The Second Epistle of Peter

William Kelly

Public domain. As published on plymouthbrethren.org.

Also online at https://plymouthbrethren.org/series/6189

KEE Ministry Library · Faithful Men
kee-ministry-library.netlify.app

Preface and Introduction

(T. Weston, 1906.)

Preface.

It will be observed that this Exposition of Peter's Second Epistle, does not extend beyond the 7th verse of the concluding chapter, this being as far as was written by the Author when called away to his rest.

Whilst it would have been easy to have added some comments on the remaining verses of this Epistle from the Author's other writings, yet, as they would not be of the same detailed character as is here presented, it has been thought best to issue this little book as it now stands, with the earnest desire that the Lord may graciously bless it to the refreshing and edification of the reader, to whom its writer, though dead, yet speaks.

Introduction.

The authenticity and genuineness of the First Epistle needed not a word. It seems never to have been disputed from the first. Not so the Second. Eusebius P., who died about A.D). 340, tells us (H.E. iii. 25) that among those scriptures that were controverted, but recognised by most (the many), was this Epistle. Even he did not dare to class it (as the Epistles of James, Jude, and John's second and third, or the Revelation) with the spurious; but he does not count it like the other books of the N.T. accepted by all without question.

Yet on its face the writer declares himself with yet more carefulness than when he wrote before, not "Peter" only but "Symeon Peter," name and surname. So, at the

Jerusalem conference on the Gentile question, James speaks of him (Acts 15:14) as “Symeon” (the Aramaic form of “Simon”), though historically designated “Peter” just before (ver. 7). A forger would have strenuously avoided any such shade of difference, superficial though it be; as he never would have conceived still greater care to attest thus minutely the Peter who added this Second Epistle. For he now was led with all holy energy and apostolic authority to denounce the false teachers that were to corrupt more and more the Christian profession, and the scoffers walking after their own lusts, wilfully blind to the day of the Lord, through unbelief and materialism.

The late Bp. Christ. Wordsworth, though loyally defending the true inspiration of this Epistle, seeks to palliate the hesitation raised (at least in the third and fourth centuries). He pleads that, as “Writings were forged in early times by heretics in the names of Apostles, especially in the name of St. Peter,” it was therefore incumbent on Christian churches to be on their guard, and not to receive any book as written by an apostle and as dictated by the Holy Spirit, before they were-convinced by irrefragable proofs that it was apostolic and inspired. “Little harm would arise from a temporary suspension of judgment. If the Epistle was what it professed to be, viz., a work of the Apostle St. Peter, then in due time it would not fail to be universally received as such. But if it was not what it claimed to be, then perhaps heresy might steal into the church under the venerable guise of an apostolic name, and the church might be convicted of reading a forgery as the word of God; and then the credibility and inspiration of those other books, viz., the four Gospels, the Acts of the

Apostles, and the thirteen Epistles of St. Paul, which had already been received by the Church, would be impugned; they too might be exposed to suspicion; and thus the foundation of the faith would be in danger of being overthrown. It was therefore the duty of all churches to take time to consider, before they received any book as the writing of an Apostle. It was their duty to doubt."

The error here is serious enough; and Dr. W., a grave and sincere prelate (far above trickery), puts it in its naked deformity. "It was the duty of all churches" to doubt! How little did he mean to surrender the ground of faith! Ecclesiasticism led him thus astray. It is never a duty, even for the simplest Christian, to doubt Scripture, but only to believe; and if so, what about the duty for all churches, or even for any church, to doubt? Really it was suicidal, and an utter dishonour to God who inspired the Scriptures, and a shameless failure on the church's part. One of the haughtiest sins of Popery is to set up the claim of the church to decide what is scripture. Whether they vest this prerogative in the church, in the ecumenical council, or in the Pope, makes no radical difference. In every form the bringing in of any authority but God's is treason against His glory.

So far is man, whatever his position, privileges, powers or responsibilities, from having the duty of judging God's word, it is what judges man. For man to doubt God's word, or to sit in judgment to pronounce it His or not, is an overthrow of all righteousness and of all grace, one might add of all decency. It is at the peril of any soul, and peculiarly inconsistent with the Christian, or the church, to question what He has written. The Lord has decided for the intrinsic authority of His own words,

to say nothing of His unvarying reverence for all scripture as the full and final sentence of God's mind. "He that rejecteth me and receiveth not my sayings hath him that judgeth him: the word which I spoke, that shall judge him in the last day. For I spoke not from myself, but the Father that sent me, himself hath given me commandment what I should say and what I should speak; and I know that his commandment is life eternal. What therefore I speak, as the Father hath said to me, so I speak" (John 12:48-50).

The Holy Spirit is no less precise in affirming the same principle in Heb. 4:12, 13. "For the word of God is living and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and quick to discern the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature that is not manifest in his sight; but all things are naked and laid open before the eyes of him with whom we have to do." What words could more directly refuse the monstrous assumption of the church in pretending to accredit scripture, or the still more unseemly assertion of its duty to doubt?

There is no evidence that the question as to 2 Peter was raised in the first century. We hear of it much later in the fourth century when unbelief and unspirituality had long prevailed to the decay of faith and the prevalence of heterodoxy, to which the open and sanctioned worldliness that followed gave great impetus and wide currency. The death of Peter no more invalidated his Second Epistle, than Paul's death did his Second to Timothy. This is a mere imagination of circumstances to account for a much later and a wholly ungrounded hesitation about our Epistle. The supposition of delay at

first, and the collection of evidence from various parts, before the Epistle was received on the church's verdict of its genuineness, are but an amiable dream.

The Second Epistle, like the First, eminently bears on daily life, but with less doctrine, as is natural, being avowedly written afterward to the same persons. Both are hortative; but the Second pronounces, as the First does not, a solemn warning on closing evils, with the severest denunciation of false teachers denying the Sovereign Master that bought them. These bring on themselves swift destruction, and mislead many into their dissolute doings, whereby the way of truth shall be blasphemed; as also by covetousness with feigned words they make merchandise of the saints. Hence prominence is given to these appalling enormities under the garb, not only of professing Christians, but of accepted teachers. This, at a later date at least, struck superficial observers so strangely as to raise a question of the authorship. But they ought to have recognised the selfsame spirit in the early episode of the apostle's dealing (Acts 8:18-24) with Simon of Samaria, the sorcerer of old. The fervour of love which characterised his evangelising kindled into a flame against the profanity of the baptised man, who thought to obtain the gift of God with money. Peter therefore pointed him out for the warning of others, yea, of himself too, as in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity. The advance and spread in corruption now descried by the Spirit called for still more energetic terms of abhorrence; as the last chapter exposes the latter day mockery of infidels in a philosophic form.

