary of presenting sacrificial offerings.

they had not learnt to test those who falsely claimed to be Apostles, and to prove them to be liars.

Foremost among these pretenders was a woman, perhaps of noble extraction, certainly of great influence; but a worshipper of idols, a sorceress and harlot, who, while she seems to have borne the name of Jezebel, also resembled the infamous wife of Ahab in her character and actions. To understand what she was doing in Thyatira, and, more especially, what is her prophetic antitype, we must briefly consider the history of the Israelitish Queen.

Jezebel was not by birth a daughter of Abraham, but a princess of idolatrous Tyre, at a time, too, when its royal family was famed for cruel savagery and intense devotion to Baal and Astarte. Her father, Ethbaal, a priest of the latter deity, murdered the reigning monarch Pheles, and succeeded him. Her nephew, whom Virgil calls Sychaeus, afterwards became king and priest of Baal, and was the husband of Dido. He was assassinated by his brother Pygmalion, who ascended the throne in his stead, and through fear of whom the widowed Dido fled to Africa, and founded the city of Carthage. Born of a family so distinguished for fanaticism and crime, Jezebel proved herself in every way worthy of her lineage, and found the condition of her husband's realm most favourable to her plans.

For the first monarch of Israel had disregarded the Law of God on the ground of expediency, and had set up the golden calves at Bethel and Dan, incurring thereby so terrible a guilt that it is repeatedly said of later kings;—"He walked in all the ways of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, and in his sin, wherewith he made Israel to sin." By acquiescing in this act, the Israelites

Baal and the four hundred prophets of the grove, that is, of Astarte. Elijah did, indeed, by calling down fire from heaven, make the renegade people fall on their faces, and cry out for the moment, "Jehovah, He is the God!" Yet the influence of Jezebel was so powerful, that, on the very next day, the prophet was flying for his life. And this influence she exercised, not only while her husband was alive, but also during the reigns of her two sons, Ahaziah and Jehoram. Moreover, the marriage of her daughter Athaliah to Jehoram, son of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, supplied her with a lever by which to move that country also. Nor did Athaliah disappoint her mother's hopes; for she caused a house of Baal to be built in Jerusalem itself;¹ while her sons broke up the House of the Lord, and bestowed its dedicated things upon the Baalim.²

We may conclude our sketch of Jezebel's character by citing the words of Jehu to her son;—"What peace, so long as the whoredoms of thy mother Jezebel and her witchcrafts are so many?"

Returning to the Jezebel of Thyatira, we find the charges brought against her to be, that she falsely called herself a prophetess, and that she taught and seduced the servants of Christ to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed to idols. When we remember, that the Christians of those days were even more closely surrounded by Heathenism than the Israelites of old, we may easily understand the process of corruption to which this lying prophetess was subjecting them. Time had been given to her to repent, but she repented not: therefore, judgment was near. She had chosen the bed of sin: it should be changed

¹ 2 Chron. xxiii. 17.

² *Ibid.* xxiv. 7.

into a bed of anguish : her paramours should be thrown into great tribulation, and her adulterous children slain. And their fate should cause a fear to fall upon the Churches, like that which men felt when they saw Ananias and Sapphira smitten with death in the midst of the assembly.

Having thus pronounced sentence, the Lord turns to His Own beloved ones in Thyatira whom He calls "the rest"—for even in Thyatira He had much people scattered amid the throng of idolatrous professors ; just as there were seven thousand in Israel who had not bowed the knee to Baal, though Elijah was ignorant of them. These were, indeed, standing in rank side by side with the corrupters, but without consciousness of their real position : they were deceived by their seducers, and knew nothing of the depths of Satan and his dark plans.

The Gnostics, as their name implied, boasted of a deep insight into the things of God and the mysteries of evil ; and, under the guise of assumed knowledge, led their followers, step by step, into an abyss of wickedness and uncleanness. But the remnant were guileless of this great iniquity ; and, although they had occasional scruples, which they sometimes boldly avowed, were, nevertheless, honestly disposed to look upon the evil around them as more than counterbalanced by the good, and did not at all perceive the intention of the whole system of doctrines presented for their acceptance. And so, in His treatment of them, ignorant and bewildered as they were, the Lord was full of consideration and tender love. They had no power to fathom the Satanic depths ; therefore, He would lay upon them no other burden than that they should hold fast what little truth they had, until He should come.

There is a curious passage concerning Thyatira in the *Panarion* of Epiphanius,¹ which it may be well to notice.

The writer is speaking of the heretical Alogi, who denied the genuineness of the Gospel and Apocalypse of John. Originally, perhaps, this community had belonged to the group of Montanist sects; and, if so, had been disowned by the latter on account of their false doctrine. They seem to have had their headquarters at Thyatira, which was a stronghold of the Montanists also.

Now, these two Sects appear to have worked so zealously—possibly before their separation—that for 112 years—from 263 A.D. to 375 A.D.—there was no Catholic congregation in their district.

This fact was used by the Alogi as an argument against the inspiration of the Apocalypse. In its second chapter, they said, there is an Epistle to the Church in Thyatira, in which the continuance of that Church until the coming of the Lord is assumed; and, yet, at the present time, there is no Catholic congregation whatever in that city, nor has there been any for the last 112 years.

Such, then, was their argument: and the answer of Epiphanius—written, apparently, a little later, when the tide was beginning to turn in favour of the Catholics, who had just established a congregation in Thyatira—was to this effect;—That the very circumstance adduced by the Alogi proved the genuineness and truth of the Apocalypse; for that, under the name of Jezebel, the Author had evidently predicted the temporary overthrow of the Catholic influence in Thyatira by the Montanists

¹ *Panarion*, Lib. II., Tom. I., Haer. LI, chap. 33.

and their false prophetesses, Priscilla and Maximilla ; but that now the trouble was over, and the Catholics had once more an increasing Church in the city.

This answer, however, satisfactory as it may have seemed at the time to Epiphanius, was by no means correct. For, in the literal acceptation of the Epistle, Jezebel must have been doing her mischievous work at the time when the Apocalypse was written, that is, about 96 A.D. ; whereas the Montanist ascendancy in Thyatira did not begin until 263 A.D. On the other hand, if we glance at the prophetic interpretation, we shall readily perceive, that the predicted apostasy could be no temporary obscuration of truth in an unimportant city of Lydia ; but must affect the whole of the Nominal Church, and continue for many centuries.

The German Theologian Merkel, who is on the side of the Alogi in their rejection of the Apocalypse, supposed them to have affirmed, that there was no Church in Thyatira when the Epistle was written ; but a careful study of the passage will convince us that he was mistaken.¹

Historic Fulfilment of the Fourth Epistle ✓

It will be noticed that this letter deals with a far more settled state of wickedness than that which is portrayed in the Epistle to Pergamum. The latter Church had, indeed, committed fornication with the world ; but, in Thyatira, the children of the adulterous connection appear.

For the present Epistle foreshadows the course of Ecclesiasticism, that mysterious power which was

¹ For a minute discussion of the whole question, see Dollinger's *Hippolytus and Calistus*, pp. 273-88.

dominant throughout the Dark Ages, continues even in our days to exercise a baleful influence in the world, and is now exhibiting symptoms of reviving strength, especially in the once Protestant countries of England, Germany and America.

In the prophetic exposition of the previous Epistle, we saw that the whole body of professing Christians had allowed themselves to be attached to the Pagan World-power, that is, to Babylon in a Mystery; for Rome had received all her religious institutions from Babylon; either through her second king Numa Pompilius, the Etruscan, or by the legacy of Attalus III., king of Pergamum.

Now, from the time of Constantine, there was a continual influx of Pagan initiates into the Nominal Church; and these initiates, having once begun to profess Christianity, diplomatized so skilfully that they presently succeeded in procuring the Bishopric of Rome for one of their own leaders. This triumph was consummated in the years 366–367 A.D., when—after his faction had emerged victoriously from a bloody conflict with that of his rival Ursinus,¹ or Ursicinus—Damasus found himself in secure possession of the Episcopal throne, and forthwith proceeded to complete the union of the Christian and Pagan communities.

If we desire to understand what the Christianity of that age was, the remarks of a contemporary Pagan historian on the struggle of Damasus for the Bishopric will be found instructive;—

“ I do not deny, when I consider the ostentation

¹ On one occasion a massacre took place in a Church then called Liberius, now Santa Maria Maggiore; and a hundred and sixty corpses, male and female, of the partizans of Ursinus were afterwards dragged out of it.

Alas! for the
"Bishops!"
I Peter
5: 1-4

that reigns at Rome, that those who desire such rank and power may be justified in labouring with all possible exertion and vehemence to obtain their wishes; since, after they have succeeded, they will be secure for the future, being enriched by offerings from matrons, riding in carriages, dressing splendidly, and feasting luxuriously, so that their entertainments surpass even royal banquets."¹

In the year 378 A.D., the Emperor Gratian, who had recently abolished the Pagan title and office of Pontifex Maximus, revived and conferred them upon Damasus; and steps were at once taken for subordinating the Universal Church to the See of Rome, just as the whole of the Pagan Empire had been formerly subject to the Pagan Pontifex Maximus.

Upon certain points connected with the granting of this dignity to Damasus doubts have been cast, which we may not now stay to discuss.² But the attitude of Gratian toward the Pagans certainly inclines us to believe, that, when Damasus was entrusted with authority to decide all questions connected with the religion of the Empire, the Pagans, as well as the Christians, were subjected to his power. That his title was legally recognized, we have ample proof; for there is preserved, in the *Codex Theodosianus*,³ a rescript, signed by the three reigning Emperors, Gratian, Valentinian, and Theodosius, and dated 380 A.D., in which Damasus is described as Pontifex, while the Bishop of Alexandria is no more than Episcopus. The Popes never resigned this title, but retain it to the present

¹ *Amm. Marcell.* XXVII. iii. 14.

² The reader may, however, find these doubts ably refuted in any edition, except the first, of Hislop's *Two Babylons*, pp. 404-13.

³ Book XVI., Tit. I., Leg. 2.

day, together with the ring which once distinguished the Pagan Pontifex Maximus.

In 381 A.D., the second general council met at Constantinople, and, by its decrees, the Pontifex Maximus was recognized as Head of the Universal or Catholic Church, while the Bishop of Constantinople was to rank as second to him. The amalgamation thus became an accomplished fact, and, before the year 400 A.D., "the tonsured priests of Isis, sworn to celibacy," were being received as the ministers of Christ. Just as in Israel the prophets of Baal and Astarte replaced those of Jehovah, so the false Church, the new Jezebel, introduced the hierophants of the very same deities, under changed names, among the followers of the Lord Jesus. Then many doctrines of Paganism began to be openly preached, with a little change in the nomenclature, and were declared to be Christian—baptismal regeneration, justification by works, image and saint-worship, prayers for the dead, and many others. The mystic *tau* was everywhere prominent as the sign of the Cross; the wafer of Mithras was substituted for the broken bread; the Bishop retained the crooked staff of the Roman augur, but called it a crozier; and wore on his head the fish-head mitre of the priests of Oannes or Dagon. Everything was Pagan except the bare names. The vast conspiracy to convert Christianity itself into Heathenism had succeeded, so far as the bulk of professing Christians were concerned.

As time went on, the teachings of the mystic Jezebel continued to be unfolded. In 341, Athanasius and his companions fled for refuge to Rome, and, soon after they had settled there, introduced the Monastic Orders, which had been already established in the deserts of

the Thebaid. Subsequently, they were instituted in Gaul by Martin of Tours, and in Africa by Augustine.

Damasus and Jerome had encouraged the movement in every possible way, and especially by teaching that celibacy and virginity were the highest of Christian virtues. And Pope Siricius—384–398 A.D.—who succeeded Damasus, supplemented their work by issuing a Decretal in which he insisted on the celibacy of all the Catholic clergy.

Pope Celestine I.—422–432 A.D.—gave a great impetus to Mariolatry by aiding the persecutors of Nestorius, the Archbishop of Constantinople, who had preached eloquently against the blasphemous title, Mother of God—*Θεοτόκος*—which was then given to the mother of Jesus. The intention of this title is obvious; for, had Mary been the mother of the Lord's Godhead, she herself must of necessity have been a Goddess, and they would have been justified in their worship of her. But, on the other hand, the plan of salvation would have failed; for the Lord would have had no human nature, and, therefore, could not have saved the human race.

Pope Leo I.—440–461 A.D.—substituted oral or secret confession to a priest for the far more Scriptural and salutary penitential discipline of the earlier Church. He is also the first Pope who is known to have declared, that heretics ought to be put to death.

Pope Gregory I.—590–604 A.D.—made the doctrine of Purgatory an article of faith. Also, by calling attention to the supposed tombs of Peter and Paul at Rome, and by diligently collecting the legends and wonderful stories connected therewith and distributing them throughout Christendom, he drew many pilgrims to Rome, and so secured much gain to his Church.

lightened believers who did such things out of a pure heart ; and His Spirit taught them, so that they often detected error, and resisted it even to the death. For the Roman Jezebel, like the Phoenician princess, soon began to slay the prophets of God. The latter should have had sufficient perception to discover that Rome had no part or lot with Christ, and so have disowned her. But they were blind : they suffered the Woman to teach and seduce, looked upon her as the true Church, and strove only against particular errors, which they did not associate with the general system. Yet, after a while, some began to see the name, "A Mystery, Babylon," written upon the forehead of the Harlot.

And, in addition to the idolatrous abominations, political intrigues, and scandals, which her history discloses, there were, also, many other things which should have made her detection as the Mystic Jezebel a very easy matter. For instance, the time of her power was a time of war bloodshed and violence. This tendency she was far from checking : nay, she even sanctioned and stimulated it, whenever it was to her interest to do so, and was the cause of many a deadly struggle ; so that the Christians of the Middle Ages were quite as warlike as the Mahometans. The principal means by which she obtained warriors to carry out her orders for the deposition of kings, the invasion of countries, or the despatch of crusades, is well described by Porter, who, in speaking of the youth of those days, says ;—

"Taught from childhood to take delight in the military exercises which formed the daily occupation of the retainers in every baronial castle, he imbibed, at an early age, that ardent craving for distinction which was one of the fundamental

principles of chivalry. Imbued with the religious veneration of the period—a veneration deeply tinged with superstition—he was led to consider as sacred the obligations imposed on him by the chivalric code. To fight in defence of his religion was not only a duty, it was also an inestimable privilege. He had been taught, that pardon for his sins was to be purchased by a display of martial zeal on behalf of his faith, and that the shedding of his blood in such a sacred cause would ensure him an entry into the joys of Heaven. This doctrine appealed in the warmest and most direct manner to the prevailing sentiment of the times. What wonder, then, that it was eagerly accepted, and gradually worked its way through all ranks of society.”¹

It is very evident that the Kingdom of the Mystic Jezebel was of this world; and, therefore, she was consistent in teaching her servants to fight for it. Hence arose the four great religious Military Orders, the Knights Templar, the Knights of St. John, the Lazarets, and the Teutonic Knights; the first and second of which were known as the Red and White Cross Knights, respectively.

Another mark by which the Roman Church might have been recognized as the mystic Jezebel was her ruthlessly persecuting spirit; for there was nothing of this kind in Him Whom she hypocritically addressed as Lord. When His disciples asked Him to bid them call down fire from Heaven upon the unfriendly Samaritans, He rebuked them, and said;—

“Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of.

¹ *Knights of Malta*, pp. 1, 2.

For the Son of Man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them." ¹

Rome, on the contrary, in her times of power has always mercilessly destroyed every one that was standing in her way ; and we need only mention the appalling barbarities of the Albigenian massacres, and the horrors of the Inquisition, of the Auto da fe, and of the fires of Smithfield.

But somehow such things are wont to be omitted, or minimized almost to nothing, in many of our histories ; for there is ever going on a mysterious tampering with literature, which is not, perhaps, to be wondered at, seeing that we are dwelling in Satan's realms.