After the suited salutation in 2 Peter 1:1, 2, the apostle presents grace's foundation of all things for life and

godliness in what was already given, even to becoming partakers, not of human nature ameliorated, but of a divine nature through God's precious and exceeding great promises, having escaped he corruption that is in the world through lust. But for this very reason there is need of diligence to make our calling and election sure (3-11). This he shows them in view of his speedy departure, not by any hint of apostolic succession, but by leaving the truth with them, and recalling the wondrous sight vouchsafed to him and two other chosen witnesses of the power and coming of our Lord on the holy mount, even in the days of His flesh, and the Father's voice out of the excellent glory: the divine miniature of the kingdom, in confirmation of the prophetic word, with a hint of a blessedness and hope more surpassing still for their hearts (12-21). And he explains that no prophecy is of its own solution, but rather forms a whole by divine purpose and power converging on God's kingdom in Christ.

Then in 2 Peter 2 is the apostle's indignant prediction of the ungodly issue, the germ of which was already at work, and its judgment sure and unswerving from God. It is thus the complement of the First Epistle. As the latter was occupied with the suffering of the righteous from a hostile world turned to their good; so the former tells of the doom that must fall on the corrupting false teachers who hypocritically made truth and righteousness a mockery. The judgment on angels that sinned, on Noah's ungodly despisers, on godless and unclean Sodom and Gomorrah, are set out as fore-runners of the punishment that awaits the still more guilty that now follow Balaam in his unrighteousness.

Whatever their high-flown words of vanity, they despised lordship, and were slaves of corruption.

2 Peter 3 follows up God's righteous government of the world to the uttermost, in dissolving the heaven and earth that are now, and so, purging the world of all associations with ungodliness, to bring in new heavens and a new earth wherein righteousness dwelleth. But the apostle is not content with withdrawing the veil from the destruction, not only of the corrupt, of the covetous and insubordinate, but of the sceptical who rest on the stability of things material, which also perish. The saints who believe in God's promise, and wait for these awe-inspiring displays of divine retribution to come, he would have to be found of Him in peace without spot and blameless.

Thus any unbiassed Christian apprehends clearly, even if he had not the inspired writer's word for it, that the two Epistles came in the power of the Holy Spirit from the same hand, mind, and heart: the one specially regarding God's present government of the righteous; the other as specially that of the unjust in the future. Only together do they complete the great theme, and this in the style of the great apostle of the circumcision, wholly different from that of James, or John, or Paul, while Jude has his own distinctive character, as can readily be proved in its season. "Ye therefore, beloved, as knowing [things] beforehand, take care lest, being carried away with the error of the wicked, ye fall from your own stedfastness; but grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him the glory both now and to eternity's day! Amen." The close is as directly practical as the beginning; so in measure, rightly applied, is all scripture, and every scripture, as surely profitable for

man, as it is inspired of God. But through Peter it is peculiarly evident, and in his Second Epistle no less than in the First. Yet all is based on Christ's accomplished redemption, the possession of a new and divine nature to preserve from corruption, and a living hope through His resurrection Who is gone into heaven, angels and authorities and powers being made subject to Him.

But the Catholic principle is false, that the church teaches; for it is taught by those given as teachers by the exalted Head. Nor is it the church that preaches, but evangelists equally given by Christ in glory. The Protestant is just as false, who asserts the right of every man to private judgment. This directly tends to rationalism, and deifies man, as the Catholic does the church. The truth is that God has the right and the authority to send His gospel to every man; and woe be to every man that despises it. So God addresses His word in general to the christian and the church; and woe be to such as do not bow and bless Him for it. Hence it is quite exceptional when those divine communications, however deep, are sent save to the faithful as a whole, either in this or that place, or quite unrestrictedly. There are three letters to two chief rulers, who had a special place as His servants in the word, and as apostolic envoys. Yet the richest unfoldings of grace and truth in the Epistles were not addressed to officials, but expressly to all the saints or to the church. Now is it not almost blasphemous to say that the saints or the church addressed had the duty of doubting? How a Christian could be beguiled so to think is the marvel. But human tradition and prevalent ecclesiastical habits account for many a mistake.

Take the N.T. facts. Did the church of the Thessalonians doubt the first of Paul's Epistles, unexampled as it was? Did they not accept without question his written testimony, as they had his oral a little before, not as men's word — but just as it truly is — God's word, which also works in the believer, certainly not in the doubter? It is the more pertinent, because the Second of these Epistles exposes the fraud of a letter pretending to have come from the apostle, which had imposed on some at least. Thenceforward his salutation with his own hand in every Epistle is the token to guard the saints; yet far from him, or even them, the pestilent and unbelieving thought that their church, or any other church, was temporarily to suspend judgment, — no, not even when they, or some of them, had just been drawn into error by a deceiver.

And if the sign-manual of Paul sufficed, surely also that of Peter, or Symeon Peter! The name might be a possible question; and this it was not difficult to ascertain. Silvanus a prophet (Acts 15:22) was the bearer. But this settled, there was nothing, when the Second came, but to receive as from God what His inspired servant conveyed to the same saints who had his First Epistle. Examining its contents for the church to accept it would have been a snare of the enemy. The inspired word was to judge their conscience; not they to judge it, but to have their hearts invigorated and souls cheered by His grace and truth through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Again, not only did the inspired writer preface his name and apostolic title in fuller fashion than when he wrote before, but he refers to personal facts, one of the weightiest import, the other of the most exclusive nature, early in the Second Epistle. He pathetically tells

them of his knowledge that he was speedily to put off his tabernacle, as his motive for sending them a permanent testimony of what they needed for their continued remembrance Then he introduces the most magnificent and unique scene ever vouchsafed on earth to saints, himself, and his two companions: the transfiguration of the Son of man, acknowledged by the Father as His beloved Son, far above Moses or Elijah, with whom the apostle then foolishly placed Him, as if they could be on common ground. “Hear Him;” and as the voice out of the cloud came, Jesus was found alone. Therefore this Epistle must be either a base imposture, or the last words of love from that apostle.

Nor is there a part of the N.T. more pregnant with wise and holy counsels, suited to the wants of the saints, or more characteristic of him that wrote it, following up his former letter. For as his First set forth God’s righteous government of His children, founded on His grace which called unto His eternal glory in Christ Jesus, so his Second adds that righteous government about to fall on the corrupt false teachers, such as bring in by the bye heresies of perdition (2 Peter 2), as well as on the sceptics that rest on the world’s stability to mock at the coming of the Lord (2 Peter 3). The Second accordingly is needed to complete the First; just as that to Colossian saints from the apostle Paul completes what he wrote to Ephesians (the fulness of the Head, and the body His fulness). It is to grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

The two Epistles of Peter dwell alike on the all-importance of the gospel, so blessed already, yet on the one hand surrounded by a world of persecutors as well as by immense dangers from evil men within and

without. It is this development of evil which draws out the energetic sketch of the misleaders in all the second chapter, and of the sceptical enemies and their doom, down to the dissolution of all things, in 2 Peter 3. Both led speculative persons, like the untaught and ill-established of whom he himself speaks in 2 Peter 3:16, to question that Peter wrote it. No doubt that solemn warning has a stamp of its own necessarily different, not only from the First Epistle, but from what precedes and follows it in the Second. But can any objection be shallower? Its nature demanded an unsparing denunciation entirely out of season elsewhere. But when he is occupied with the souls of the saints as in the First Epistle, his style in the Second is impressed and instinct with the same ardent, fervent, practical earnestness in love and godliness, peculiar in its manner to him beyond any other writer in the N.T. And how beautiful his allusion to “our beloved brother Paul also”! and how marked the contrast with well-known patristic impostures which set the one against the other!

The case of the Epistle to the Hebrews illustrates that of 2 Peter, though the circumstances differed widely. For there were reasons of gracious consideration why the former had no name prefixed, whilst it contain) marks at the end only appropriate to the sole apostle who could have written a letter so comprehensive, profound, and wise in a style that rises in grandeur to the height of his argument, as he employed when required to the Romans (Rom. 8), the Corinthians, and the Colossians. Here it is sustained from first to last; but he is teaching the latent value of the O.T. to saints familiar with its letter, rather than as an apostle and prophet communicating the mysteries of the N.T. of which he was the most honoured

steward. Paul was here inspired outside his allotted province to write the final call to the believing Jews, that by it they might realize, as they had not hitherto, their proper Christian place of entering within the rent veil, and of going forth to the rejected Messiah without the camp, and bearing His reproach. The “new” covenant, the spirit of which is embodied in the gospel had made the first old; and what grows old and ages is near vanishing away. Now God claimed this after long patience before providential judgment fell on the city and its sanctuary. Nor should we fail to admire the divine care in sending God’s last message to the converted Jews by Paul as He sent His first apostolic call to the Gentiles by Peter.

Yet leading men in the Roman church stood in doubt of Paul’s writing to the Hebrews. So Eusebius P. tells us (H. E. iii. 3; vi. 14, 20) not only of Caius and Hippolytus (commonly called bishop of Portus R.), but of others till his own day. Baronius labours in vain to get rid of this shame: but Photion confirms it in his Bibl. μή. ρκα Ed. Hoesch 1653. So does Jerome, more than six times in his letters, expositions, etc., to the general effect that “the Latin custom did not receive it among the canonical Scriptures.” Nevertheless the Roman church as such never went so far as to reject the Epistle; and from the middle of the fourth it was as fully owned there as elsewhere. The Novatian trouble had tended to its prejudice, because such passages as the early verses of Hebrews 6 had been abused to justify their extravagance as of others before that. Nor was one known in those days of faith to broach the idea that it was the church’s duty to sit in judgment on an inspired communication. The danger lay rather in the second

century, at any rate of publicly reading what was not inspired, as we know was done.

Had people but known the Scriptures in faith and power, no such question had ever risen about the Epistle to the Hebrews. God had taken care to cut off all excuse for unbelief by the unusual verification of 2 Peter 3:15, 16. For as it is certain that Peter wrote his two Epistles to Christian Jews (1 Peter 1:1, 2 Peter 3:1), so is it that he declares Paul to have written to such also. What can this be other than that to the Hebrews? Therein are the same topics as spoken of here: the Lord's longsuffering and salvation, far more than in the letters to the Galatians, the Ephesians, or the Colossians; His coming for the blessed glory of His own, and the judgment of all that refuse His voice and are adversaries. Nor is it to be passed by, that, as Peter speaks of some things therein, as in all his Epistles, hard to be understood, which the untaught and ill-established wrest to their own destruction, so Paul in that Epistle (Heb. 5:11-14) tells the Hebrews that he had much to say and hard to be interpreted, because of their dulness in hearing.

So in the next chapter (Heb. 6:1) he exhorts them, leaving the word of the beginning of Christ (certainly not the principles of His doctrine, but what was known before redemption and the descent of the Holy Spirit), to go on to perfection i.e. full growth by the truth. Luther and Calvin were as unappreciative of this as Cajetan and Erasmus, and indulged in dreams from which some few have not recovered down to Dean Alford and others in our own day, putting forward Apollos, Barnabas, Luke, Silas, Clemens Rom. and even Tertullian! With equal show they might have contended for sixty more, besides those six; for there is no sound reason for any one of

them. What more frivolous than the pleas for attaching any one of these names to this noble Epistle? What can excuse the slight of the Holy Spirit's attributing it to Paul, as we have just seen?

It is interesting to note too that the letter from the Roman church, which passes under the name of Clemens R., refers repeatedly to the Epistle to the Hebrews, and proves that no doubt of its inspiration existed at that early date (probably before the first century had run out). Its chap. 36. not only makes much use of Heb. 1 but this under the solemn formula γέγραπται, It is written. The doubts of individuals were long after.