As an example, we may cite the great massacre of Protestants in Ireland, in 1641. Now, Oliver Cromwell has been much abused for the severity with which he treated the Irish in his subsequent invasion. But it must be remembered, that he believed himself to be executing murderers, which was, also, the view of the whole English people at the time. Very instructive it is to observe the difference between the remarks on this subject in some of our modern histories and the writings of men who were contemporary with the

¹ Luke ix. 55-6. The R.V. has omitted these valuable words of the Lord, without any adequate reason ; and the suggestion, that they are an interpolation blended from *Math. xviii. 11*, and *Luke xix. 10*, is absurd. "The whole answer of our Lord," says *Alford*, "was in the way of the system of ecclesiastical censures, and has, probably, been unsparingly tampered with on that account. I cannot consent to expunge, where authorities are so divided, words whose insertion could hardly have occurred." *Scrivener* pronounces this objection to be reasonable ; and *Dean Burgon* exclaims against the profanity of removing so important a saying of our Lord, "though *Manuscripts, Versions, and Fathers*, from the Second Century downwards," testify to its genuineness.

massacre. Richard Baxter affirms, that a main cause of the Civil War, and the deposition and execution of Charles I., was the indignation of the people at the King's neglect to punish the Roman Catholic authors of so terrible a crime. And, in his Autobiography, in summing up the causes of the War, he speaks thus ;—

“But of all the rest, there was nothing that with the People wrought so much, as the *Irish* Massacree and Rebellion : The *Irish* Papists did by an unexpected Insurrection, rise all over *Ireland* at once, and seized upon almost all the Strengths¹ of the whole Land, and *Dublin* wonderfully escaped (a Servant of Sir *John Clotworthy's* discovering the Plot) which was to have been surprised with the rest, Octob. 23. 1641. Two hundred thousand Persons they murdered, (as you may see in the Earl of *Orary's* Answer to a Petition, and in Dr. *Jones's* Narrative of the Examinations, and Sir *John Temple's* History, who was one of the resident Justices :) . . .²

. . . In a word, scarce any History mentioneth the like barbarous Cruelty as this was : The *French* Massacree³ murdered but Thirty, or Forty Thousand ; but *Two Hundred Thousand* was a Number which astonished those that heard it.”⁴

The words, “Till I come,” seem to be an intimation that this apostasy will not altogether disappear, until

¹ That is, apparently, the strong or fortified places.

² We omit the sickening details of the massacre, which resembled those of the Indian Mutiny, but were, of course, on a much larger scale.

³ That is, the Massacre of St. Bartholomew, August 24th, 1572.

⁴ *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, p. 28. We have copied the passage as it stands in the edition of 1696.

the true Church has been summoned to meet her Lord. And we shall presently find that the later chapters of the Apocalypse favour this view. For the great Ecclesiastical System will be broken up and destroyed only in the throes of that awful convulsion, which will set the last rebel Emperor upon the throne of the world.

In this Epistle only, the Lord adds something to the description of the one who shall obtain the reward, and designates him as "he that overcometh, and he that keepeth My works unto the end." For there would be strong temptation to keep other works, to serve the Church rather than Christ ; and, if any one were so influenced, however pious he might seem, he would not ultimately be found among the overcomers.

Again the promise is strikingly appropriate. After the toils of the wilderness, the Israelites were, if they remained faithful, to subdue the Canaanitish nations and possess their land. So shall the true Church hereafter subjugate and rule over the world with Christ, as soon as the last weary traveller of her long procession shall have passed out of the desert of this life. The Roman Church, however, must needs reign now, without the Presence of Christ, without His Apostles, and without the countless members of His Body who have already crossed the stream ; but those who resist her seductions, and are willing to be esteemed as nothing in this world, shall, when the Lord comes, enjoy to the full that after which she is vainly striving. For so completely does the Lord identify Himself with His Own that He gives to them the very same power over the nations which He has received from His Father.

"Faithful is the saying, For if we died with Him, we shall also live with Him : if we endure, we shall also reign with Him."

↳ But there is something more for the overcomer: he shall have the **Morning Star**—a promise differing from that which was given to the pious Jew, upon whom the Sun of Righteousness shall arise. The explanation is, perhaps, as follows. Those who anxiously wait for the dawn know its welcome harbinger, the silver planet, which emerges in the glimmer of early twilight, bright and conspicuous at first, and then growing fainter and fainter in the gradually increasing light, until, at last, it dies “on a bed of daffodil sky.” But sometimes it is swept away in very different fashion; it may be that it has scarcely appeared when the storm-cloud comes on, obliterates it in a moment, shuts out the hope of day, and brings back the darkness of midnight. Yet, after a while, the roar of the tempest is hushed, the angry lightnings cease, the clouds part and float away; and, lo! the sun has arisen, and is looking down upon the earth in all the splendour of his might.

Such a daybreak as this must, it would seem, be in our minds when we consider the promise of the **Morning-star**. Those servants of Christ who are ever looking for His coming will see Him when He calls His Own to Himself. But this manifestation, of which the slumbering world may be altogether unaware, will be but momentary, and then the storm-clouds of the Great Tribulation will bring back midnight darkness upon the earth. At the close, however, of the time of trouble, the **Messiah** will appear in all His glory to deliver the Children of Abraham, and, as the clouds part, will be found to have arisen as the Sun of Righteousness, with healing in His wings, over them that fear the Name of the Lord.¹

¹ Mal. iv. 2.

We must not leave this Epistle without noticing a significant change in the order of its sentences. The exhortation to him "that hath an ear," which hitherto has preceded the promise to the overcomer, is now placed after it, and retains its new position in the remaining Epistles. This change seems to indicate, that, whereas in each of the first three Epistles the exhortation is addressed to the whole Church, in the last four it is spoken only to the overcomers. The reason for the change was, that the four Churches had departed so far from God that, as corporate bodies, they had been abandoned by His Spirit; and the large majority of their members were, consequently, incapable of understanding messages from Him.

As a proof of the evil condition of these Churches, we may observe, that the Lord marks off, as objects of His special care, only "the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this teaching, which know not the deep things of Satan, as they say;" that He speaks of but "a few names in Sardis that did not defile their garments;" describes His Own people in Philadelphia as a little flock, struggling to keep the faith amid corrupt multitudes; and threatens to spue Laodicea out of His mouth.

The Epistle to the Church in Sardis

↳ We now pass on to a Church of knowledge, indeed, and comparative orthodoxy, but withal to one which is fast sinking from the Heavenly Places into the world, and losing all its spiritual power.

The word "Sardis" is not Greek: hence some have derived it from a Hebrew root, which would give it the meaning of "remnant;" and this they refer to "the

Handwritten note:
"The Church in Sardis"

rest in Thyatira," mentioned in the preceding Epistle. But such a derivation is unfair; for the word is no more Hebrew than it is Greek. It is a Lydian name; and, therefore, in a Lydian root we must seek its interpretation, which will then be "new," "new-born with the year," "renewed."¹ There is a sound of reformation in the name. Sardis had evidently recovered her orthodoxy after some apostasy into Paganism; but had not recovered the warmth and devotion of her first love.

To this Church the Lord presents Himself as "He That hath the Seven Spirits of God," a title which is full of meaning for her. She lacks vitality, and He appears as the Possessor of the Spirit in all the seven-fold plenitude of His power: whatever may be her intellectual force and activity, she is little moved by Divine energies, and He comes with gracious purpose, that she may have life, and may have it abundantly.

In His hand He holds all the Seven Stars, which are the Angels of the Churches. This seems to be, as it were, a solemn repetition of His claim to be Head over all, and to indicate the critical time of a new beginning, a fresh departure, analogous to the return of the Jews from captivity, and the rebuilding of the Temple.

Again, the Lord knows: He has no need that any should witness to Him of this Church, and it is useless for special pleaders to defend her. His eyes of flame pierce through every covering of hypocrisy: therefore, void as she is of spiritual power, it will not avail her to have a name to live. She may deceive men, and may even, like the more advanced Laodicea, go on to

¹ See Stier's *Words of the Risen Saviour*, p. 165.

deceive herself; but she cannot hide her real condition from Him. Against the Church which preceded her, she boasts that she holds to the pure Word of God; nevertheless, her vitality is at so low an ebb, that she is spiritually almost as a person in a swoon is physically: it might be said of her, as Paul says of the woman who lives in pleasure, that she "is dead while she liveth."

It is not without deep significance, that, whereas adversaries are found assailing five of the Churches, either from within or from without, there is no mention of any foe in the Epistles to Sardis and Laodicea. For these two have ceased to be effectual witnesses, and, therefore, Satan has no quarrel with them: they do not in any way torment those who have settled down as dwellers upon the earth; why, then, should anger be excited against them? They have a tacit understanding with the world, that, although their opinions may differ upon some points, there is nothing to hinder a mutual friendship.

The first admonition of the Lord points directly to the source and root of all this deadness to spiritual things and conformity to the world. "Become watchful," He commands; and, if we interpret this verse by the next, we shall see that He is not speaking of general watchfulness, but of waiting for His return. Yet, such a waiting certainly includes watchfulness in all things; for he who lives in the daily expectation of seeing Christ as He is will surely not be deficient in zeal to purify himself, even as He is pure.

"Strengthen," the Lord continues, "the things which remain, that are ready to die"—for life was not yet quite extinct. And, in this warning, we may, probably, discern a reference to teaching, as well as to

work : the thought of the Lord's appearing had been cast aside, and all other doctrines were becoming indistinct. The great disclosure, which impresses upon us, more powerfully than any other revelation, the fact that we are strangers and pilgrims here, was "spiritualized;" and whatever else seemed burdensome was quickly deprived of its meaning in a similar way. The literal Presence of Christ was not desired; therefore, His Person was no longer a constant subject of contemplation. Compared with the multitude who had the responsibility of knowledge, but few were gazing fixedly upon Him; and, consequently, but few were being changed from glory to glory into the same image. And, since this Church had no apprehension of being suddenly called away, she found it easy to do much the same as the world; and, settling down upon earth, was beginning to lose all the Heavenly gifts. Gradually it was becoming her custom to bring everything to the test of intellect and human philosophy; so that, as time went on, the very foundation-doctrine of the Great Sacrifice for sin would be likely to disappear.

But the waning of faith speedily changes outward conduct, and so the Lord goes on to say;—"For I have found no work of thine fulfilled before My God." The works are deficient in quality: it is not the pure love of Christ which constrains the doers, but lower motives. They are wanting in quantity: the daily tale which God has appointed is not accomplished. "Suffer it now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil *all* righteousness," said the Lord: but the Sardians, if they coldly perform some part of their duty, are satisfied that they have thereby compounded for the neglect of all the rest. This, however, will not suffice. "And say to Archippus, Take heed to the ministry

which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it."¹ For God reviews, not merely the things that are done, but also the things that are left undone.

That she may realize her present lifeless condition, Sardis is exhorted to remember how she received the Word which was sent to her; with what heartiness of joy, which is now gone; with what warmth of love, which has now grown cold; with what demonstration of the Spirit and power, which is no longer felt! And, at the same time, she should call to mind the substance of the instruction, reproof, and correction, which she has heard—the earnest appeals, the teachings of the Spirit, and the great responsibilities which they involve.

She has received and heard, and, consequently, there is no excuse for her, as there was for the remnant in Thyatira. "If ye were blind, ye would have no sin: but now ye say, We see: therefore your sin remaineth." And so, a solemn appeal is made to her, and, at the same time, to all who can at any time be likened to her. Such Churches, or individuals, are urged to observe and keep what they have heard, and to repent quickly: but, if they refuse to respond, the time of visitation is passing: there is a limit even to the forbearance of God. All faithless believers must share the fate of the world which they have loved, and That Day come upon them unawares. At an hour when they think not, unexpectedly as a thief in the night, He will have arrived in the air to beckon away all who are watching for Him; and, as Enoch vanished from among his fellows, they will depart, or as Lot was hurried through the streets of slumbering

¹ Col. iv. 17.

Sodom. But those believers who dare to sleep as do other men, who suffer their God-consciousness to grow drowsy, so that they become **apathetic**, and the powers of the World-to-Come lose their hold upon them—such foolish ones must be left for a while among the wicked, to experience the full development and unrestrained nature of that lawlessness which they have not been sufficiently careful to avoid.

There are, however, the Lord says, a few names in Sardis which did not defile their garments. How sweeping the charge implied in these words! What! are there, also, in professing Christendom only a few with whom the Lord is satisfied! Even so: for alas! we may flatter ourselves now, but shall shortly be subjected to a very different kind of judgment, and shall discover how fearful a mistake it is to confound privileges with the use made of them. "And thou, Capernaum, shalt thou be exalted to Heaven? Thou shalt go down to Hades."

Yet there are a few whose garments are not spotted by the flesh; for, if at any time they have stained them, they have gone at once to the Fountain, and made them white in the Blood of the Lamb. They have escaped the contamination of the Leaven, and preserved purity of doctrine; they have esteemed Christ in all things as the First and the Last; and, if urged to conduct which was not in the strictest accord with His commands, they have replied, "We ought to obey God rather than man," and have not hesitated to stand firm, even when they were but two or three against the great multitude. Nor will God forget this faith and patience. When others are in anguish, when the whole earth is writhing and throbbing beneath the repeated strokes of the Almighty in the days of terror, they shall be

Here is this teaching again - that Catholics will be left to suffer the same fate as the others - it may be true!

walking with Christ in the Heavenly Places, clothed in the white robes of Righteousness : they shall be far removed from all trouble and alarm, even as Abraham was when, from the mountains of Canaan, he looked down upon the smoking ruins of Sodom.

Yes!

In this promise there is, possibly, an allusion to the procession of priests and Levites who, clothed in white linen, followed Solomon on his way to dedicate the newly built Temple.¹ And, certainly, the Psalm of praise, which at that time ascended to God, will well suit the happy throng that shall hereafter cluster around the Lord Jesus, never again to leave Him. With heart and lips will they rejoice to cry ;—" For He is good ; for His mercy endureth for ever."

But they shall fare thus because they are *worthy*. Let not Christians of our times dare to shrink from that word, uttered by Him Who is the Same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. The light of the glorious Gospel must, indeed, first shine into our dark hearts by the command of God Alone ; but, after the darkness has been dispelled, though all the power must still come from Him, He, nevertheless, expects a co-operation of hearty will on our part. When we know His promise to give His Holy Spirit to them that ask Him, it becomes our duty to ask ; and, if we ask, we shall receive, and shall then be enabled to do " those good works, which God afore prepared that we should walk in them."² But, if we are careless in this matter, we shall fail in power, our work will be left undone, and we shall not gain the Prize which is set before us for patience in the race and self-denial in the fight.

In the words to the overcomer, the promise of white

It is certainly
questionable
whether belief
in the Holy Spirit
is a necessary
condition of
salvation.
Luke 11:13
to account for

¹ 2 Chron. v. 11, 12.

² Eph. ii. 10.

I think this can hardly be admitted. It is written in the Lamb's Book

raiment is repeated; and we are, moreover, told that those who are thus arrayed will have passed beyond all tests, and will never be in jeopardy again; for the Lord will in no wise blot their names out of the Book of Life. The expression is difficult: it seems to imply, that all who are brought under the sound of the Gospel are graciously written in the Lamb's Book of Life; just as every Israelite, at his birth, was numbered among the favoured people. But an Israelite might so neglect or despise the Law of His God that sacrifice could not be accepted for him; so that he was doomed to bear his own iniquity, and be cut off from his people.¹ In like manner, those who have heard the glad tidings of salvation may, by their disobedience and continued rebellion, cause their names to be erased from the Book of Life. They may be within the Gospel-net when it is brought to shore, but be cast away, as bad fish, when the separation takes place.

In the passage before us, however, the Lord is not speaking of the lost, but only of the saved, among whom there are men spiritual and carnal, worthy and unworthy. Both have been ransomed by the Blood of the Lamb; but the former have vividly realized that their many sins have been forgiven; and have, therefore, loved much, and prayed with earnest desire that they might be strengthened to show forth their love in the dark world around them. And He has heard, and has supplied them with power to overcome, and to do those things that are pleasing in His sight.

But the latter have felt no such deep conviction of their sins and the pardon of them, and, consequently, have not been so overwhelmed with love for Him Who

¹ Levit. xix. 8; Num. xv. 30, 31; xix. 13.

died for them. Selfishly content with their own deliverance, they have not yearned to follow in the steps of their Deliverer. Thus they have suffered themselves to be overcome by the world and Satan, and have lost the Prize, the First Resurrection. Therefore, they are not found worthy, and may not walk with their Lord in white, but must abide with the dead, until the great Sabbath of joy has passed by.

The analogy between the previous and the present Dispensation is often very striking; and, if we turn to the second chapter of Ezra, we shall find something exactly corresponding to the contrast that has been described. For, in the sixty-second verse, we read;—

“These sought their register among them that were reckoned by genealogy, but they were not found: therefore, were they deemed polluted, and put from the Priesthood.”¹

They were, however, neither deprived of expiation by Sacrifice, nor cut off from their people; but were merely thrust out from the Priesthood. So, also, the saved ones who, in the present Age, have not walked consistently, nor obtained by prayer the power to overcome temptation, will incur a terrible disappointment. Their names will not be found in the register of the Royal Priesthood; and, therefore, they will not share the glories of the Kingdom.

Historic Fulfilment of the Fifth Epistle

In the previous section we remarked, that the name Sardis suggests renovation. And, accordingly, we shall find that the prophecy embedded in this Epistle is concerned with the Churches which originated in the

¹ Ezra ii. 62.