Calvin, whose repute as an expositor is high enough, passes this over, as indeed his comment is meagre and vague. Yet he did not doubt that Peter wrote the First to the converted Jews in Asia Minor, but (painful to say) he was guilty of the same hesitation as Origen and others as to the Second. He holds cheap the anonymous doubter of whom Eusebius speaks, but is influenced somewhat more by Jerome's mention of such as reasoned on the difference in style. "I confess however that there is the manifest distinctness that indicates (or, proves) different writers."… "At the same time by consent of all it has so far nothing unworthy of Peter as to express everywhere the force and grace of an apostolic spirit. But if it is received as canonical, Peter ought to be confessed its author, since not only has it his name inscribed, but he also attests that he had lived with Christ. Whereas to personate another would be a fiction unworthy of Christ. So then I determine that if the Epistle be counted worthy of credit, it must have proceeded from Peter; not that he himself wrote it, but

that some one of the disciples by his command composed the things which the necessity of the time required." Who can fail to see a vacillation unworthy of one who could be firm in matters of less moment than what touches the honour of the written word? (J. Calv. Opp. vii. Arg. in loco.) Real ground for a doubt among ancients or moderns there was none.

It is remarkable that the only other Epistle to the Hebrews once suffered without any just cause from a similar doubt of unbelief. There may be occasion to treat of this fully where it is more directly called for. Here a few words will suffice in confirmation of what has been said against any question of Peter's Second Epistle. And it is a pleasure to say that Dr. Wordsworth's prefatory defence of Paul's Epistle to the Hebrews is as excellent, as any palliation of the hesitation as to Peter is deplorable.

The church in Rome, or some of its notable leaders, it was that indulged in this unwarrantable prejudice. So Jerome says in more than six places that "the Latin custom did not receive it among the canonical Scriptures." Baronius in his history combats the allegation of Eusebius and tries to excuse Jerome as misled by him. Yet the Novatian dispute, with its mistaken abuse of Heb. 6, did dispose those in Rome against the Epistle, till that bias gave way before the bright light of truth chased away all clouds and mists.

But the remarkable fact is that at the beginning no doubt was entertained. Nor can evidence be asked earlier or weightier than its frequent citation as the written word in the letter from the church in Rome, which goes under the name of Clemens R. to the Church

in Corinth. So many are they that Moses Stuart, the American Prof., even divides these quotations into four classes. And Justin M., following not long after in the first half of the second century, makes clear references to it, both in his Apology, and in his Dialogue with the Jew Trypho. But we need not here say more on these external evidences. There is not a little to show that, notwithstanding its peculiarities, no doubt was expressed till long after it had been received as an undoubtedly inspired document. Peter himself affords a divinely given proof that Paul wrote to Hebrew saints, and that this is the blessed Epistle in question. That to the Christian should be the end of controversy. “But if any one is ignorant, let him be ignorant.”

These two Epistles are eminently characteristic of the two apostles, whatever the peculiar features in each owing to the urgent need which called for them. Nor is there any real ground to infer that any one but Paul and Peter had to do with those peculiarities. Both display the unmistakable power of the Holy Spirit’s inspiration. Both wrote with the moral power and doctrinal precision and divine majesty and love to the saints proper to the grace of God, with authority and not as the scribes.

2 Peter 1

The first notable trait in this Epistle is that the writer not only repeats the new name Christ gave him (Matt. 16:18) with his apostolic office, but adds his old one, object of divine mercy, with the confession of absolute subjection to his Master conveyed in “bondman.” Paul loved so to call himself, and Jude, and John. The Lord Jesus had drawn it out of that shame and degradation which only it could have in the estimate of the first man, and had invested it in His own person, when the Word became flesh, with all that is right and lovely and devoted in the sight of God, and of all moment to the faith of those who have communion with Him.

For who such a bondman as He that, being originally in the form of God, counted it not an object for grasping to be on equality with God, but emptied Himself, taking a bondman’s form, becoming in likeness of men; and losing found in figure as man, He humbled Himself, becoming obedient even to death, yea death of the cross? Nor did it atop there; for He gave before His departure the beautiful pledge of carrying on in heaven the lowliest service of washing the feet of His own, as the Advocate with the Father. Nor did this satisfy His love; for He also intimated that, when those bondmen of His, whom at His coming He shall find watching with girded loins and burning lamps, are thenceforward blessed on high at His coming again, He will gird Himself, and make them recline at table and come forth and serve them. Nay, when He shall deliver up the kingdom to the God and Father, all things having been subjected to Him, then shall the Son also Himself be

subjected to Him that subjected all things to Him, that God may be all in all. As He will never cease to be man, He will abide throughout eternity bondman, without derogating from that deity which He ever shares as Son equally with the Father and the Holy Spirit. It is Christ who alone gives us the full truth, and so of bondman as of all else. It is in an evil world, the place of active and suffering divine love which He loved so well that He will never give it up.

The same privilege and duty of love the Lord laid on His disciples, as we read repeatedly in all the Gospels, and in varying form. Let it suffice to quote what Luke (Luke 22) gives us at the last Supper; for he it is who brings together the deepest moral contrasts, if to man's shame, for the believer's profit, and above all to Christ's glory. "And they began to question together among themselves which of them it could be who was to do this [i.e., give Him up]. And there arose also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted to be greatest. And he said to them, The kings of the nations have rule over them, and those that exercise authority over them are called benefactors. Ye however [shall be] not thus; but let the greater among you be as the younger, and the leader as he that serveth. For which [is] greater, he that reclineth at table, or he that serveth? [Is] not he that reclineth? But I am in the midst of you as he that serveth?"

The apostles by grace were enabled to make His bondman character their own. O what a contrast with His servants too soon, and ever since, especially with such as claimed to have the succession, though by no means confined to them! It is no doubt a hollow name of pride where taken up in word only; but what is

comparable with it when in power? To be somebody is the desire of fallen man, the world's spirit; to give up all in love and obedience is Christ's, who alone really had all things. It is our pattern now. Greatness according to Him is to be a true servant; and to be chief is to be a slave, as He became, who not only served every need, but gave His life a ransom for many, His peculiar glory.

Peter therefore in his later Epistle, while he does not hide his Jewish name of nature with all its failure, puts forward before his apostolic title that lovely name of "bondman"; which more than ever shone in his eyes, so needful and good for the saints to ponder, delight in, and appropriate.

"Simon Peter, bondman and apostle of Jesus Christ to them that obtained like precious faith with us in virtue of [the] righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ" (ver. 1).

"Bondman and apostle of Jesus Christ," he writes to the same saints as before (2 Peter 3:1). But the terms now employed strikingly differ, yet have they an equally appropriate application to those of the Jewish dispersion in Asia Minor, who believed in Christ. In his First Epistle he was careful to describe them as sojourners elect according to foreknowledge of God the Father by the Spirit's sanctification unto obedience and blood-sprinkling of Jesus Christ. This was a pointed and elaborate contrast with their previous position as of a chosen nation to Jehovah, severed from others by the fleshly ordinance of circumcision, and held to obedience of the law under the penal sanction of the blood of victims (Ex. 24) which kept death before them if guilty of transgression. Here in the Second Epistle they are said

to have obtained like precious faith with the apostle and his brethren and theirs, in virtue of their God and Saviour Jesus Christ's righteousness.

"Like precious faith" raises no question of measure of faith in those who believe, but asserts that what is believed is equally precious for the simplest Christian as for an apostle, in its source, agent, object, and result. It is that full revelation of God in Christ, and not merely from God as had been from the first.

There is however a remarkable expression that follows, differing wholly from "the righteousness of God" as used by our Lord in Matt. 5:33, as this does from its use by the apostle Paul in the Epistle to the Romans and elsewhere. Yet one is as true as the others, and all are in harmony as alike from God. It is therefore of interest and moment to distinguish them, whilst they all three agree in meaning God's moral consistency with Himself in varying aspects. In the First Gospel the disciple is enjoined to seek first, not the supply of our natural wants for which we may count on our Father's care, but "the kingdom of God and his righteousness." This was then revealed in Christ, God's power and authority supreme, and in all goodness but consistency with Himself. To this the new nature responds in subjection and love; and this the disciples were to seek first, assured that He would see to all their need. But there is not a word about redemption, or saving lost sinners, but saints answering to what the Christ brought out to faith in Himself and His teaching.

Again, in Rom. 1, 3, 8, 10:4, we have the gospel of God based on the work of Christ, and sent out to all mankind on the very ground that they are lost. It is therefore a

righteousness that justifies the sinner through the faith of Christ; God's righteousness, not man's, grounded on His redemption, so that He, believing His witness to Christ, is justified by Christ's death and resurrection. God can afford through the Saviour to bless him, whatever may have been his ungodliness, according to His cleansing blood and risen power.

But in our text it is not the believer obtaining God's righteousness through faith, but obtaining faith by the righteousness of their God and Saviour Jesus Christ1: a quite different truth, and peculiar to the remnant which God ever has in Israel. Branches may be and are broken off, but some, not all. There are ever the elect that obtain, while the rest are blinded; so it is at the present time, and so it was of old. They only of all men have this privilege, a remnant according to the election of grace. Of no other nation can it be predicated. As theirs were the fathers, so still better the promises. Accordingly the apostle here attributes their receiving like precious faith to the righteousness of Jehovah Messiah, Jesus their Saviour and God. He at least was faithful to the promise, and in virtue of it they were given to believe, no less than the apostle and the saints in Jerusalem. So Peter had preached on the day of Pentecost; "for to you is the promise and to your children, and to all afar off, as many as Jehovah our God may call." Them too He called, and they by grace believed; but it was in His righteousness — "our God and Saviour Jesus Christ's."

"Grace to you and peace be multiplied in knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord" (ver. 2).

The text of the salutation in ver. 2 differs from that in the First Epistle only by the addition of the words, "in

the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord”; which reappear in its course substantially elsewhere. They are characteristic of the Second Epistle, and of great weight and worth where living faith accompanied that full knowledge.

Yet the solemn fact is shown in 2 Peter 2:20-22 that such a full knowledge might be only in the flesh, and end in a last state worse than a first, or total ruin. So we read in Rom. 1:18 of men that hold the truth in unrighteousness: very zealous for an orthodox creed, but quite unrenewed, and hence holding fast the truth with unrighteousness. The faith, Christianity, is so rich in knowledge of the utmost interest, that the natural mind, where the conscience is not before God, nor the soul purified by obedience of the truth, may deceive itself and readily acquire much, which only puffs up, instead of building up. It is never in this case receiving the love of the truth, that they may be saved; but their mastering the truth, as they would any department of art or science, rather -than being searched by truth, and subject to it, unto salvation. In a word there is no repentance Godward, but intellectualism. When Christ is the object and the life, the truth is known and loved, while it also frees from bondage of every sort to make one all the more bondman of Jesus. Thus it was that the apostle desired “grace and peace multiplied in full knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.”

It was of great moment for the Christian Jews to learn (and indeed it is imperfectly understood in Christendom) that, before our Lord came, the knowledge of God though true was vague, comparatively speaking. Yet all the O.T. saints looked away from themselves to Him in the sure hope of the woman’s Seed to destroy the

enemy. They knew Him as a faithful Creator and Preserver and Saviour, and by sacrifice too. His ways with Adam and Abel, with Enoch and Noah, gave ever-increasing light; though but partial, it was blessed. To Abraham more was vouchsafed, and the name of the Almighty, as a present help in the midst of the race ripening for judgment, was no small thing. Much more became known when through Moses He gave the name of Jehovah the Eternal, as the grand national watchword to Israel His people, the security of their final and everlasting blessing on earth under His government, whatever their changes meanwhile.

But the Lord Jesus has given us the knowledge of God His Father as He knew Him, generally in the days of His flesh, fully in His resurrection and ascension, that we might know Him as His Father and our Father, His God and our God, in the new creation consequent on His atoning death. What was all before in many modes and many measures, compared with this fulness? As the "beloved" disciple says in his First Epistle (1 John 5:20), "We know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding that we may know Him that is true; and we are in Him that is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life." Is anything so wonderful, gracious, and practical, as the truth now made fully known? It could not be till He came who knew it Himself perfectly, and died and rose and ascended that we might be brought, as far as is possible, into His relationships, and have the Holy Spirit given to know it this day (John 14:20). Such is Christian knowledge of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. As the Father is revealed, so the Son reveals, and this only in its living reality by the Holy Spirit. It is the full

revelation of God, confessed in our baptism, and needed, as it ought to be enjoyed, every step of the way till our pilgrimage closes in His coming to take us on high that where He is, we also may be.