Are the Prize & the 1st Resurrection identical? They may be!

According to this teaching such are not lost - but will not share the millennial Kingdom.

Reformation, and which have been generally distinguished as orthodox on the whole, but very seldom as exhibiting a spiritual power in anything like due proportion to their privileges.

We must, however, remember, that, although the Reformation did, indeed, confer great blessings upon us, by breaking down the tyranny and murderous power of Rome, and by encouraging the circulation of the Scriptures in every Protestant country, it was, nevertheless, by no means a purely Christian movement; but, in the case of many who assisted in bringing it about, a mere struggle for political liberty, or some other earthly object. Hence we can scarcely wonder that the results were not altogether satisfactory. For, even before the enthusiasm of their victory had died away, the Protestants had fallen apart into antagonistic Sects, which, in their sharp contentions with each other, soon lapsed into a state of spiritual deadness.

The German Protestants were divided into two great communities, the Lutheran Church and the Reformed: the former of which still insisted upon a Real Presence in the bread of the Lord's Supper, and retained Roman vestments and many Roman ceremonies; while the Reformed, or Calvinistic, Church repudiated such doctrines and practices, but thrust their own extreme views of Predestination, Election, and Reprobation, into undue prominence.

Then the terrible Thirty Years War devastated and exhausted the whole country to so fearful an extent that the great question with the surviving population was, What they should eat and drink, and wherewithal they should be clothed: how they should rebuild their ruined cities and farmsteads, and repair their shattered fortunes. No doubt, the worldly cares necessarily

too true

connected with such circumstances did much to divert the minds of the people from spiritual things, and tended to induce a merely formal and outward religion. And there was very little help to be obtained from the pulpit or the Theological Professors. For, as a rule, the Clergy of both the Sects were affected with the general apathy and deadness ; and, having, for the most part, no spiritual eyes wherewith to discern the work of God that lay before them, fell to controversy on their differences in doctrine, and often exhibited as much fierceness as they had displayed in their former conflicts with Rome.

Some of the bitterest of these controversies were concerned with points of very secondary importance, and sometimes with such as ought not to have been discussed at all—a fact which evoked the following remark from Matthew Pfaff, one of the good and thoughtful men of those days ;—

“If the Apostles should return to earth, and be called to Professors’ chairs, they would evince a woeful ignorance concerning the things which are the subjects of strife among the Theologians.”

These words occur in a remonstrance addressed to Protestants¹ by Pfaff, in 1720. And Spener had previously complained, that the majority of the Clergy viewed their religion from a merely intellectual standpoint, and, provided they could defend their dogmas against opponents, were altogether careless in regard to their own spiritual life ; and so, could afford no help to men of more tender conscience, whom they might have led to seek the Lord in spirit and in truth.

Presently, however, a reaction set in—chiefly through

¹ Under the title ; *Alloquium Irenicum ad Protestantas*.

the influence of Philip Jacob Spener, August Herman Franke, and Christian Thomasius—and, under the name of Pietism, convinced many that Christianity was not a matter of mere intellectuality and precisely defined and logically defended dogmas, but must exhibit the fruits of a holy life and a loving heart.

Those who were sincerely affected by this movement did many good and benevolent deeds, and strove to pour their love in Christ upon their fellow-men, and to walk as nearly as they could in the steps of their beloved Master. Yet, if we may be allowed to judge from their neglect of the deep teachings and mysteries of God, by the knowledge of which we are conformed to His mind, they seem to have recoiled too far from the evil which they were avoiding : and this fault laid them open to many attacks.

Then Christian Wolf appeared at Halle, which hitherto had been the Headquarters of Pietism, and began to teach, that Christianity could be defended by the very weapons that were used against it, namely, by reason and science. His philosophy, which, for the most part, was developed from the theories of Leibnitz, was for some time popular. But, at length, the Pietist leaders were enabled to demonstrate, that, if Christianity had to depend for its defence upon human reason, it must of necessity surrender all its supernatural characteristics ; because these lay beyond the limits of human reason, and could be known only by revelation.

During the reign of Frederick William II., Voltaire visited Germany, and introduced his philosophic Deism, which did its baleful work by means of levity, sarcasm, and ridicule : and, soon afterwards, Illuminism, with its free thought and proud contempt for orthodoxy, creeds, and religious superstitions, was casting its cold chill

over the land. The Pietists and Moravians did, indeed, struggle against these deadening influences, and the latter developed a wonderful missionary spirit, which, after a while, exercised no small influence upon the Protestant Countries of Europe. Nevertheless, the general condition of German Protestants during this period could not be better described than in the Lord's words, "Thou hast a name that thou livest, and thou art dead."

Let us now turn for a moment to the United States of Holland. The Seven Provinces—as soon as they had broken off the yoke of Spain, in 1754, and established their Republic—adopted, by a tacit consent, the Calvinistic form of Protestantism as their national religion; but their enjoyment of religious unity was not of very long continuance.

In 1603, Jacob van Harmin, better known as Arminius, became Professor of Theology at Leyden—a man who, after long and diligent study, had convinced himself, that no Divine sanction could be found for the rigid Predestinarian doctrine of Election and Reprobation, and who, consequently, introduced the system now termed Arminianism.

In 1610, the year after his death, his disciples drew up a statement of their views, which they called "A Remonstrance." Hence their party were known as Remonstrants, a name which caused that 'of Contra-remonstrants to be given to their Calvinistic opponents.

The last-mentioned party were in favour with the populace, and were, consequently, the more numerous—a fact which seems to have induced the Stadtholder, Maurice Prince of Orange—who was supposed to be aiming at the sovereignty—to range himself on their side. The Remonstrants, on the other hand, were much

fewer in number, but more select, and were led by Olden Barneveld and Grotius, the famous lawyer and theologian.

It was not long before the whole country became so violently agitated by the controversy that the States General deemed it necessary to interfere, and convoked a Synod, which was to meet at Dort and decide the question in dispute. But, just before its first session, Prince Maurice arrested Barneveld and Grotius and cast them into prison, thus depriving the Remonstrants of their leaders at the critical moment.

When the Synod met, in 1618, the Remonstrants found themselves regarded rather as arraigned criminals than as men freely debating on the same level as their opponents. And, in the end, they were deprived of their civil rights, while their Clergy were banished from the land, unless they consented to renounce their own creed and accept that of the Calvinists. But, after the death of Maurice, the Republican party recovered its power, and tolerance was again extended to the Arminians.

And so, the spiritually deadening controversy was resumed, and, perhaps, reached the climax of its folly in the compromise-doctrine of Hypothetical Universalism, proposed by Moses Amyrault of Saumur, which affirmed, that God had decreed to save all men, through Jesus Christ, hypothetically, on the condition of their faith. And that, in order to produce this faith in men, resistible grace was given to all, but irresistible grace to none save the elect!

“Behold, this only have I found, that God made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions.”¹

¹ Eccles. vii. 29.

How impossible it must have been for a fervid spiritual life to exist among these wrangling factions may be readily understood.

In England, the contention between Episcopalians and Puritans, which began in the reign of Edward VI., corresponded to that of Lutherans and Calvinists in Germany. The Puritans aimed at a drastic reformation: they were for abolishing all Roman ceremonies and vestments, together with the Roman Episcopate and hierarchical system; and would have restored plain services and government by Presbyters, as instituted by the Apostles. They would have begun afresh from the Word of God, without any reference to the idolatrous system of Satan from which they were just escaping.

The Episcopalians, on the other hand, while equally determined to break off the Papal yoke, did not wish to do away with government by Bishops and Archbishops, and would have retained many Roman practices. Not a few of them were in high places in the Anglican Church, and had just succeeded in procuring a revision of the First Prayer-book of Edward VI.; so that they were naturally unwilling to stultify themselves by submitting to have their work set aside, although there was much of Roman error still left in the Second Prayer-book.

Thus the parties were clearly distinguishable during the reign of Edward VI.; and, on the accession of Mary, the prominent leaders on both sides saw the necessity of flight to the Continent—a course which was approved by Archbishop Cranmer, who, however, refused to adopt it in his own case, and remained at his post. But, even on the Continent, the two exiled parties continued in sharp conflict, especially at Frank-

fort, where the Anglicans finally triumphed under the vigorous leadership of Dr. Richard Cox, who subsequently accepted a Bishopric.

But the Puritan exiles, and many others who were not bigoted Anglicans, were hospitably received and settled among the Continental Calvinists, and some of them under the direct personal influence of Calvin himself, who was then at the height of his power. In England, they had left an Ecclesiastical chaos : on the Continent, in Switzerland, in the adjacent parts of France, and in some of the cities of Germany, they beheld well-ordered Churches, governed by Presbyters according to Apostolic rules, with plain services, stripped of everything Roman, and impressive preaching, and with a strong moral discipline. They were fascinated by their experience, and, upon the accession of Elizabeth, returned home in the full hope of establishing in their own country that which had seemed to work so well in the lands of their exile.

But the convictions and prejudices of the Anglicans, also, had been strengthened and sharpened by conflicts with their English brethren, and with the Continental Calvinists around them ; so that they came home with a disposition to support Episcopal government and Roman Church-order, and to retain some, at least, of the ancient ceremonies and vestments.

And there was yet another formidable obstacle lying in the way of the Puritans ; for the Queen was no ardent Protestant. There was, indeed, one doctrine of Rome against which she set herself with determined mien, as her father had done before her. No Pope should ever interfere with the sovereignty of the Queen of England : she would suffer no Italian Priest to tithe and toll in her dominions. But she loved the pomp,

the ceremonies, and the sensuous colours, of Rome: and, until the day of her death, the crucifix and lights might be seen on the altar of her private Chapel. She was, moreover, resolved to uphold Episcopacy: for the Bishop, she knew, was a powerful agent for the suppression of that Protestant individualism which she so greatly disliked and dreaded in the Puritans. Hence Presbyterianism was kept under, during her reign, and Episcopacy was firmly established.

But, perhaps, the most spiritually disastrous of the actions of Elizabeth was the suppression of "the Prophesyings," as they were called, or "Religious Exercises," which had been established among the Clergy. These were Meetings, somewhat like our modern Bible-readings, in which a previously chosen text or paragraph of Scripture was expounded by the first speaker, and afterwards further commented upon by others. Subsequently, laymen, also, were admitted to the Meetings, and, occasionally, were allowed to join in the discussion.

This practice was acting admirably, as a means of instructing the ignorant and still semi-Popish Clergy, and of furnishing them with the Word of Life to carry to their flocks.

But the Queen did not like such proceedings: they were, she said, a violation of the Law of the Land, and as such were an offence to her orderly subjects: they caused the laity to neglect their secular affairs, and filled their heads with notions that might lead to disputes and seditions in the State: they drew people of the vulgar sort to Meetings when they ought to be otherwise occupied in some honest labour for their living: and so on. She, therefore, despatched peremptory letters, containing the above and other arguments,

to her Bishops, commanding them to inhibit the "Propheysings;" and, should any of the Clergy still persist in continuing them, to send such persons to prison and notify their case either to herself or to her High Court of Commission.

Many of the Bishops were only too pleased to carry out this order; while others did so with much reluctance. But Grindal, the Archbishop of Canterbury, refused to obey, and made a noble protest to the Queen. He reminded her of her promise to abstain from arbitrary interference in spiritual matters; and affirmed, that the Meetings were exercising a wide influence for good, by familiarizing the Clergy with the Scriptures, and were the most powerful of all means for the beating down of Popery. And, as a proof of their practical usefulness, he mentioned this striking fact;—that, whereas previously to their establishment there were not more than three able Preachers to be found, now there were thirty fit to preach at Paul's Cross, and forty or fifty, besides, able to instruct their own Cures. And that, while such results were before him, he could not, without offence to the Majesty of God, send out injunctions for suppressing the "Exercises."

This answer so enraged the Queen that an order was immediately issued from the Star Chamber, confining the Archbishop to his own house, and depriving him of his Archiepiscopal functions for six months. Subsequently, however, the Primate was induced to obey the royal mandate: but he firmly refused to withdraw the opinion respecting it which he had expressed in his protest; and, consequently, was never restored to the Queen's favour.

From this incident it is evident, that Elizabeth deemed her authority over the Anglican Church to be

as indisputably absolute as that of the Pope over the Roman Church. She held that she might do what she would with it, without even troubling to ask counsel of its Ecclesiastical Head, the Primate of all England. This was also the view of James I.; and the claim was admitted by the Bishops and Clergy, who preached the Divine right of Kings; so that the Church became a mere dependency of the Crown, subject to changes in doctrine, discipline, or forms of worship, at the will of the Sovereign.

The Puritans, also, and the masses of the people, seem, more or less, to have acquiesced in the theory, so long as the Monarch shared their fear and detestation of Rome. But, when Charles I. attempted to exercise the prerogative of his predecessors, and, at the same time, was manifestly shaping a policy for the restoration of the Roman Obedience, the Puritans and the people revolted, and the Revolution which followed overthrew both King and Church.

Elizabeth seems to have had a great dread of preachers, who were almost always Puritans¹; for she feared that, by criticizing too freely any orders emanating from herself or the Star Chamber, which they thought contrary to Scripture, they might provoke

¹ Naturally enough; for the Clergy, used as they were to dead forms and ceremonies, had no mighty truth or inspiring revelation to compel their speech. Moreover, since many of them had been Catholics when Henry VIII. was King, had turned Protestants under Edward VI., had gone back to Popery in Mary's reign, and had once more returned to Protestantism on the accession of Elizabeth, they could scarcely have had sufficient conviction to energize them. But the heart of the Puritans was so filled with their new faith, so enthused with the discovery of salvation through the love of God and the Blood of the Lamb, that they could not but speak with their tongues.

discontent and rebellion in the land. And so, she announced that not more than three, or at most four, preachers were needed in a county.

This discouragement, added to the suppression of the "Exercises," caused the number of able ministers to decrease still more; the ignorant Clergy who remained were despised, and the morals of the people degenerated. And, since a sufficient number of men in Orders could not be found to fill vacancies, it became the custom to substitute Readers,¹ often of disreputable character, who recited the services of the Prayer-book, and sometimes read a discourse from the Book of Homilies; but had nothing further to say.

Under such a regime as this, there could be no living Christianity. Nevertheless, the Puritans, though disliked and slighted by the Court and the Bishops, increased, and obtained an ever firmer hold upon the minds of the people; for, wherever they were, Scriptural words of truth, and often of power, flowed from their lips.

When James I. ascended the throne, Lord Bacon advised him of the state of the Church of England in a very able paper, in which he urged the adoption of a more conciliatory policy toward the Puritans; suggesting, that several things for which they were asking might be granted with advantage. Among these, he urged the dropping of the misleading term, Priest; the removal of the Absolution from the Prayer-book; the

¹ This was a revival of one of the Minor Orders of Romanism, that of the Lector, or Reader. The paper required to be signed by all Protestant Readers began thus;—"Imprimis, I shall not teach or interpret, but only read that which is appointed by public authority.

I shall not minister the Sacraments, or other public rites of the Church, but bury the dead, and purify women after their childbirth."

non-enforcement of the cap and surplice in preaching ; subscription rather for articles of doctrine than for rites and ceremonies and points of outward government ; more care and stringency in the Bishop's examination of candidates for Orders ; efforts to increase the number of competent preaching Ministers in the Church ; and, as the best means to that end, the revival of the "Prophesyings," or "Religious Exercises," which Elizabeth had suppressed against the advice of the Primate Grindal.

But this appeal failed to produce any effect ; as was, also, the case with the Millenary Petition, which the Puritans presented to the King on his progress to London. For the Puritans were not given to adulation, but the Bishops were accomplished courtiers, and knew well how to flatter the vanity of James, which was his weak point. Hence, although he did summon a Conference to meet at Hampton Court, according to his promise, the Puritan Ministers quickly perceived that they had come to discuss a foregone conclusion. Only four of them were allowed to take part in the Conference, Reynolds and Sparks from Oxford, and Knewstubs and Chaderton from Cambridge. But they were opposed by the Archbishop of Canterbury, eight Bishops, eight Deans, and Drs. Field and King.

On the first day of the Conference, the King held a private council with his Bishops and Deans, to which the Puritans were not admitted. On the second day, they were allowed to plead their cause, and the King actually reprovved Bancroft, the Bishop of London, for a rude and insolent interruption while Reynolds was speaking. That, however, was his first and last impartial act. Thenceforth, instead of behaving as a Moderator, he openly took the side of the Bishops, and

himself pleaded their cause. The Puritans are said to have made but a poor defence of their points: they answered, says Barlow "verie lously and coldlie."