“As his divine power hath granted to us all things that [are] for life and godliness through the knowledge of him that called us by his own glory and excellence” (ver. 3).

Such is the apostle’s testimony to the intervention of God’s grace in salvation. Who knew better than the chief workman on the great Feast of Pentecost when three thousand souls were added in one day? Who could testify as he of the power of God that wrought outside to save multitudes, and against evil within judicially, and assuredly not less in the devotedness with one heart and soul to Christ in love, which rose above all selfishness? Who could speak more nearly of the miraculous energy vouchsafed in those early days when, notwithstanding the awe that reigned, the sick were even carried into the streets and laid on beds and pallets, that, as he passed by, at least his shadow might overshadow some one of them; and this not of Jerusalem alone, but from the cities round about, the sick and the possessed, who were heeled everyone?

Here however he speaks only of the divine power in its ordinary but supernatural operation. It is God’s prerogative to quicken souls that were dead in their offences and sins; the Father in communion with the Son gives life. He calls out of darkness into His wonderful light — yes, makes us, once darkness, now light in the Lord; once tasteful and hating, to love because He first loved us. Think, too, of the relationships He confers on

the Christians, His children and sons, also, as the First Epistle said, a holy priesthood, and a royal one. Others we might recount; for, being Christ's, all things are ours, with the Holy Spirit ever indwelling since we rested by faith on Christ's redemption, that there might be power as well as capacity. How truly His divine power hath granted all things that are for life and godliness!

Jews, we know, ask signs, Greeks seek wisdom. Never were such signs of power and of goodness as in Christ; yet the Jews rejected Him. Never was such wisdom of God as in Jesus; yet the Greeks, the world, disdained Him. Had the rulers of this world known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory; but none knew. They were blind in unbelief. And a new thing was brought in; not yet the expected kingdom restored to Israel in power and glory, but "some better thing "in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord," who is on the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, angels and authorities and powers being made subject to Him. Hence, carrying out what was surprising even to the Twelve, His divine power has granted to us even now all the things that pertain unto life and godliness. For the Christian is called to the life of faith in all reverence and godly fear, as having nothing yet possessing all things, sharing now Christ's reproach, while looking at the things unseen and eternal.

Such is Christian faith, which the apostle set before these saints, once Jews, in his First Epistle; and confirms with point and solemnity in the Second against all corruption and scoffing. Therefore from the start he would establish their confidence in the provision of grace for all wants, weakness, and dangers. Even the Jews were counted Atheists, because they had no

images. How much more open to the charge were Christians without visible temple, altar, or sacrifice! Yet they, and they alone, knew the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom He sent. They alone had, now that Christ was on high, the other Paraclete, the Holy Spirit whom the Father sent in the name of Jesus to be with them for ever, and to be in them, consequent on Christ's death and their acceptance thereby.

This was but part of the "all things" His divine power has given us for life and godliness. For we have now also an entirely new revelation, fully conforming to the O.T. which they had from of old, but conveying what was now suited to God, no longer hidden in the holiest whence His people were strictly debarred, but fully manifested in Jesus, His Son yet Man, perfect God and perfect man in one person. This involved a total change for all who now believe. We have redemption through His blood, and we await His coming for redemption of the body as well as of the inheritance. We are baptised in the power of the Spirit into one body whether Jews or Greeks, all fleshly distinctions therein gone which were strictly maintained in the O.T. We have a great High Priest gone through the heavens as He is, Jesus the Son of God, to sympathise and intercede; and if any one have sinned, we have with the Father Him as Advocate, the Righteous One that is the propitiation for our sins. And we have a hope no less precious and high, that He is coming for us, we know not how soon, to receive us to Himself for the Father's house, as well as to display us in the same glory with Himself before the world when we shall reign with Him. Hence we need, and we have, a new and special revelation in what is called the N.T., to guide us, not of the world as Christ is not, in His path till He comes. The

Gospels, the Epistles, and the Revelation furnish this perfectly by the Spirit as our guide into all the truth.

We see how carefully the apostle guards the truth from mere speculation or sentiment. Knowledge that puffs up is as far as possible from his thought, save in these who had nothing else along with their dissolute or unrighteous ways. There may be a knowledge of God and of Jesus which never rises above the human mind, leads into no communion with God, has not even moral roots in the conscience and heart, and is ever liable to heterodoxy, because it is only natural. But the knowledge which he commends to the saints is what his fellow-apostle John treats as life eternal, and he himself as the means of life and godliness; for our apostle is ever intent on practical result. For this indeed divine power cannot but be needed, as the saints are here cheered by the assurance of it.

Its working is strikingly expressed, “through the knowledge of him that called us by his own2 glory and excellence.” Man is fallen, and thus is in a condition wholly different from his first estate Then his duty was to obey, in thanksgiving to God for all the goodness that surrounded him. But with his disobedience came ruin not only for himself but for the creation of which he was head. Departing from God, he was an exile from paradise, a sinful dying man; and so the race in and by him. All deliverance hung on Another, the woman’s Seed, who crushed in heel should crush the serpent’s head; a Man, but necessarily more than man thus to deliver by the utter defeat of Satan. From that day forward faith clung to the Coming One, later called Son of God, and Son of man, Messiah, in Psalms and Prophets. But only the N.T. brings out the truth with all

simplicity, clearness, and depth; and not His personal glory alone, but His reconciling work shining out in divine light.

This salvation is by God's call; and one quits self, man, the world, sins and all, for the object of faith He sets before us. Hence God calls us by His own glory and excellence. It is in Christ, but it is His own glory and excellence, not ours. Instead of staying where we are, which had been quite right if sin and ruin had not come in, we turn to One in heavenly glory who here suffered for our sins, that we should be not only forgiven but with Him there; and even here and now, while we are weak indeed, to enjoy that excellence which goes out of Him to preserve and guard us in the present scene of evil. We leave all by faith for Him. Our calling is the calling on high of God in Christ Jesus (Phil. 3:14); and there will the prize be. But there is He, dead and risen now; and to Him the sinner looks to be saved, for His is the power that keeps from the paths of the destroyer. He that rests where he is rests in self and sin, blinded by the enemy. The voice of Christ awakes him to his lost condition; and he, obeying the word, repenting toward God, and believing on the Lord Jesus, is called by God's own glory and excellence. The Saviour is there, and associates him who believes with Himself above in hope, thus separating him from the evil in him and around him.