But what else could have been expected? They were overawed by the circumstance that their chief opponent was their King; while his tone towards them can only be described as bullying. Moreover, he frequently introduced personal matters, telling them, that he knew what they would do with him, should they ever succeed to power, and often repeating his favourite saying, "No Bishop, no King." And, yet again, his Peers and Bishops were spectators of the controversy, to whom he often turned with some joke at their expense by which the Peers were much entertained, more especially when he said, "A Puritan is a Protestant strayed out of his wits." In such conditions the Puritan Ministers felt that the whole of the august assembly was against them, and were, doubtless, too unnerved to do their best.

As the King rose to depart, he said;—

"If this be all they have to say, I shall make them conform themselves, or I will harry them out of this land, or else do worse."

And so, he dismissed the oppressed Puritans with a threat of persecution. But he little suspected what he was really doing. He was alienating the Puritans from the Monarchy and the aristocracy, destroying their belief in the Divine right of Kings, and rousing in them a spirit which, in a little over forty years, brought about the deposition and execution of his own son, Charles I.

The subjoined brief account of the Conference by a writer of the seventeenth century may, perhaps, enable us to understand what the people thought of it;—

“However, in *January* they obtained a Conference with the Church-party at Hampton-Court, where the King himself would be Moderator, whilst most of the Nobility and Bishops were Spectators; you need not doubt which party prevailed, the Nobility and Bishops not only giving the King the Victory, with the Epithets of, *The Solomon of the Age, The most Learned*, but of *being inspired.*”¹

Amid such continual bickerings and strifes, spirituality dwindled away, and love burned low, until, at length, swords were drawn by both parties, and a deadly and most unchristian struggle ensued.

But into how dire a condition the Church lapsed when her Clergy were deprived of the only available means of instruction and mutual edification, and ignorant and often ill-living and impious Readers were substituted for able and zealous Ministers, we may learn by the subjoined and interesting extract from the beginning of Richard Baxter’s Autobiography;—²

“We lived in a Country that had but little Preaching at all: In the Village where I was born there was four Readers successively in Six years time, ignorant Men, and two of them immoral in their lives; who were all my School-masters. In the Village where my Father lived, there was a Reader of about Eighty years of Age that never preached, and had two Churches about Twenty miles distant: His Eye-sight failing him, he said Common-Prayer without Book; but for the

¹ *A Detection of the Court and State of England during The Four last Reigns, and the Inter-regnum*, by Roger Coke Esquire, Vol. i. p. 7. 2nd Edition, 1696.

² *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, pp. 1, 2.

Reading of the Psalms and Chapters, he got a Common Thresher and Day-Labourer one year, and a Taylor another year: (for the Clerk could not read well): And at last he had a Kinsman of his own, (the excellentest Stage-player in all the Country, and a good Gamester and good Fellow) that got Orders and supplied one of his Places! After him another younger Kinsman, that could write and read, got Orders: And at the same time another Neighbour's Son that had been a while at School turn'd Minister, and who would needs go further than the rest, ventur'd to preach (and after got a Living in *Staffordshire*,) and when he had been a Preacher about Twelve or Sixteen years, he was fain to give over, it being discovered that his Orders were forged by the first ingenious Stage-Player. After him another Neighbour's Son took Orders, when he had been a while an Attorney's Clerk, and a common Drunkard, and tiple himself into so great Poverty that he had no other way to live: It was feared that he and more of them came by their Orders the same way with the forementioned Person: These were the School-masters of my Youth (except two of them :) who read Common Prayer on Sundays and Holy-days, and taught School and tiple on the Week-days, and whipt the Boys when they were drunk, so that we changed them very oft. Within a few miles about us, were near a dozen more Ministers that were near Eighty years old apiece, and never preached; poor ignorant Readers, and most of them of Scandalous Lives: only three or four constant competent Preachers lived near us, and those (though Conformable all save one) were

the common Marks of the People's Obloquy and Reproach, and any that had but gone to hear them, when he had no Preaching at home, was made the Derision of the Vulgar Rabble, under the odious Name of a *Puritane*."

Baxter's account of the manner in which the Lord's Day was spent is such as one might have expected in the circumstances.

"In the Village where I lived the Reader read the Common-Prayer briefly, and the rest of the Day even till dark Night almost, except Eating time, was spent in Dancing under a May-Pole and a great Tree, not far from my Father's Door; where all the Town did meet together: And though one of my Father's own Tenants was the Piper, he could not restrain him, nor break the Sport: So that we could not read the Scripture in our Family without the great disturbance of the Taber and Pipe and Noise in the Street!"¹

The Autobiography of George Fox, also, contains a curious passage which illustrates the incompetency of the English Clergy of those times. The writer is describing his spiritual perplexities and sorrows, and how he sought for a godly and experienced priest to help him out of them.

First he tried Nathaniel Stevens, the priest at Drayton-in-the-Clay, with whom he had many conversations, but got nothing from him, and, at last, discovered that Stevens' only object in talking with him was to take notes for his own sermons.

Then he went to an aged priest at Mansetter in Warwickshire. But, in response to his story of temp-

¹ *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, p. 2.

tation and despair, he could only obtain the suggestion, that he should cheer himself by means of tobacco and psalm-singing. By the priest's request, however, he visited him a second time; but then found him "angry and pettish:" moreover, he told Fox's troubles to his servants, and very soon the tale was providing mirth for the milk-lasses.

Next he walked seven miles to consult a priest at Tamworth; but pronounced him to be like an empty and hollow cask.

Afterwards, some one mentioned Dr. Cradock of Coventry as a man of great experience. So he made his way to him, and relates the interview as follows;—

"I asked him the ground of temptation and despair, and how troubles came to be wrought in man? He asked me, 'Who was Christ's father and mother?' I told him Mary was His mother, and that He was supposed to be the Son of Joseph, but He was the Son of God. As we were walking together in his garden, the alley being narrow, I chanced, in turning, to set my foot on the side of a bed, at which he raged as if his house were on fire. Thus all our discourse was lost, and I went away in sorrow worse than I was when I came."

Last of all, he went to "one Macham, a priest in high account," who gave him physic and had him bled; but Fox says that they could not get a drop of blood from him, either in arms or head, because his body was, as it were, dried up by sorrow grief and troubles.

After such an experience, we are not surprised to find him saying;—

"As I was walking in a field on First-day morning, the Lord opened unto me, that being

bred at Oxford or Cambridge was not enough to fit and qualify men to be ministers of Christ; and I wondered at it, because it was the common belief of people."

But, beside the inefficiency of the Clergy and the political cast assumed by the Puritans, there were other causes, also, which tended to the spiritual death of the Protestant Churches. Among these may be reckoned the prevalence of Deism in England; but, perhaps, the chiefest of them was the philosophy of John Locke, the basis of which was as follows. He taught, that the mind of man is at first a blank tablet, and that all his impressions are received through the senses, and afterwards developed by a mental process termed reflection; so that all human knowledge consists of transformed sensations. Nevertheless, Locke did not altogether deny revelation, and professed belief in Christianity, but his creed seems to have been distinctly Pelagian; for he knew nothing of sin or of redemption from it. And, in his essay on *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, he submits even the Bible to the judgment of human reason, as if there were nothing in it that transcends the mind of man, and that must not be tested thereby.

Hence the idea began to spread, that everything, whether sacred or secular, must be proved by the reasonings of men; and England was quickly flooded with literature both for and against the credibility of Christianity; and, a little later, the authenticity of the Scriptures was similarly discussed. Indeed, the Theological works of the eighteenth century were almost entirely devoted to these two subjects; so that, as Mark Pattison truly observes;—

“Christianity appeared made for nothing else

but to be proved: what use to make of it when it was proved was not much thought about."

Thus the neglect to preach the love of the Lord Jesus, the Glorious Gospel of the Blessed God, and the practical doctrines resulting therefrom, together with the ignoring of those deep mysteries, the knowledge of, and reflection upon, which are the most efficacious means of confirming men in the faith and leading them nearer to God, and especially the silence in regard to the return of the Lord, as the only remedy for the ills of the world—all these omissions degraded Christianity to the lowest level, and deprived it of its spiritual and life-giving power.

But, at length, in the last half of the eighteenth century, God began to send forth men to inaugurate a change—to lift up the Lord Jesus once more, that He might draw all men unto Himself, and to prepare for the final showers of blessing and the appearing of the Great King.

When, therefore, the Lord Jesus commands Sardis to watch, and threatens, if she does not obey Him, to take her, also, by surprise, as well as the godless world, He lays His finger upon the plague-spot of Protestantism, and the main cause of its failure. For, while the Reformers swept away the rubbish beneath which the truths of the First Advent were lying, and proclaimed salvation to all men through faith in the love of God and in the Blood of the Lamb, they failed to discover the promise of the Second. They "turned to God from idols to serve a Living and True God," but not "to wait for His Son from the Heavens."

And, since they were looking for no further deliverance, and longed not for the Appearing of Him Who loved them and gave Himself for them, there was

nothing to hinder them from settling down upon the earth: they became worldly, sectarian, and political, disposed rather to talk or dispute about the Bible than to dig out its precious and transforming truths: they had grown carnal instead of spiritual: and their Christianity was like to an embalmed corpse, and was no longer a living power.

But, even in such unfavourable circumstances, there were yet a few names in Sardis which had not defiled their garments: these should be deemed worthy to follow the Rider on the White Horse, clad in fine linen, white and clean. These should be found written in the Lamb's Book of Life; and He would confess them before His Father and the Holy Angels, because they confessed Him upon earth, and proved their love for Him by keeping His commandments, just as they found them written in His Own Word.

✓ *The Epistle to the Church in Philadelphia.*

Philadelphia, a city of Lydia, was built by the Pergamenian King Attalus II., who was called Philadelphia on account of his loyal conduct toward his brother Eumenes. From him it received its name, which signifies "Brotherly love." In A.D. 96, the Church established there seems to have been in circumstances somewhat similar to those of Smyrna; for the brethren were subjected to annoyance and persecution from Jews, or, perhaps, Jewish Gnostics, who were not recognized by the Lord as Sons of Abraham, because Abraham's faith was not found in them; but as children of their father the Devil, whose works they were doing. They were, however, at that time, unable to raise a persecution to the death against Christian

believers, as they did in Smyrna ; but could only bring pressure of a milder kind to bear upon them, with the view of forcing them to give up the Word, and deny the Name, of the Lord Jesus. The brethren had, however, successfully resisted all their efforts ; and now the Lord bade them carry the war into the camp of their foes, and, since they had held firmly to His Word and Name, promised to maintain an open door for their work, which no man could shut, and to deliver them from the great trial that was coming upon the world.¹

So much, then, for the literal sense of the Epistle ; but, since we have no further information respecting the Church to which it was sent, it will be more convenient to treat it practically, as well as prophetically, just as if it were addressed directly to ourselves.

And this we may do with safety ; for the Epistles to Philadelphia and Laodicea bring us down to the immediate Times of the End, representing, as they do, the final results of the Sardinian, or Reformation, period, and the two classes that were to be evolved from it—the elect who will escape the things that are coming upon the earth, and will stand before the Son of Man while they are going on, and the unfaithful and worldly ones who will be left on the earth to pass through them.

The present Epistle is, therefore, specially addressed to the people of the Lord in the Last Days, to those who will be alive when He comes. And the voice of prophecy agrees with the course of events in pointing

¹ In the literal acceptance of the Epistle, the Hour of Trial is, probably, the general persecution under Domitian, from the horrors of which the Lord seems to have graciously protected the Philadelphian believers.

to ourselves as being the persons directly concerned, either with this letter, or with that which follows it: so that the solemn question for each of us is, Which of them applies to my case? Am I among the beloved of the Lord who shall be delivered from the Hour of Trial? The question is urgent, and must be settled at once, while opportunity is still granted: for all things are full of warning that the Lord is at hand.

We find in this letter no open mention of blame or rebuke in regard to those who are directly addressed. For Philadelphia is the Church of brotherly love,¹ and where that grace reigns, Christ has little fault to find. We must, however, be careful that we understand the meaning which the New Testament attaches to the term: we must not interpret it of the world's love of clansmen or compatriots, of the feeling which keeps together members of the same Sect or Society, or of the mutual attraction of minds which have been cast in a similar mould. For what is here meant is love for all true believers, not by reason of any qualities they may possess, nor on account of coincidence of opinion, but because they are the objects of Christ's affection.

To this John refers when he says;—"We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren."² For, if the love of Christ constrains us, so that we are drawn toward those who would naturally be unattractive, or even offensive, to us, we have proof that we are a new creation in Him, because we no longer know our fellow men after the flesh, but only through the great heart of the Lord

¹ Φιλαδέλφεια, from φιλεῖν, to love, and ἀδελφός, a brother.

² I John iii. 14.

Jesus, Who has become our life.¹ And this grace must be manifested in us, if we would belong to the Philadelphian Church, and be saved from the evil that is coming upon all flesh.

To His Own people, Christ chooses to be known as "He That is holy:" thereby intimating to us what manner of persons we, also, must be, if we would be His at His coming; for without holiness no man shall see the Lord.

But He also presents Himself as "true," and what earnest searchings of heart should that word stir up in each one of us! For how great insincerity, and what confusion of motives, may be found even in our service to God! So natural, indeed, is this condition to us that none can tell how often he offends; and yet the Most High desires truth in the inward parts, and all things are naked and laid open before the eyes of Him with Whom we have to do. Surely the most advanced believer is ever needing to pray with the Psalmist—"Remove from me the way of lying."

Lastly; the Lord speaks of Himself as having the Key of David, an expression of considerable difficulty on account of the purpose for which the Key is afterwards used. It seems, perhaps, better not to seek an explanation from the twenty-second chapter of Isaiah—where "the Key of the House of David" may have a different shade of meaning—but to understand a simple claim on the part of the Lord to the power of the throne of David.

When the heart of Ahaz was moved and the heart of his people, as the trees of the wood are moved by the wind, through fear lest the royal family of Judah

¹ 2 Cor. v. 14-17; Gal. ii. 20.

should be exterminated, God announced, that the root of Jesse should not fail, until a virgin should bring forth a Son,¹ upon Whose shoulder the government should rest for ever.² Now Christ, Alone of men, was born of a virgin-mother, and He was, also, the lineal heir to the throne of David; therefore, in Him the prophecy must be fulfilled. Accordingly, He here asserts His claim to that power over the world which is the prerogative of the Davidic crown. He has the right to open, and none dare shut; or to shut, and none may open: He Alone can let loose, and He can restrain. This great power He will shortly assume to Himself in the sight of all men; but, even before His time comes, He will anticipate it in favour of the Philadelphians, so far as to set before them an open door which no man shall be able to shut.

The open door, probably, means an opportunity for testimony. "Withal praying for us also," says Paul, "that God may open unto us a door for the Word, to speak the mystery of Christ."³ And again;—"But I will tarry at Ephesus until Pentecost; for a great door and effectual is opened unto me."⁴ And, in yet another place, he relates that, when he came to Troas to preach the Gospel of Christ, a great door was opened unto him in the Lord.⁵

Thus the title, "He That hath the Key of David," taken in connection with the promise which follows it, may have been intended to signify that the Lord would use His rightful power over the world to restrain opposition to the preaching of His people in the Times of the End. In other words, that a testimony should

¹ Isa. vii. 2, 14.

² Col. iv. 3.

³ 2 Cor. ii. 12.

² Isa. ix. 6.

⁴ 1 Cor. xvi. 8, 9.

go forth, a last warning cry, like that of Enoch before he was taken away from the doomed earth.

And the promise is now being fulfilled before our eyes. The world is not changed; yet, at the present time, it suffers the preaching of Christ with a forbearance never before known. Its great and wise men do not, indeed, conceal their contempt for the Divine revelation, though by their sneers they are ever proving its truth, while they cry;—"Where is the promise of His coming? For from the day that the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning." Its Ecclesiastics and Sectaries are still as averse to the real doctrine of Christ as the Pharisees and Sadducees were at the First Advent. Nevertheless, there is at present no serious interference with the work of Evangelical Christians; for the Lord has opened a door for them, and there is none who may dare to shut it.

How fearful, then, is our responsibility during a time so graciously given: how earnestly should we strive, if by any means we may save some of those for whom Christ died! Now it is day; but the day is fast declining, and the night cometh, when no man can work.

The Lord is, however, careful to explain why He has thus opened a door for Philadelphia. She has heeded the warning given to Sardis: she has strengthened the things that were ready to die, so that she now possesses "a little power;" therefore, He is able to fulfil to her His Own words;—"Unto every one which hath shall be given." This little power has been shown in the fact, that she has not suffered herself to be carried away by any of the currents of the world: she has held fast to the Word of Christ,

Striking

and has yielded neither to the traditions or philosophies nor to the Higher Criticisms of men. And, in the present day, how hard it is to do so, how few the number of those who follow such a rule! Yet it is for this that the Lord loves Philadelphia, and will save her from the Hour of Trial. \angle

O that all true believers would apply the lesson thus presented to them, and begin to prepare for the impending change by a strict comparison of their own doctrine and practice with the revealed laws of the King! How, otherwise, can we be ready for His coming! And let us not imagine that any supposed service will cover the defects of our obedience.

“Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.”

And we must not forget, that, to pass by individual mistakes, there is not a Sect in Christendom which has not some errors in its Creed. These it is the duty of every Christian to detect and discard; and so, all true believers would find themselves drawing nearer and nearer to each other, and would soon be standing, in these Last Times, as one body, separated from worldly religion, as well as from every other kind of worldliness, and awaiting the summons which shall bid them quit for ever the painful conflicts of earth for the glory which dwells in Immanuel's land.¹

¹ We do not mean by this to suggest the formation of a new Church with none but real Christians for its members. Such a scheme has been often tried, with the invariable result that another Sect, if not more than one, has been added to previous distractions. None but the Chief Shepherd Himself will ever succeed in gathering the harassed sheep into one visible fold. But, while Christians remain

It is also said of the Philadelphians, that they did not deny Christ's Name. Such a denial is not necessarily made in express terms: we may put an earthly Church in His place; we may deify human intellect; or, perhaps, the denial may rest in an ignoring of Christ's Name, either through a false shame, or because, however willing we may be to speak of Him as a great Teacher and Philosopher, we do not really believe Him to be the Only Begotten Son of the Father, and the One Sacrifice for sin.

There are many roads by which Satan leads professing Christians far away from the pale of the Philadelphian Church; and yet how easy it is in these times to confess Christ, when the worst consequences which are likely to follow a faithful testimony are nothing more than the derision of the world, the censure of nominal Christians, and, perchance, the loss of some few friends! Very different will it be when liberty is taken away, and the Harlot-church sits once more upon the Beast, and rules over the Kingdoms of Christendom. And this change may very soon take place, and the end of the Philadelphian period remove the Lord's protection from those whom He shall find sleeping: for then, in the case of all who are to be saved, that confession, which love could not call forth in the days of ease, must be extorted by the fires of persecution.

—so long as conscience permits—in whatever communities they may happen to be, let them be ever ready to join in intercommunion, and let them remember the solemn context of those words;—"Then they that feared the Lord spake often *one to another*." If the distinctions and feelings of Sect keep them from these things, they have little hope of being included within the pale of the favoured Philadelphian Church.

For the renewed activity of preaching, and the wide diffusion of Scriptural knowledge, in the course of the nineteenth century have already moved Satan to repeat the stratagem by which he gradually counteracted the work of the early Church; and, consequently, the Synagogue of Satan, that is, the Gnostic Church of Rome, mentioned in the Epistle to Smyrna, appears for the second time upon the scene. For some years her emissaries have been rapidly overspreading the countries from which they were driven by the Reformation, and in which outpourings of the Spirit have occurred, especially England Germany and America, neutralizing the pure Word of God by means of Babylonian ritual and priestcraft and Gnostic subtlety, and, finally, guiding men back to Rome itself. Their followers are taught to look down upon believers who hold Scriptural views, and to arrogate to themselves the place of God's Church, just as the Pharisees claimed to be God-appointed Rulers and Teachers at the First Advent.

But all who are really resting upon their Lord may be well content to endure this treatment for a season; for He has here promised to plead their cause in His Own Person, and to show that He has loved them. And He will do it in such a manner that some of those who have been led blindfold into the false Synagogue, through not understanding the depths of Satan, will repent and bow down before them, confessing that, after all, they were the true Church, and desiring to be joined to them in Christ.

How this change will be effected, and in what way He will put a distinction between the obedient and the misguided, the Lord now proceeds to explain. But, first of all, there must be no mistake in regard to His

reason: *because* the Philadelphians have kept the word of His patience, *therefore*, He will keep them from the Hour of Trial. How great trouble might we spare ourselves did we but keep the Word of Christ! It is comparatively easy to receive it: the difficulty is to hold it fast with patience until the End.

The idea conveyed by the Greek noun translated "patience" is that of manly endurance; the verb connected with it is sometimes used of soldiers who, when charged by the enemy, do not give way, but stand their ground. And so, the Lord has set each one of us in a position which, by His grace and help, we must maintain in spite of all the efforts of the Power of Darkness to dislodge us.

Waiting amid trials and temptations is a chief ingredient in our cup of discipline: for "it is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord." There is no fruition for us now, except peace and joy in the Spirit: we must live on the future: we must, like our Master, endure the cross, despising the shame, for the joy that is set before us. For here we have no continuing city, but are strangers and pilgrims, until we are brought into our own city, the Jerusalem that is above, "which is our mother." Hence Paul says to the Hebrews;—"Ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye may receive the promises." And he commends the Thessalonians, because they "turned unto God from idols, to serve a Living and True God, and to wait for His Son from the Heavens." This patience and willingness to wait for Christ the Philadelphians have, and their reward is, that He will keep them from the great Hour of Trial.

Now, this Trial will not be partial, but universal;

for it is to come upon "the whole world:" and, consequently, those who are to be delivered from it must needs be taken out of the world, even as Enoch was before the corruption and violence of men had come to their worst in the days of Noah. And that this is what the Lord here means is evident from the following words, "I am coming quickly." The Philadelphians will obey the command to watch and pray always, that they may be accounted worthy to escape all the things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man; and they will be heard. At a time known only to God, but, as we have previously seen, before the rise of the Antichrist, the Lord will descend to the mid-region of the air, and call to Himself all those who are looking for Him. And then the Trial will come upon the whole world, "to test them that dwell upon the earth."

The last expression is, doubtless, to be understood, in a moral sense, of all those who have settled themselves upon the earth, with little or no aspiration beyond it; and who must be tested, because there is some wheat even in that vast heap of chaff. For there are many who believe in the Lord Jesus, but do not go much further in His ways; who are careless of pressing on to know Him and the power of His Resurrection, being content with things here below, with their Churches, and acts of devotion, and good works. And so, their thoughts are necessarily fixed upon the earth; they seldom contemplate the Heavenly calling, and do not look for that blessed hope and appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Such a state of mind must engender worldliness, and cause those who have it to be more or less dwellers

upon the earth. And to separate them from the altogether carnal, to make them start back with horror from the things that are seen and long for the Advent of the Deliverer, the Hour of Trial will come: they will be made to experience what the world is when the restraining influence of the Spirit is withdrawn, and the Mystery of Lawlessness unveiled. Then the miracles of the Antichrist will bewilder, and his bloody persecutions terrify, them; but, since they are the beloved of the Lord, He will sustain them, and the fearful agitation of the sifting shall prove them to be wheat.

Very different will be the result from the rest of the world. They will yield to temptation: having rejected God and His Christ, they will fill up the measure of their iniquity by bowing before Satan and the Beast; and be, consequently, swept as chaff into the unquenchable fire.

Since, however, the grace of God will have previously separated the Philadelphians from the world and the false Church, they will not need the severity of the last winnowing, and will, therefore, be removed before that terrible purging of the floor commences. Their minds should be fixed on the promise, "I am coming quickly!" for their toil, and testifying, and light affliction, will not last long: Christ will shortly appear, and turn all their sorrow into everlasting joy.

But He adds a caution. Let them be careful and continually watch and pray, that they may retain the grace given unto them. For, although His people can never perish, neither shall any one snatch them out of His hand, yet they may be beguiled of their reward. If, by yielding to their own inclination, and the words of those who deprecate "fanaticism," they lapse into

indolence ; if they follow in the way of others, and indulge their fleshly appetites ; if they suffer the cares of this life to gather around them like a thick mist beyond which they can see nothing ; if they turn aside either to human philosophy or to tradition—they may fail to lay hold of that for which they were laid hold of by Christ, and miss the glory of the Kingdom, though they may be saved from eternal death.

The Lord presses His exhortation still further by the promise to the overcomer. When those who are ready shall have been caught up to Him, it will be time to begin the building of the great living Temple. For the chief of the stones will then have been conveyed to the appointed spot, hewn and chiselled and fitted each for its place, so that no sound of hammer, or axe, or any iron tool of affliction, will ever be heard there.¹ And, in the glorious edifice, those who have endured the contempt of men for Christ's sake will be pillars of strength and beauty, fixed on their bases, so that they shall no more go out. For the former things will then have passed away, and those who, in previous times, have been bidden to come out from the world, or—which is still more painful—to turn their back upon the Church of their fathers, and go forth unto Christ without the camp, bearing His reproach—these blessed ones will then have reached the abode of everlasting rest, the dwelling of glory.

Earthly Churches are apostatizing and breaking up : the dark form of the Adversary rises triumphantly over many a ruin, to the bitter grief of the Lord's people. But He has a sweet consolation for them, and here presents to their view the everlasting pillars of the

¹ 1 Kings vi. 7.

Heavenly Temple. They may be driven out of the Churches below for His Name's sake, or be compelled to leave them, because of their apostasy: but they shall soon be with Him in the Temple of God, and go no more out for ever.

The mention of the place appointed for them in the Temple may intimate, that, during the interval between their rapture and the Lord's appearing in glory, He will judge them in regard to the things done in the body, and assign to each the part he is to sustain in the celestial worship.

But there are yet other rewards for the overcomer. The Lord adds;—

“I will write upon him the Name of My God, and the Name of the City of My God, the new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of Heaven from My God, and Mine Own new Name.”

There is something very gracious in the expression, “My God,” which occurs four times in this verse. We are reminded of a former utterance;—

“Go unto My brethren, and say to them, I ascend unto My Father and your Father, and My God and your God.”¹

By so speaking the Lord seems, in both instances, to identify Himself, as the Last Adam, with His Own people, in accordance with the Scripture;—

“For both He That sanctifieth and they that are sanctified are all of One: for which cause He is not ashamed to call them brethren.”²

In regard to the significance of the names, Christ will acknowledge His faithful disciples before His Father, Who will then Himself recognize them, and,

¹ John xx. 17.

² Heb. ii. 11.

by setting His Name upon them, seal them as His Own. The overcomer will also be marked as a citizen of the Jerusalem which is now above, but will shortly descend to be the light and glory of the redeemed earth. And, lastly, Christ will write upon him His Own new Name, probably that to which allusion is afterwards made;—

“And He hath a Name written, which no one knoweth but He Himself.”¹

In Immanuel's land, a name is no empty sound, as with us: it declares the real nature of its possessor. Probably, therefore, this new Name indicates some glorious mystery of which, by his union with Christ, the believer will be made a partaker in the coming Age.

The last words of the Epistle, the exhortation to listen, should fall solemnly upon our ears: for, as we said just now, there is strong probability that they apply to us above all others, that the Lord is even now completing the number of the Philadelphian Church, and will, in the times of the present generation, remove her to the Heavenly Places. “Watch therefore; for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of Man cometh.”

Historic Fulfilment of the Sixth Epistle

In reading the speech of Peter in Solomon's Porch, when the Jewish crowd was standing amazed at the instantaneous healing of the lame man, we come to the subjoined passage;—

“Repent ye, therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that so there may come seasons of refreshing from the Presence of the

¹ Rev. xix. 12.

What tongue
or pen can
express the
rapture
attending
these words
MY NEW
NAME!
What new and
glorious
colours of
this being
will there
be
can!

Lord ; and that He may send the Christ Who hath been appointed for you, even Jesus ; Whom the Heaven must receive, until the Times of Restitution of All Things, whereof God spake by the mouth of His holy prophets, which have been since the world began."¹

Now, in thus addressing Jews in Jerusalem, Peter was doing that which corresponded to the delivery of the second message to the bidden guests in the Parable of the Marriage Feast,² and was, also, beginning to obey the Lord's command to His disciples, to be His witnesses "both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea and Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."³

He was, therefore, preaching, first to Jews, that Gospel of the Lord Jesus, which he ought afterwards to have set before Gentiles also. Hence, whatever he said had reference to the present Dispensation of Grace in which we are now living, and is of the greatest interest to ourselves. And, in urging his Jewish audience to repent and be converted, he mentioned three results which would follow their sincere response to his appeal.

- I. Their sins would be blotted out.
- II. There would come seasons of refreshing from the Presence of the Lord.
- III. When these seasons of refreshing had done their work, God would send the Lord Jesus once more to our earth, and would bring about "the Restitution of All Things."

Since, however, the meaning of the first and third of these results will be obvious to every reader of our volume, it is only in regard to the second that any

¹ Acts iii. 19-21.

² Matth. xxii. 4.

³ Acts i. 8.

explanation is needed. What, then, are we to understand by these seasons of refreshing from the Presence of the Lord? Surely the expression must point to those visitations of grace, those waves of the Spirit's influence which have passed over us at intervals, moving the Lord's people to prostrate themselves before Him in humble confession, and then filling them with praise and power; and, on the other hand, causing many a sleeping sinner to awake, and arise from the dead, that Christ might shine upon him—those favoured seasons which we are now accustomed to call Reformations, or Revivals.

As soon as there were converts to be affected by them, such seasons would be graciously vouchsafed from God, Who, by their means, and by that of the Evangelizing spirit which they would arouse, would gradually bring all His elect into the fold of Christ; and, when the last of them was safely gathered in, would send His Beloved Son to destroy them that corrupt the earth, and to restore its peace and joy.

The figure which underlies the idea of "refreshing" is that of showers upon parched ground; and a beautiful instance of it may be found in the ninth verse of the Sixty-eighth Psalm;—

"Thou, O God, didst send a plentiful rain;
Thou didst confirm Thine inheritance, when it was weary."

If we keep this fact in mind, we may draw much information concerning the seasons of refreshing from a passage in the Epistle of James;—

"Be patient, therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient over it, until it receive the early and latter rain.

Be ye also patient ; stablish your hearts ; for the coming of the Lord is at hand."¹

Now, in Palestine, the normal early, or autumn, rain begins in October, at sowing-time : while the latter rain comes on in March, and continues a little way into April. By the middle of April, the barley is ready for cutting ; and the wheat-harvest follows about a fortnight later. At the present time, both the rains are usually scanty ; and, on the other hand, there is no absolute cessation of wet weather between the seasons. But this is, doubtless, an abnormal condition of things ; for, in more than one passage of the Old Testament, it was plainly intimated, that the rain-supply of the Holy Land would depend upon the obedience of the people. We may cite the following promise as an instance ;—

"And it shall come to pass, if ye shall hearken diligently unto My commandments which I command you this day, to love the Lord your God, and to serve Him with all your heart, and with all your soul, that I will give the rain of your land in its season, the former rain and the latter rain."²

It would seem, therefore, that we must understand James to be alluding to the regular early and latter rains, the course of which would be after this manner. The first would come on during sowing-time : storms would prevail for a day or two ; then there would be a short interval of fine weather, succeeded by another series of showers ; and so on, until the dry season set in, at the close of which, about six weeks before harvest, the clouds would return, and the latter rains begin, and progress in the same manner as the former.

¹ James v. 7, 8.

² Deut. xi. 13, 14. Comp. Lev. xxvi. 3, 4 ; Jer. iii. 3 ; Joel ii. 23.

Accordingly, in applying the figure, we should expect copious outpourings of the Spirit in the early days of the Church, and also toward the close of the Age, at the sowing and just before the reaping, with an intervening period of little spiritual influence. And this is precisely what has happened. From the Pentecost which was the birthday of the Church, there were, for some three centuries, showers of grace in many countries, and multitudes of earnest preachers overspread the world. But, in the fourth century, when the persecutions had ceased, and Christianity was becoming corrupt and fashionable, a coldness, worldliness, and laxity of doctrine, set in, the power of the Spirit was withdrawn, and there was a great drought which lasted, without any general intermission, through many weary centuries, until the close of the Dark Ages.

Then the season of the latter rain seems to have commenced, and the first copious showers resulted in the Reformation. The next remarkable outpouring, in this country, caused the awakening in the middle of the eighteenth century, which corresponded to the work of the Pietists and Moravians in Germany. Then came a marvellous and abundant rain in the revivals of 1857-59, which affected the whole of the Protestant world ; and, lastly, the movement caused by the preaching of Moody, Sankey, and many other Evangelists, took place.

It will be noticed, that the great showers follow at ever-shortening periods. Between the Reformation and the days of Wesley more than two centuries had passed by ; but seventy or eighty years spanned the interval between Wesley and the revival which commenced in America ; and about fourteen years after the latter, the fourth movement began.

Another interesting fact is, that the former rain lasted about three hundred years, and that it is now rather more than that time since the Reformation. Is the patient waiting for the early and latter rain all but over, and has the season of harvest come at last?

Yet one more remark upon the four great Revivals: for we may discern in them a very striking and significant progress of doctrine.