It may help souls if we illustrate the same by the words of the apostle Paul in Rom. 3:23; especially as their sound is as familiar as the sense is not. "For all sinned, and do come short of the glory of God." The first clause is plain; but what of the second? By sin man lost his place on earth as well as his life as it was. It became a question of meeting the glory of God, or of being cast

into hell. And this is only met by the Saviour and His work on the cross to fit the sinner by faith in Him for heavenly glory Otherwise he is content with himself, neglects so great salvation, and refuses the Saviour who will judge him at the last day. He verily comes short of the glory of God; whereas the believer rejoices in hope of it. Without the blood of Jesus we could not stand by faith before the glory of God; but, knowing that His blood cleanses from all sin, we are entitled there to stand in spirit even now, and thus do not come short of it. We are called by His own glory and excellence.

Justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, we repent toward God, we judge ourselves, and (instead of resting here on ourselves) we go forward in faith to Him who is at God's right hand, thereby entitled to boast, no longer in self, or man, or the world, but in hope of the glory of God. Meanwhile we are guarded in (or, by) His power through faith for the salvation even of our bodies in that day. But it is by His own (not our) excellence and glory that He called us, instead of licence for ease, worldly honour, or natural enjoyment. Hence says the apostle Paul as the right experience of a Christian, "I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for whom I suffered the loss of all things, and do count them dung, that I may gain Christ, and be found in him, not having a righteousness of mine own, that which is of the law, but that which is of God by faith," etc. "Not that I already attained, nor am already perfected, but I pursue, if also I may apprehend, seeing that also I was apprehended by Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:8-12). Instead of abiding as unfallen man ought in his first estate, there is but one thing, forgetting the things behind and

stretching forward to the things before, to pursue toward the goal for the prize of the upward calling of God in Christ Jesus.

The apostle proceeds to explain through what God has granted now, not the manifested kingdom of the Messiah (for this is postponed to the day of His appearing in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory), but the greatest promises, as he calls them and precious, whilst we await Him, walking by faith, and not by sight. For what are those of earthly glory and power for Israel on earth in comparison? Ours are association with Christ in heaven. In short another and higher order of blessing now goes on. It is what we call Christianity.

“Through which he hath granted to us the greatest and precious promises, that through these ye may become partakers of a divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world in (or, by) lust” (2 Peter 1:4).

These words are the weighty expression of truth peculiarly appropriate to and needed by the persons addressed, but of permanent value for all saints since then to our day. “Which” refers to God’s own glory and excellence, whereon we have dwelt the more because the force is quite lost in the common Greek text, and the current translation. No less a standard suited His call. He would have the called to estimate the total difference of that object which was familiar to them as Jews under law. To live long on the earth and be blessed in basket and store presented an incomparably lower prospect; and a hopeless ground, if one applied it spiritually to such sinful creatures as they were in God’s sight, a ministry indeed of death and condemnation. The gospel

proclaims grace reigning through righteousness unto life eternal through Jesus Christ our Lord; it is a ministry of the Spirit and of righteousness, even of God's righteousness which we become in Christ. Therefore are we always confident, even in view of death and the judgment-seat of Christ, because God holds us for the very triumph we know in Christ, and has also given us already the earnest of the Spirit till we too are glorified. Even the new covenant for Israel under the Messiah's reign falls quite short of our heavenly associations with Christ already.

Hence we can understand the bounteous provision of His word that we may enter intelligently into what He has communicated to us in the carrying out of His gracious purpose. Through His own glory and excellence He has granted us the greatest promises, far more elevated than any given to His earthly people Israel. Take as a little example what the apostle himself had said in the early verses of his First Epistle, and of its first chapter. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, according to His much mercy, begot us again to a living hope through Jesus Christ's resurrection from among the dead, unto an incorruptible and undefiled and unfading inheritance, reserved in [the] heavens for you who are kept (or, guarded) in (or, by) God's power through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in [the] last time." He does not, in the verse we are considering, repeat what these precious promises are, now proposed to the precious faith of the Christian. But this one sample may suffice to show their general character, in contradistinction from the earthly hopes, which once sufficed to fill them with satisfaction and

pride in the highest degree, and so greatly contributed to their unbelief in the Messiah.

The Christian promises do not at all lend themselves to human feeling or worldly ambition. We can easily understand how the Jew might carnally delight in looking on to the day when, as Isaiah predicted, kings shall be Zion's nursing-fathers and Gentile princesses her nursing-mothers. Then they shall bow down to her with the face toward the earth, and lick up the dust of her feet. Then the sons of the strangers shall build up her walls, and their kings serve Zion, and her gates remain open continually day and night, to bring in to her the wealth of the nations, and their kings in triumphal train. For the nation and the kingdom that will not serve Zion shall perish; and those nations shall certainly be laid waste. It would be easy to accumulate, as any Christian can verify from the prophets generally, no less glowing visions of earthly glory assured to converted and restored Israel, when the day of Jehovah dawns. But here too a single inspired voice is surely enough.

Flesh in its unbelief and vanity among professing Christians may abuse every word of God. But the exceeding great and precious promises held out to the Christian do not in themselves afford any real handle to carnality. They presume the Lord's coming, and our body of humiliation transformed in order to be conformed to the body of His glory. In that day assuredly there can be no perversion for the Christian in heaven, nor will there be for Israel on the earth, all righteous under Messiah and the new covenant. It is now, in an evil world ruled by Satan, and with flesh still in us, that we are ever exposed to danger. But those promises has God granted to us, says the apostle, "that we may become partakers

of a divine nature.” For it is in the exercise of His own will that the Father of lights begot us by the word of truth.