In the times of the first, the everlasting foundation-stone, which had been buried beneath the rubbish of centuries, was uncovered, so that it could be seen by all; and once again the Apostolic message was freely proclaimed, that man could be saved only through faith in Christ Jesus, and not by his own works or deservings.

In the second, the new point chiefly insisted upon was, that conversion is instantaneous and miraculous, being caused by the entrance into man of the Holy Spirit, by Whose indwelling he is made a new creation in Christ Jesus, separated off from the world, and gradually sanctified and prepared for his glorification.

In the third movement, the great truth of the unity of the Church was recovered, and men began to see, as, in modern times, they had never done before, that Christ is the One Centre around which all who believe in Him must cluster; that no human Sects or Creeds must be allowed to keep Christians apart, because the whole of the real Church has been baptized by the Spirit into One Body.

And, lastly, during the fourth special outpouring of grace, two points have been urged with unwonted frequency and energy, namely, the necessity of a higher spiritual life, and the certainty that the Lord is at hand. These doctrines are closely connected, and are

both contained, though in reversed order, in the midnight cry, "Behold the Bridegroom cometh, go ye out to meet Him!" Hence their simultaneous proclamation would seem to indicate, that what the Spirit is now pressing upon the Church is the warning ;—

"Therefore, be ye also ready: for, in an hour that ye think not, the Son of Man cometh."¹

It seems, therefore, not improbable that the Fourth was the final Revival; and that we are now in the perilous times of the Last Days, from which there will be neither deliverance nor relief, until the Lord come.

Some little while ago a well-meant attempt was made to stir up another Revival in England, and a Magazine was started for the purpose of stimulating the workers: but there was no adequate response, and the project was soon abandoned.

Since that time, the so-called Welsh Revival has occurred; but three reasons, at least, forbid us to regard it as genuine.

I. Its characteristic features could find no parallel in the New Testament; and its assemblies, while ever engaged in a sensuous worship, in which any one might take a public part, manifested little or no desire to hear, and learn from, the Scripture of Truth.

II. It evolved from Holy Scripture no new revelation of the glory of God or of His dealings with man, as the genuine Revivals have invariably done.

III. The apparent results seem to have vanished, like smoke in thin air. Godly men have since gone through the affected parts of Wales, and

Too true

¹ Matth. xxiv. 44.

reported that they could perceive no visible change for the better; and one witness had even heard men jeering at the things which they said when under the excitement.

The writer himself has met with some strange evidence as to the quality of the spiritual life that was generated by the "Revival." Among other instances, he received a letter from a lady unknown to him, who asked for advice in the following circumstances. The place in which she was sojourning had been much affected by the movement, especially the Wesleyan connection in it; and the latter had, in consequence, resolved upon an effort for extending their work, to which end they thought it necessary to raise extra funds. But, instead of applying to Him to Whom the earth belongs, and Whose are the cattle upon a thousand hills, they arranged to give a public entertainment, among the promised amusements of which were Palmistry and Fortune-telling! The lady felt deeply the inconsistency of such a proceeding, and expostulated with the superintending Minister. He, however, made light of her objection; and, since she did not know enough of the nature of Palmistry to press it, she communicated with the writer, asking for advice and instruction as to the arguments which she might use. A copy of the bill announcing the entertainment was enclosed in her letter: it was surrounded by a broad coloured border of Japanese design, which gave it a very attractive appearance. From what quarter, then, could the spiritual influence have come which summoned Palmistry and Fortune-telling to its aid?

The refreshing showers of the latter rain appear, then, to have fallen just before and within the periods

To this might be added, that since the days of the "Revival" we have witnessed a "revival" made "revival" campaigns - organs - papers - as in - identified - some - much -

of Sardis and Philadelphia. And, taken together, the Revivals have once more restored the whole circle of Apostolic teaching to the professing Church.

The second shower was very prolonged in its effects and somewhat vivified the deadness of the Sardian period. It began in England with the preaching of Wesley and Whitefield, the Evangelists whom Lady Huntington brought to the front, and others. And its earlier results may be realized by comparing the description of the condition of the country, in John Wesley's journal, at the beginning and toward the end of his protracted labours.

Then, while Methodism was in full action, the Evangelical party was being formed in the national Church, the great Missionary and Bible and Tract Societies were established, and the "Clapham Sect" carried on its helpful work. A little later two significant movements were inaugurated almost simultaneously, those of the Brethren and the Oxford Tractarians. The latter, which was a powerful and widely successful attempt to bring the English Church once more under the yoke of Rome, probably owed its origin to the French Revolution. For, at the time of that social upheaval, many Jesuits and Roman Priests were driven out of France, and took refuge in England, where the majority of them supported themselves by scholastic work, and not a few were installed as French Masters in English Schools. This circumstance often gave them an opportunity of propagating Roman principles, of which they did not fail to take advantage.

One of these *Émigrés* was settled in the large School of Dr. Nicholas of Ealing, where John Henry Newman was being educated, and—although Newman did not recollect it when he wrote his *Apologia*—may have

influenced the future Cardinal's young mind, and suggested the cross and rosary, which, in after-years, he found sketched in his Verse Book, and, perhaps, also, his early habit of crossing himself whenever he went into the dark.

Another *Émigré*, the Abbé Giraud, was French Master at Maizemore Court School, near Gloucester, whose conversations so moved one of his pupils, Ambrose Phillips de Lisle, that the latter subsequently became a Papist, and acted as a kind of mediator between the Pope and the Tractarian leaders, with most of whom he was intimately acquainted. Investigation would, doubtless, bring many similar cases to light; and this stealthy propagation in numerous quarters will, probably, account for the fact, that, when the Movement commenced, many minds in different places were found fully prepared to support it; so that the dissemination of its principles was frequently described as an epidemic.

But, perhaps, one of the most important of the successes achieved by the *Émigrés* was the influence which some of them obtained over Charles Lloyd—afterwards Regius Professor of Divinity at Oxford, and finally Bishop of that Diocese—whom they thoroughly imbued with their "Church Principles." For, as soon as their distinguished pupil had become Regius Professor, he cast about for some means of spreading his convictions, and presently formed a class to which he gave private lectures on Theological, or rather Ecclesiastical, study. The subject which he selected for his first course was the History and Original Sources of the Anglican Prayer-book, and Dean Church thus comments upon his teaching;—

"Bishop Lloyd's lectures had taught him"—

Hurrell Froude—"and others, to the surprise of many, that the familiar and venerable Prayer Book was but the reflexion of mediæval and primitive¹ devotion, still embodied in its Latin forms in the Roman Service books; and so, indirectly, had planted in their minds the idea of the historical connection, and, in a very profound way, the spiritual sympathy, of the modern with the pre-Reformation Church."²

He took up other subjects, also, which tended to remove English prejudices against the Roman Church, and drew an emphatic distinction between Romanism as it was in the reign of Henry VIII., when the Reformation in England began, and what it had become when remodelled by the Council of Trent, with an evident desire to suggest the conclusion, that the Anglican Church ought to have returned to her allegiance as soon as the Roman was reformed.

Now, it is a remarkable fact, that almost all the men who subsequently became Tractarian leaders—except Keble, who was not then residing at Oxford—were Lloyd's disciples. Indeed, Pusey and Newman have cordially acknowledged their obligations to him; while Mr. Gladstone described him as;—

"A man of powerful talents and of a character both winning and decided, who, had his life been spared, might have acted powerfully for good on the fortunes of the Church of England, by guiding

¹ In dealing with the Tractarians we have to remember, that, in speaking of the Primitive Church, they mean the Church of the Fourth Century—by which time the Nominal Body had been completely Paganized by the Gnostics—and not that of the First Century, to which alone the title belongs.

² *The Oxford Movement*, p. 41.

the energetic influence which his teaching had done much to form."¹

Indeed, it seems to have been Lloyd who, inspired by the Jesuit *Émigrés*, laid the train of the Oxford Movement; while, if we may believe Newman's account of the matter, it was Keble who, by his sermon on *National Apostasy*, applied the match. A few days after the sermon, the famous meeting at the Parsonage of Hugh James Rose took place, and a resolution was passed to issue the Tracts.

We must not, however, attempt to narrate the story of the Movement, but can only observe, that, by the ability and determination of the conspirators, its operations have been so successful that the spirit of England seems to have altogether changed, and the cry of "No Popery!" in the first half of the last century now to have given place to that of "No Protestantism!" The Woman has once more been enabled to leaven the only partially reformed Anglican Community. Secret Societies of the Clergy have been formed for the spread of Romanism; it is persistently reported that Roman Priests, and even Roman Bishops, have been stealthily introduced among them; throughout the Country, Church after Church has gradually displayed Roman ornaments, Roman vestments, Roman images and crosses, and Roman ceremonies; the Mass is re-established in England, and the Agnus Dei may be legally sung at the elevation of the Host, which is often a wafer instead of the broken bread; and, lastly, the Articles are thrust aside, and Roman doctrine is freely taught.

The second Movement, which originated in Dublin,

¹ *A chapter on Autobiography*, p. 53.

was very different from the Ecclesiastical Revival at Oxford. The fancied discovery of the latter was the Continuity of the Church by Apostolical Succession,¹ together with the idea of one visible Body of Christ, ruled by a human Hierarchy—and that in a world where sin and Satan are still reigning, while the Great Head of the Body is Personally absent! Of course, the natural result of such a doctrine was, that the Church was practically, though not avowedly, lifted into the place of Christ.

But Brethrenism was a discovery of Christ Himself as the Only Centre and Bond of Union for the people of God, a perception of the meaning of the vision in the first chapter of the Apocalypse.² Its original spirit is well described in the verse

"I have seen the Face of Jesus,
Tell me not of aught beside.
I have heard the Voice of Jesus,
All my soul is satisfied."

Its founder, Antony Norris Groves, was a more than usually expert dentist, residing in Exeter, and making

¹ Newman makes this very plain in *Tracts for the Times*, No. I.;—"There are some who rest their divine mission on their own unsupported assertion; others, who rest it upon their popularity; others, on their success; and others, who rest it upon their temporal distinctions. This last case has, perhaps, been too much our own: I fear we have neglected the real ground on which our authority is built—our Apostolical descent.

We have been born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. The Lord Jesus Christ gave His Spirit to His Apostles; they in turn laid their hands on those who should succeed them; and these again on others; and so the sacred gift has been handed down to our present Bishops, who have appointed us as their assistants, and, in some sense, representatives."

See pp. 465-93.

an income of some £1,500 a year. From the age of twenty he had desired to become a missionary, but had not carried out his wish because of the opposition of his wife. But, before long, a change came over her, and she agreed with her husband, that they should live as economically as possible, and devote the whole balance of their income to the service of the Lord. The missionary project was revived, and Mrs. Groves now proved as eager to forward it as her husband himself. He was a firm adherent of the Established Church, and, by the advice of Edward Bickersteth, determined to give up his profession, and to seek Ordination, in order that he might work under the Church Missionary Society. With the view of carrying out this purpose, he entered Trinity College, Dublin; and, while visiting that city for his first examination, fell in with a few believers, who "with him desired to see more devotedness to Christ, and union among all the people of God,"¹ and were in the habit of meeting together to promote these objects.

At one of the meetings, Mr. J. G. Bellett told Miss Bessie Paget, who had accompanied Groves to Dublin, of a statement which the latter had just made, that, so far as Scripture was concerned, it appeared to him that disciples of Christ were at liberty, when meeting together, to break bread; and that, according to Apostolic precedent, they ought to do so every first day of the week. The suggestion was approved, and the first part of it, at least, was forthwith carried out by the little gathering in Dublin.

Up to this time, Groves had described himself as

¹ *Memoir of Anthony Norris Groves*, p. 38. The whole of the following narrative is taken from Chap. III. of the *Memoir*.

a High Churchman, and had never worshipped in a Dissenting Chapel nor intimately known any Nonconformist, except the Misses Paget. But now his views were undergoing a change ; for we find him writing ;—

“From my first going to Dublin, many of my deep-rooted prejudices gave way. I saw those strongly marked distinctions that exist in England little regarded: the prevalence of the common enemy, Popery, joined all hands together.”

On his return to Exeter, Miss Bessie Paget tested his state of mind. She was then residing in the neighbouring village of Poltimore, where there was an utterly inefficient clergyman ; and was doing her best to save the people from perishing for lack of knowledge, by gathering a little flock around her, and instructing them in the rudiments of Christ. Perhaps, she found her work somewhat burdensome ; or, since her hearers were adults, and, probably, of both sexes, deemed it unsuited to a woman. Or, it may be that she merely wished to draw Groves out of his too rigid Churchism into a bolder and more active Christianity. But, whatever may have been her reason, she, at any rate, proposed to him to relieve her of her charge every Lord's Day. He describes himself as having been at first much shocked by such a request : for to interfere with a clergyman in his own parish was altogether opposed to his principles ; and, moreover, he felt that such a step might prove a bar to his own Ordination. Nevertheless, upon reflection, the thought of the neglected people, and the notoriously inadequate clergyman, so worked upon him that he was constrained to undertake the duty.

Soon afterwards, a friend from Calcutta said to him, “Why are you wasting your time in passing through

College, if you intend going to the East?" He replied, that he wished to be ordained, because, if he should have to return disabled from the scene of his labour, he would then be qualified for ministerial work in England. But, on the way home, his wife said to him, "Don't you think there is great force in Mr. —'s question?" He admitted that there was, though he did not think it so great as to prevent his visiting Dublin for his last examination.

But, about three o'clock on the next Lord's Day morning, he was awakened by the noise of something falling; and, on going downstairs to the dining-room, found the candles lighted, his drawers opened, his papers scattered about the floor, and his little store of money gone.¹ As he was returning upstairs, his wife met him, and said, "Well, my love, the thieves have been here and taken all the money: now you won't go to Dublin." "No," he replied, "that I won't;" and they spent one of the happiest days he could recollect in thinking on the Lord's goodness in so caring for them as "to stop the way up" when He did not wish them to go.

Shortly afterwards, Mr. Hake showed him an Article of the Church of England, which he felt that he could not sign; and so, he finally decided to give up all thought of Ordination.

His attachment to the Established Church was, however, still firm. He, therefore, went to London to

¹ Mrs. Groves, who edited the *Memoir*, adds the following interesting particular. "It is a remarkable fact, that there were two packets of money, one containing £40 for the Irish trip, and one, £16, in another drawer, for taxes: the former was taken, the other left. This circumstance was often noticed as most remarkable by Mr. Groves."

arrange with the Society for going out as a lay-missionary. But, since the Committee would not allow him to administer the Lord's Supper when no clergyman was near, the matter fell through, and his "mind was then in great straits," because he "hated the thought of being a Sectarian."

One day, however, the thought was borne into his mind, that Ordination of any kind to preach the Gospel was no requirement of Scripture. "To me," he says, "this was the removal of a mountain, and I told dearest Mary of my discovery and my joy." "From that moment," he adds, "I have never had a doubt of my own liberty in Christ to minister the Word; and, in my last visit to Dublin, I communicated my views to dear Mr. Bellett and others."

His last visit to Dublin, before he left England for Bagdad, occurred toward the end of 1828; and, according to the story of Mr. Bellett, whom he seems to have regarded as the leader of the Dublin meeting, his statement was couched in the following words;—

"This, I doubt not, is the mind of God concerning us—We should come together in all simplicity as disciples, not waiting on any pulpit or ministry, but trusting that the Lord would edify us together by ministering, as He pleased and saw good, from the midst of ourselves."

To those who had been trained in Fourth-century Ecclesiastical principles this was a very startling and revolutionary announcement; but Bellett accepted it as a flash of revelation, perceiving, it may be, that it was in full accord with First-century and Apostolical principles. For had not Paul, in his directions to the Corinthians respecting their meetings, said;—

"What is it then, brethren? When ye come

together, each one hath a psalm, hath a teaching, hath a revelation, hath a tongue, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying."

In so striking a manner were the principal doctrines of the Brethren worked out by the experience of one man, who then left the little company, and went, together with his wife and children and a few others, to teach what he knew of the Lord and His Word in the East. Before that time, however, John Nelson Darby had joined the meeting in Dublin, which had also come into touch with another similar, but independent, gathering in the same city under the leadership of Edward Cronin.

The Movement soon extended to the Sister Isle, where it presently numbered some eleven hundred members at Plymouth; and hence, because this was for some time their largest station in England, "the Brethren" began to be known as "Plymouth Brethren" in that Country. It was at Plymouth that Benjamin Wills Newton first became prominent.

Meanwhile, Darby was preaching in Switzerland, George Müller in Germany, and Groves in the East; and the propagation was carried on by various agents and means, until there remained but few corners of the earth which had not been reached by its influence. The chief means were the very copious literature issued by the leaders of the Movement, and the devoted missionary enterprise of the community, both at home and abroad.

The results of the Movement were profound, but quiet, and attracting little attention in proportion to their gravity. The source of its power was not difficult to discover. Its leaders, several of whom were able and scholarly men, did not trouble to prove the credibility or the authenticity of the Bible, nor did they

How much better to search the Book
itself than to write & arrange

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write much about the Book. But they searched it diligently with the view of ascertaining the revelations which it contained; and so, drew out of it priceless treasures which had escaped the more superficial and biassed study of the Church Evangelicals. For, having, as yet, no system or Sect to defend, their minds were free: they were not constrained to look for proofs of foregone conclusions, but were able to investigate with more impartiality what God had disclosed and commanded in His Holy Scriptures.

about
it!

Among the most enlightening of the doctrines which they were permitted to set forth to believers, was their clear view of the Dispensations, for the want of which the Evangelicals had often spoken with an uncertain sound. Of this latter fact the writer had a practical experience; for he was brought up under a much beloved and gifted Vicar, who had been a personal friend of Charles Simeon—through whom, indeed, he had obtained his parish—but who vacillated in his theory of salvation, and, in after-years, confessed to the writer, that he had never known the truth with certainty, until the time of the Fourth Revival. The reason of his failure might, however, have been easily discovered from a pamphlet which he published entitled, *To work for eternal life, the teaching of the Bible*, to prove which he first cited passages from Ezekiel, explaining them as if they were to be understood directly of the Church; and then texts from the New Testament interpreted by his misapplication of the Old. For he knew nothing of the Dispensational changes; and was, perhaps, further misled by the many headings of chapters in the Authorized Version in which the Hebrew prophets are made to refer to the Church of the present Age—which was entirely

beyond their scope¹—instead of to their own people. And so, he seems to have arrived at the conclusion, that we must apply the whole Bible directly to ourselves—as many others, also, have done. But, in such cases, it is not wonderful that an attempt to harmonize into one two widely differing Dispensations should result in confusion and uncertainty.

Another great service rendered to all Christians by the Brethren was the prominence which they gave to the usually neglected study of Leviticus and the Epistle to the Hebrews, by which they familiarized many believers with doctrines that enabled them to resist the advance of Sacerdotalism.

So long as they remained in their first phase, and contented themselves with meetings of believers from various Protestant Sects, for prayer, study of the Word, and mutual edification, they were doing that to which no one could reasonably object, and which seemed like the projected shadow of the Philadelphian community. But, as soon as they had assumed the clearly defined form of a Sect, it was not long before the usual consequences followed. Ambition and rivalry appeared among them, and soon developed strifes and disruptions. They became more and more narrowly Sectarian, and lost their first love. As a body, they were, doubtless, superior to other communities in Scriptural knowledge, and were, unfortunately, well aware of the fact: hence they suffered spiritual pride to creep in among them, and the fair vision which they had at first presented began to fade away.

The second generation have proved unable to continue the faithful studies of their predecessors, whose

¹ See p. 288.

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of the "Brethren"

doctrines they have, consequently, suffered to become somewhat fossilized, and appear themselves to be little more than preservers of the traditions of their fathers. Nevertheless, the stimulus which they gave to Bible study among Protestant Christians was a service for which the whole Church of Christ owes a debt of gratitude. And, although they seem to have lost much of their early power, through the working of their Democratic principles, their many dissensions, their too great security,¹ and the decay of their interest in prophecy, and in the expectation of the Lord's return; yet they still retain a form of worship more nearly resembling the Apostolic institutes than that of any other Church with which we are acquainted, and still exhibit many salutary examples of separation from the world and whole-hearted devotion to Christ.

Of the Prophetic import of this Epistle we have already spoken in the exposition of the previous chapter. For we found, that, in its application to the whole Church, it is specially addressed to the believers of our own times, and is as yet but partially fulfilled. A few words, therefore, including a brief recapitulation, will suffice for what still remains to be said.

The Philadelphian period seems to have commenced just after the cessation of the Latter Rain; and, in the last shower but one, preparation was made for it, by the prominence given to the absolute unity of the real

¹ This arises from the fact that they are continually emphasizing the believer's standing in Christ, by which he is presented to the Father as sinless and perfect; while they seem to ignore our responsibility as regards progress in intrinsic righteousness, for which we shall all have to give account before the Judgment-seat of Christ, "that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he hath done, whether it be good or bad."

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Yes.

It is right
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not be done to
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and invisible Church, of which the Lord Jesus is the Only Centre. And we should note, that no hint of Revivals, or of any Seasons of Refreshing, during its course, is to be found in the Sixth Epistle. On the contrary, faithful believers are depicted as struggling—against an opposition which seems to come rather from professing Christians than from the ungodly world—to keep the Word, and to magnify the Name, of their Great Master. For they are passing through the final trial of their faith, which will fit them for translation into His glorious Presence; nor is there any hope of relief set before them, save the everlasting deliverance which they will experience at His coming.

From the description which He gives of Himself, we may infer, by contrast, a prophecy, that, in this period, both the professing Church and the world generally would be in a state of fearful unholiness and treacherous falsity, just, indeed, as Paul depicts them in his delineation of the perilous times of the Last Days. Still further, that men would hate all true believers to such an extent that they would quickly put a stop to the preaching of the Word, were they not restrained by an Almighty Hand. But, that, in spite of all their machinations, the Lord would set an opened door of work before His servants, which He would not suffer to be shut, until the removal of His waiting saints from earth should close the Philadelphian epoch.

Moreover, in the ninth verse, it is intimated, that an ancient foe would reappear upon the scene, even the Synagogue of Satan, “which say they are Jews, and they are not, but do lie,” and of whom we have previously heard in the Smyrna-period.¹

¹ See pp. 523-7.

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And can we not perceive how literally all this is being fulfilled before our eyes in the present time? Do not the newspapers continually testify to the miserable condition of the world, by their daily tale of murders, suicides, unfaithfulness, adulteries, divorces, iniquitous business transactions, frauds, impostures, burglaries, and violence and lying deceptions of every kind? ✓

And, again, are we not just now bewildered by the rapid and mysterious revival of the Gnostico-Christian Church of Rome, both among ourselves and in all the nations of the Teutonic race, from which it had been banished more than three hundred years ago—by the ever-increasing progress of the Oxford Movement in England, by the results of the Roman victory over Prince Bismarck and the Falk Laws in Germany, and by the alarming spread of Popery in the United States of America? And is there not a deep significance in the proclamation of the Immaculate Conception in 1854, and in that of the Papal Infallibility in 1870, together with the adoption by the Ecumenical Council of the Syllabus, which is so manifestly intended to prepare the way for a renewal of persecution?

And can we fail, at the same time, to observe the unbounded confidence which Romanists, as well as such Anglicans as are inclining to Rome, display, that they are the one Church of Christ upon earth—a confidence, too, coupled with more or less contempt for and dislike of, any without their own pale who are humbly striving to keep the Word, and confess the Name, of the Lord Jesus?

Yet some of those, who are now looking down upon the saints of God, are, nevertheless, sincere, although in grievous error. And to them the Lord will give

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grace to repent, when He interposes on behalf of His faithful ones, to acknowledge their own mistake, and to bow down before those whom His Holy Spirit will have made wiser than themselves. Such persons may, perhaps, be placed among the few in Laodicea who will respond to the Lord's knocking at the door, and will, after the chastisement of the Great Tribulation, be raised to sit with Him upon His Throne.

But the way in which He will distinguish those whom He has loved, because they have obeyed His command to wait patiently for His coming, will be manifest to all men. For, when the clouds of the Great Tribulation are gathering, but before the storm breaks forth, He will give the word, and in a moment their fears will have vanished, the tension of their thoughts be relaxed, and the heartrending sorrows of earth have been exchanged for the never-ending calm and rest of His Presence.

The Epistle to the Church in Laodicea.

We come now to the last of the Seven Epistles, that which is addressed to the Angel of the Church in Laodicea. The name¹ is very ominous; for it signifies the custom or usage of the people; that is to say, the Church in which the custom or usage of the people is followed, and not the revealed commandments of God.

Now, the city of Laodicea was very near to that of Colossae: so that their Churches became closely connected with each other; and it is interesting to notice, that Paul, in his letter to the Colossians, directs them to salute the Laodiceans for him, and to send on his

¹ Λαοδικεία from λαός, "people," and δίκη, "custom," "usage," "right."

Epistle to be read in their assembly.¹ We may, therefore, fairly infer, that the proximity and intimacy of these Churches had caused them to be infected with similar errors, and that the faults of the one had become, to some extent, at least, the faults of the other. And the probability that such was the case is strengthened by the fact, that Paul speaks of the two Churches as equal objects of anxiety to himself, in the words ;—

“For I would have you know how greatly I strive for you, and for them at Laodicea.”

Assuming, then, that it was so, we can get a glimpse of the state of Laodicea by carefully reading the Epistle to the Colossians ; and, in doing so, shall find the great charge against the latter to be, that Christ had been deprived of His honour and glory by their doctrines and the practices evolved from them. Accordingly, in the first chapter, Paul sets forth the power and Godhead of the Lord Jesus in a marvellous description, and then comments upon the errors which had caused Him to be slighted.

The converts had not looked for all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge in Him,² and were, consequently, allowing themselves to be made a spoil by means of philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.³

For they did not walk in Christ Jesus, the Lord, as

¹ Col. iv. 15, 16. Paul also directs, that the Epistle which was at Laodicea, should be brought to Colossae, and read there. This may have been the letter known to us as the Epistle to the Ephesians, which was, probably, a circular letter, sent, it may be, first to Ephesus and coming last to Laodicea. *την εκ Λαοδικειας* is a pregnant expression, signifying that the letter was then at Laodicea, and must be fetched from that city.

² Col. ii. 2, 3.

³ vv. 8, 9.

they had received Him and been taught :¹ they did not consider themselves made full from His fulness,² but from the fictitious Pleroma of the Gnostics :³ nor did they frankly believe, that He had blotted out the hand-writing of ordinances which was against them.⁴

And thus they were moved to seek salvation from other sources, as well as from Him ; so that their religion consisted largely of distinctions between clean and unclean meats,⁵ and of observances of festivals,⁶ which God had, indeed, formerly appointed as a shadow of the coming Saviour, but which had lost all their value now that the Body which cast the shadow had taken its place. They were, also, devoting themselves to a self-conscious, and, therefore, profitless humility ;⁷ and were associating other objects of worship with the Lord Jesus, even daring to pray to those angelic beings whom He had created.⁸ Thus they had ceased to hold fast the Head, and, just as if He had not died for them, were subjecting themselves to ordinances which He had never commanded, and which could only mean that His work was not all-sufficient.

Again ; they practised fastings and other neglectings of the body, which Paul declares to be of no value, but merely to serve for the satisfying of the flesh.⁹ And, in fine, instead of the spiritual service enjoined by Christ, they substituted a fruitless worship, arranged according to human ideas, and already condemned by the words of the Lord ;—

“In vain do they worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.”

¹ vv. 6, 7.

² vv. 9, 10.

³ See pp. 312, 325.

⁴ Col. ii. 14.

⁵ ver. 16.

⁶ ver. 16.

⁷ ver. 18.

⁸ ver. 18.

⁹ ver. 23.

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They were being beguiled of their reward, and were wasting the time which God had given them upon earth.

After thus sketching out their errors, Paul makes a powerful appeal to them. If they really were risen with Christ, they should look far beyond the meaningless trifles which were occupying their minds. What had "Handle not, taste not, touch not,"¹ to do with those who were dead to the world, and whose life was hid with Christ in God?² It was not theirs to be constructing elaborate systems upon earth: they should be setting their affections on things above, where Christ sits at the right hand of God, where is the City of true believers, and whence they should be looking for the Lord Jesus to come.

But the Epistle which we are considering shows that Paul's words had not availed with the Laodiceans, whatever effect they may have had upon the Colossians.

The former had proved themselves worthy of their name: whatever was right in their own eyes, that was also their faith and their law. And, as a natural consequence, their love for Christ had cooled to lukewarmness: their religion was a mere practice of outward rites and customs and a belief of certain doctrines, and not a personal attachment to their Lord and Saviour.

We must not, however, forget to notice one striking feature in this fallen Church, which, in a later stage of its prophetic development, may throw much light upon what is going on among us in these Last Days. For the heresies at Colossae, and, therefore, as we have assumed, at Laodicea also, were propagated by Essenes, or Jewish Gnostics. Hence, as we have explained

¹ ver. 21.

² Col. iii. 3.

above,¹ they have an apparently twofold character; so that, while Paul's charges are for the most part concerned with what would now be termed Roman errors, some of them, on the other hand, refer to such views as we should designate Broad Church, Rationalistic, or Sceptical.

Just in the same manner, we now see the Gnostic presentation of Christianity, in the form of the Church of Rome, spreading its influence in every direction; while, side by side with it, the absolutely Pagan Gnosticism, now called Theosophy, is preparing for the time when—after the destruction of the Harlot-church—it will, probably, be Satan's chief instrument for drawing men altogether away from the very name and thought of Christianity, and attaching them to the God-defying Antichrist.

Such, then, seems to have been the condition of the Church in Laodicea about A.D. 96, when it was on the point of being rejected by the Lord Jesus. And, having so far described it, we will now seek to interpret the details of the Epistle as a prophetic forecast of the Churches of our own times, with reference to which it was specially written. For it is only too evident that the Laodicean period has already commenced, though it is at present overlapped by the Philadelphian, and will be so, until the First-fruits unto God and unto the Lamb shall have been taken away to be presented in the Heavenly Temple.

Historic Fulfilment of the Seventh Epistle

In its prophetic bearing, this Epistle depicts the great body of professing Christians in their last phase, and

See pp. 339-40.

describes that worldly and self-satisfied disposition for which Christ will, at length, openly reject them. It is also a final summons, to all who have ears to hear, to leave the spiritually dead, though outwardly prosperous, Church, and to join the despised Philadelphians, before Laodicea is disowned by Him Whom she insincerely calls Lord, while she does not the things which He has commanded. For her very name points to her lawlessness, signifying, as it does, the Church in which the people are the judges of what is right. And this name indicates the deep-seated cause of corruption, by which she has been so terribly affected that, while the Lord finds no fault with Philadelphia, He knows of nothing for which Laodicea can be commended.

Laodicea may, therefore, be regarded as an Ecclesiastical Sodom on the eve of its destruction, but with a few Lots yet remaining in her, who must be removed before the Lord can smite. For He will not suffer anything to hinder Him from saying, in the day of His glory, "Of all that Thou hast given Me, have I lost none." To believers, then, this Epistle is almost like the warning to Lot;—

"Haste thee, escape thither; for I cannot do anything, until thou be come thither."

As Sardis was evolved from Thyatira, being the development of that body which knew not the depths of Satan, so Philadelphia consists of the faithful and true who have come out from Sardis; but Laodicea—to quote the striking words of Stier—is "the great residuum of dead Christianity gathered together at the last time."

To this Church the Lord introduces Himself in a peculiarly solemn way, which intimates that faith in His promises and Person has waned and almost dis-

appeared. For, in the first place, He is the Amen, that is, the Truth, the word being the same "Verily" with which He was wont to preface many of His utterances. He thus meets the ever-spreading unbelief, which, in various forms and degrees, we may detect in almost every circle. It is now the time of the scoffers, who are saying ;—"Where is the promise of His coming?" Nay, there are not a few who profess to be Christians, and yet eliminate all that is supernatural from their Christianity! And others, like the Pharisees, are so satisfied with their own Church upon earth that they can see no necessity for Christ's appearing, and dislike all thought of the changes which such an event would occasion. These and similar ideas are destroying the faith of many; so that, while they profess to think much of the Lord's moral teaching, they disregard, or explain away, His prophetic utterances. But their folly will soon be turned into bitter repentance: for all that He has said shall be Yea and Amen—a joy to the Philadelphians, but a terrible woe to the Laodiceans.

He is, also, the Faithful and True Witness: therefore, although He is long-suffering, yet His very faithfulness will presently cause Him to send forth His wrath. And, accordingly, in the eleventh verse of the nineteenth chapter, where He is represented as suddenly unveiled before the affrighted world, He is styled the Faithful and True.

But there is, also, another meaning to His title; for Laodicea has failed in her testimony; therefore, He must Himself appear. It is recorded of the persecuted Christians at Lyons and Vienne, that, during their severe and protracted sufferings, they refused to be called martyrs, or witnesses, affirming that their Lord

was the only true Martyr. Self-satisfied Laodicea has no such thoughts of Him; and so, He declares His character before delivering upon her a judgment awfully contradictory of her own. She has vaunted herself to others, but He is the great Truth-speaker; will she dare to support her cause against Him?

Lastly; the Lord is "the Beginning of the creation of God," an expression which Arians have interpreted to mean, that He was the First of created beings. But revelation teaches us, that He was the Only Begotten Son of the Father; and, moreover, that "all things were made by Him; and without Him was not anything made that hath been made." Hence, it is evident that He is called "the Beginning of the creation of God," as being the First Cause of all created things. He is thus the Beginning, and He is also the Amen, or the End; while, in the meantime, He is the Faithful and True Witness.

As regards those whom He specially addresses, since they are described as neither hot nor cold, they must be the saved, or, at least, the deeply impressed, who have allowed themselves to sink back into the "corruption that is in the world through lust,"¹ the unstable believers who strive to make the best of both worlds—to serve God and Mammon; who have accepted the Satanic doctrine, that the Church must attract the world by carnal means, and provide it with amusements, who see nothing incongruous in the association of the ball-room and the Communion-Table; who are ready at any time to go down into Egypt for help, to "get up" Bazaars, often with comic aids, Dramatic Performances, Tableaux Vivants, Pageants, Carnivals,

¹ 2 Pet. i. 4.

Whist-drives, and various other pastimes and social entertainments, for the benefit of their Church, or Schools, or poor. But such things can be done only by withdrawing to a distance from Christ, and then the warmth and zeal of first love quickly begins to cool in the chilly atmosphere which surrounds it. So is it with Laodiceans, wherever they are found; they have ceased to be affected by the powers of the World-to-Come; Christ is no longer in them as the hope of glory; and, since they do not experience His constraining love, they are naturally disinclined to suffer inconvenience for His sake, to spend and be spent in His service. And, in all that we can learn of them, there will be found solemn warnings against the carnal Religionism and human Philosophy which are now overspreading Christendom.

The lukewarm are an abhorring to the Lord: He would deal rather with the absolutely cold. The former class, by their lack of love and inconsistent conduct, cause the adversaries to blaspheme, and so, compel God to reject them openly. If any one hold the form of godliness and deny its power, his chastisement must be made manifest to all men, that the holiness of God may be vindicated, and the world may know that He does not tolerate insincerity.

Therefore, the Lord spued¹ out the Laodiceans of old, and so will He do to all whom He finds like them at His coming. These are they who shall be left when others are taken: these shall stand without, vainly knocking, after the Master has risen and shut to the

¹ The metaphor is taken from the use of lukewarm water as an emetic, and expresses the very strongest abhorrence. So the land of Canaan is said to have spued out its inhabitants on account of their abominations (Lev. xviii. 28).

door : these, having practically denied Christ by adopting traditions, teachings, and systems, which did not come from Him, shall feel what it is to be denied by Him, and be taught by the sharp goad of persecution to keep more carefully to the simple paths which He has revealed.

But the worst feature in Laodicean Christians is, that they do not realize their sad condition : they think highly of themselves, and say that they are rich and have gotten riches, setting forth the asserted fact, and the process which led up to it, in such a way as to imply that their own arm has done it ; but the assertion itself is utterly false. They feel—most fatal of symptoms—that they have need of nothing ! Ordinances and will-worship have completely satisfied the flesh.

Sternly, therefore, does the Lord express their real condition in the words ;—

“ And knowest not that thou art the wretched one, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked ! ”

How often in this life are men deluded by sensuous dreams and the arts of evil spirits, until the time comes for an awful awakening ! The rich man is clothed in purple and fine linen, and fares sumptuously every day ; but presently he opens his eyes in Hades, being in torments, and unable to procure a drop of water to cool his tongue. And, even among the saved, how many are now walking as the first, who will have to change to the place of the last when the King comes ! How many are sitting in the chief seats, who will hear the humbling command—“ Give this man place ! ”

In the words, “ And knowest not that thou art the wretched one, ” the article points to the previous Epistle,

in which those who are here called Laodiceans are represented as looking down with contempt upon the Philadelphians ; while the Lord comforts the latter with the assurance, that He will make their despisers to come and worship before their feet, and to know that He has loved them. Not the little flock, to whom it is their Father's good pleasure to give the Kingdom ; but the self-satisfied professors and will-worshippers, are those who need pity. The Lord knows what is impending, and calls them the wretched and miserable, because He is just about to reject them as unworthy to escape all the things that shall come to pass. And they are also poor, for they have nothing but the riches and influence of this world, which is ready to fade away ; blind, for they cannot see their own miserable condition and fearful prospect ; naked, for the Lord has not clothed them, so that they may walk with Him in white.

In the following words, " I counsel thee," there is a mournful significance ; for they intimate that Laodicea is departing from the Kingdom of God's dear Son, and crossing the boundary line into the realms of Darkness ; so that He no longer commands her, as He would His Own subjects, but only offers counsel. Indeed, Laodicea has altogether lost the habit of obeying Him, and seeks to traditions, and Councils, and canons, or to science, and great men, and no longer to the Word of God as the sole authority.

The doctrines of Pergamum and Thyatira are returning, and ominous is the fact, that the Lord now finds no extenuating circumstances, as He previously did, and mentions no good works ; for this rebellion is against light and knowledge.

Yet He warns the Laodiceans to cease boasting of

their fancied wealth, and to buy of Him "gold refined by fire;" that is, a faith which will endure temptation, and be only purified the more when exposed to the fiery trial.¹

Thus, whatever might be their condition in the world, they would be rich in faith, the lack of which is hastening their ruin : for they who cannot trust Christ for every need, and in every perplexity, soon begin to put confidence in themselves, or in their Church, and so, are enticed away from the One Foundation.

He also bids them come to Him for white raiment, that they may cover themselves with His righteousness, instead of the filthy rags which can never hide the shame of their nakedness. And, lastly, He points out that they need His eye-salve to heal their blindness, and enable them to perceive what they are, and whither they are tending.

There is, however, but little hope that Laodicea can be restored, except by the Spirit of judgment and of burning ; therefore, He significantly adds, "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten." Yet so terrible will be the chastisement of those who are left upon earth during the Days of Vengeance that His mercy again exhorts ;—"Be zealous, therefore, and repent."

For even now the acceptable time has not quite gone by : Christ is yet standing at the door. He should, indeed, be in the midst of those who are gathered together in His Name ; but their sins have caused Him to depart from His Own place, though He still lingers near them.

The Dispensation is closing, and the scene is, perhaps, similar to that which Ezekiel witnessed when Jerusalem

¹ 1 Pet. i. 7.

was being given up to destruction. For the prophet beheld the Glory of the Lord withdrawing slowly and unwillingly from the Temple : he saw It halting on the threshold of the House ;¹ then raising Itself from the earth, and taking up a more distant position above the East gate ;² afterwards passing through the midst of the city, and lingering, yet once more, upon the mountain which is on the East side of it,³ before the final ascent of the Cherubim, and departure of the Keeper of Israel.

So the Lord, unable any longer to endure the disobedience and multiplied abominations of the Laodicean period, is leaving the Church which boasts His Name. Yet He, also, tarrys awhile, as did the Glory in Its passage from the Temple, and turns again to knock, if, perchance, any may awake to the consciousness that He, Who should be the Centre, is without ; and may, therefore, run to open to Him. ✓

Perhaps, the knocking may refer to two different means which the Lord is using to rouse His people. The first of them is, probably, chastisement ; and, while this would seem to include every kind of uncertainty, rebuke, and affliction, there is one sorrow which in a special manner belongs to the present time. For true believers are being continually vexed by the failure, and, still worse, perversion of testimony in the Sects to which they have joined themselves, and by

¹ Ezek. x. 4.

² Ezek. x. 19.

³ Ezek. xi. 23. We are not told that the Glory ascended immediately. Perhaps, the Lord remained for a while on the Mount of Olives to supervise the judgment which was about to fall upon the City and the Sanctuary. Standing upon the same spot, He afterwards announced the second destruction of Jerusalem (Luke xix. 43, 44), and uttered the great prophecy of its final trouble (Matth. xxiv. 7-28). From thence He ascended to the Heavens, and thither He will return with all His saints (Zech. xiv. 4).

the corruption and lawlessness which surround them. They are thus being deprived of that thoughtless security, in which some rest so entirely upon outward organizations that they seem to differ but little from the dwellers upon earth. They are being warned by manifest tokens, that, if the stream with which they have hitherto floated has been turned from its proper channel, they must no longer suffer themselves to be borne along by it, lest they be presently engulfed amid the waves of destruction, instead of being carried into the ocean of Christ's love. They are being taught to cling more closely to the Person of the Lord, more obediently to His revelation; and to long for His appearing, by which alone the power of evil can be checked, and the present perplexity disentangled.

For, while He is breaking in pieces their earthly rest, He has not forgotten to set that glorious hope before them. His secret has been communicated to them that fear Him: He has not hidden from them what He is about to do; and, consequently, on all sides proclamation is being made, that He is at hand. And power has been given to those who seek it to understand the great prophetic utterances of God, which have for centuries lain sealed and comparatively unnoticed: many have read them through and through, and the knowledge of them has been increased.

Such are the Lord's appeals, which, however, He addresses no longer to the whole Church, but only to individual members of it. "If any man," He says, "hear My voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me." A few there may be who will listen to these words, but the great multitude of the Laodiceans have no desire to sup with the Lord.

They are feasting with the dwellers upon earth, nourishing their hearts in a day of slaughter, eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage; and so they will go on, until the day that the Master of the House rises and shuts to the door. Then, at the sound of the closing portals, their indifference will be changed to feverish anxiety: they will shudder as they perceive that the Hour of Judgment is come.

In these days of luxury too many believers, like the spouse in the Song of Songs,¹ have left the work of tending their flocks in the wilderness, and are gone into the city of the world: they are slumbering at ease, and stifling conscience with the weak excuse, "I sleep, but my heart waketh;" I make no outward show of work or labour of love, but am right and true within. And so, they permit the fear of any slight inconvenience to deter them from rising to open unto their Lord, until, at last, His hand is seen through the hole of the door, until He manifests His Presence by the rapture of those who are looking for Him.

Then the careless ones awake to consciousness: they are smitten to the heart with remorse and returning love: they spring from their sinful couch, and hasten to unbar the door.

But no fair and glorious Form is waiting in the darkness of the night; the Beloved has withdrawn Himself, and is gone: they seek Him, but cannot find Him: they call Him, but no answer peals back through the gloom. They have trifled with warnings too long: the

¹ Song of Sol. v. 2-6. Our remarks upon it are, of course, only an application, and not an interpretation; for the *Song of Songs* is not directly addressed to Christians, but to Hebrews. In many points, however, there is an analogy between the Heavenly and the earthly people.

appointed time has passed, and they writhe in anguish as they perceive that the slighted threat has been suddenly and inexorably accomplished. The Master has knocked: they were not ready to open to Him immediately, and He has departed, and left them alone in the midnight of woe.

But, if any of the lukewarm Laodiceans can be roused before it is too late, they will be strengthened to overcome, and will yet attain to the dignity of sitting with Christ on the Throne of Glory from which He will judge the Millennial world.

Conclusion

We have now considered the Seven Messages from the Lord to the Churches concerning the things that are, or the present Dispensation; and have been enabled to discern in them the great periods of Church history, as they were foretold by Himself. And we have learnt from the study, that it was never yet possible, nor ever will be, for the Nominal and Visible Church to be anything but a failure. In saying this, we are speaking, of course, from an altogether spiritual point of view. For many Visible Churches have enjoyed worldly prosperity, such, too, as was quite satisfactory to the majority of their members, and was loudly trumpeted from pulpit and platform; but, as was the case with Sardis, the Lord found no work of theirs fulfilled before His God.

Nevertheless, both within and without the pale of such Churches, the members of the true, but as yet Invisible, Church are being disciplined and trained for their glorious destiny. Confessing One Lord, and indwelt by One Spirit, by Whom, also, they have been

& they
 who truly
 belong to the
 Church which
 is His Body
 should acknowledge
 One Lord
 One Body in their
 worship, and
 refuse to own
 any other

baptized into One Body, their unity is perfect, and, although that unity has never yet been seen by mortal eye, it soon will be. For the Lord has all but gathered in the Children of God that were scattered abroad; and, when He has done so, will organize the Body, assign to each individual member his own place, and then manifest Himself, with them all, in glory before the whole world. The effect will be wonderful and instantaneous. For, when the peoples who have survived His judgments behold those, who, through His grace, loved and served Him during the dark days of their earth-life, now made visibly One in Him,¹ and glittering around Him like the stars of the firmament, then, at length, they will believe that it was, indeed, the Almighty Father Who sent Him. And when, again, they gaze upon the Twelve Tribes—both the Hundred and Forty and Four Thousand with the Seal of God upon their foreheads and the countless multitudes who, with David their King, will have been just raised from their graves—taking possession of the Land of Israel, and all the promises to Abraham Isaac and Jacob being literally fulfilled; while the broad earth is covered with the blasted forms of those who dared to make war upon the Lamb—when they see all these things, they will fall upon their faces, and cry;—Jehovah He is God, and there is none beside Him!

But shall we not have to wait long, very long, before these glorious events can come to pass? What, then, is the teaching of the series of prophetic Epistles which we have just been investigating? Does it not declare that the predicted times of the Church upon earth are spent and over, that the Age is at the end

¹ John xvii. 23.

of its course? Have not the days of the Church that lost her first love passed by centuries ago, together with the Ten Corrective Persecutions that followed them? Have not sixteen hundred years all but run out since the Nominal Church of Christ suffered herself to be made the State-Church of Satan's Empire; for the Kingdom of This World has not even yet become the Kingdom of our God and of His Christ? Has not the Roman Church completed the first and lengthened stage of her career, which we are accustomed to call the Dark Ages? And is it not almost four centuries since the yoke of her power was broken by the Teutonic nations, whom God called out to be His last witnesses upon earth, before He sends down His Son from the Heavens. The Sardian deadness interposed, and then came the plenteous rain of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, with which the Lord refreshed His inheritance; and which resulted in Evangelistic and Missionary efforts, so great that the face of the whole earth has been sown with the pure Word of God. And now, in this twentieth century, all things are changing: Christianity has become adulterated with worldliness, sacerdotalism, unbelief, and every kind of human opinion: the Churches have lost their spiritual power, and, consequently, many of them are using carnal means to retain their congregations; while the comparatively few individuals, who still hold to the Bible and the Godhead and salvation of the Lord Jesus, are struggling, amid many difficulties, to keep that which they have until He comes.

All the scenes which the Lord has caused to pass before us in the Seven Epistles, save one, have already become history, testifying to His perfect knowledge of the end from the beginning. The one thing which

remains to be fulfilled is the removal of the faithful Philadelphians from earth, and the simultaneous rejection of the lukewarm Laodiceans.

Thus in these two chapters of the Apocalypse, as in many other prophecies, the Lord warns the men of our generation that the Age's story is all but told, that we are standing on the confines of the Dispensation, and that, at any moment, the event may happen which will announce, that Man's Day is over and the Day of the Lord has come.

Are we, then, ready for the stupendous change; or will the Lord come suddenly and find us sleeping in spirit, however active we may be in the flesh? Many professing Christians read novels which fix their thoughts upon things below, when they should be seeking those things that are above, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God: they frequent ball-rooms; are found at the card-table, or intent upon theatricals, miracle-plays, or pageants; and so, waste that time which ought to be spent in watching unto prayer. And not a few of our Churches and religious Institutions are becoming mere caterers of amusements and short-lived pleasures. Temptations of every kind lie thick around us. O let us beware of being drawn into that stream which ripples soothingly as it bears men away from God and His Christ; lest, at an hour that we think not, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, our opportunities should have passed, and we should find ourselves rejected by Him Who loved us and gave Himself for us.

O God of Peace, we intreat Thee to sanctify us wholly; so that our spirit and soul and body may be preserved entire, without blame at the coming

of our Lord Jesus Christ. Thou art manifestly calling us; for Thou hast revealed to us Thy purposes: do Thou, therefore, grant the desire which Thou hast planted in our heart.¹

Through the Blood and Righteousness and Indwelling Spirit of our Lord and Saviour, we beseech Thee that we may be accounted worthy to escape all those things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man; ² and may we prevail to attain to that Age and the Resurrection out from among the dead.³

Enable us ever to abide in the Lord, that we may bear much fruit; ⁴ and that, if He shall appear, we may have boldness, and not be ashamed before Him at His coming.⁵

Grant to us, we beseech Thee, to find mercy of the Lord in That Day.⁶

O, deliver us from every evil work, and preserve us unto Thy Heavenly Kingdom.⁷

We ask it only in the Name, and for the sake, of Him Who loves us, and loosed us from our sins by His Blood. Amen.

¹ 1 Thess. v. 23-4.

⁴ John xv. 5.

⁶ 2 Tim. i. 18.

² Luke xxi. 36.

⁵ 1 John ii. 28.

⁷ 2 Tim. iv. 18.

³ Luke xx. 35.

Paul's farewell
words.

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