It was not a mere operation, however excellent and powerful, on the mind. This of course there was. Conscience was penetrated and overwhelmed with a just sense of our sins and evil state; the heart was exercised truly before God by His manifested love in Christ and His work. But besides, a new nature was imparted, and this no less than supernatural in character. We were born of God, not only sons by adoption, but given the title and reality of His children (John 1:12, 13). Throughout the Fourth Gospel the divine design was to declare life eternal in the Son of God, to manifest its character in Himself and His ways and words, but also to announce that this life He gives, all the more distinctly because He was the rejected of the Jews and man — the world in short. From John 3 to 20 this is written with more than sunbeam brightness; and if now denied by those who once rejoiced in that light, it can only be through the darkening power of Satan.

O.T. saints had life in the Son; they were God’s children: without it they never could have walked in faith and fidelity as they did, nor share in the resurrection at His coming, nor reign with Him. But it was only revealed as a known, conscious, and present reality in John’s Gospel. Its future privilege for converted Israel and the Gentile sheep (Ps. 133:3, Dan. 12:2, Matt. 25:46) is plain; but then, and even before, we shall have it, if deceased, in a resurrection for the body, as now we have it in our souls as a revealed and existing certainty. To doubt, darken, or deny this fundamental truth of Christianity is of the evil one; it is connected with false doctrine as to Christ’s

person, and more or less the loss of almost all the truth characteristic of the Christian and the church.

Nor does it depend only on the phrase life eternal, or on the Gospel and First Epistle of John — the revelation of that blessed phrase which some would pare down to extinction. The apostle Paul intimates the same gift of grace substantially in other forms of speech suited to the scope given for his teaching. Let us look at the Epistle to the Romans only, though others are just as plain and abundant He tells us of life in the future (Rom. 5:17, 21), but of “newness of life” too in which we should walk now (Rom. 6:4); he bids us reckon ourselves alive to God in Christ Jesus whilst here, and yield ourselves to God as alive from among the dead already (11, 13). In Rom. 7:4 he says to those knowing the law that they were made dead to the law through the body of Christ to their being Another’s that was raised from among the dead, in order that they might bear fruit to God — an impossibility without life in Christ, serving too in newness of spirit and not in oldness of letter. It would be mere letter in the way of exposition to deny that such a life is eternal, though the term is not employed. Again in Rom. 8:2, what else was life in Christ Jesus?

No doubt in Christendom, and in its most evangelical circles there is the utmost feebleness as to a real spiritual life communicated now to the believer. Hence there is a dangerous tendency either to the amelioration of the old man, or to a miserable blank, as if we had but the flesh, and the Spirit of God only to guide and reprove according to need. It is a sad loss to overlook Christ in us, Christ as truly the life of the saint as the fallen Adamic life is shared by the race.

This is, according to Peter's line of things, implied in "a divine nature" of which, he tells the saints, they had become partakers through the divine promises God had granted them, "having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust," the spring of the evil. He does not speak of life eternal as John was given to do, nor of death and resurrection with Christ as Paul; but he presents the moral result, inseparable from the truth as each of them put it, and as important for the believer to apprehend and enjoy. Therefore he speaks of the same substantial privilege as partakers, or possessors in common, of a divine nature, with the moral blessing annexed of "having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust." The one description looked more at the divine character into which the believer entered to form his practice day by day; the other, the negative side of the evil and danger from which grace had given the saints escape through faith: both eminently falling within the range of the truth on which the apostle loved to dwell. Of its source in Christ the Mediator, John delighted to testify; as Paul, on the association with Him to which His work entitles the believer in deliverance not merely from sins but from sin, on the eternal counsels of God for heavenly glory with Christ, and on His present power by the Spirit that should work in the inner man above all that we ask or think.

We have seen how carefully from the first the apostle was led to point out the distinctive character of Christianity in dealing with souls. It was not now the law, as they had known, demanding consistency with obligations to the God of Israel from a people in the flesh already formed and owned, as well as directed by a divinely appointed priesthood to maintain them

according to the legal covenant for the trial if thus they could stand in His sight. The result was not only idolatry but the rejection of their own Messiah, the Righteous One, and, as He told them, in the consummation of the age the reception of the antichrist (John 5:43), the man of sin, and the destruction of that generation with him. The gospel is founded on the wholly different principle of sovereign grace; another character of things follows with results in manifest contrast. It addresses Jew and Gentile as alike guilty and lost. It calls them by faith in Christ to the God that reconciled us to Himself by the sinless One whom He made sin for us, that we might become God's righteousness in Him. Therefore is the ministry of reconciliation to win sinful souls through the saving grace of God; and the ministry of the church to nourish and guide the saints into and by all the truth, Christ being the great Priest, Advocate, and Head, etc., and the saved made kings and priests now in title and enjoyment, manifestly so in the day of glory.

Hence the stress here laid on their having received like precious faith (ver. 2), and (vers. 3, 4) on the same knowledge of Him that called by His own glory and excellence, through which He hath granted to us the greatest and precious promises, far beyond those to Israel, that through these they might become partakers of a divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world through lust. For Peter ever insists on plain moral realities. For these no ordinances or institutions avail. In Christianity there is and must be the direct communication of God's grace and truth in Christ to the soul, and the consequent knowledge of God, with approach to Him in the confidence of His love and of our own nearness to Him in known favour, all sins being

forgiven. For it is indeed no energy or desert on our part, but His divine power that has granted us all the things that pertain to life and godliness. Faith is the appropriating means.

Yet is much more needed on our part, which the apostle proceeds to enforce. A divine nature requires all care and diligence that it may grow; and as its spring and fulness are in Christ, and it is communicated and revealed to us by the word through the Spirit's agency, so is it formed in all that is suited to it by its requisite food and exercise, alms, and objects.

"But for this very thing also, bringing in besides all diligence, in your faith supply virtue, and in virtue knowledge, and in knowledge temperance, and in temperance endurance, and in endurance godliness, and in godliness brotherly affection, and in brotherly affection love" (vers. 5-7).

It is evident that the apostle is here enforcing experimental reality in the saints. But the Auth. Version hardly gives the force adequately. It is not "And besides this," but an energetic call for what is due to the grace of God in communicating the signal blessing of being sharers in a divine nature through faith in His very great and precious promises. Even a fleshly mind might and does deduce from the power and certainty of divine grace that there is room for earnest and practical purpose of heart on the part of the believer. But scripture enlarges the argument, warns against sloth and easy-going, and summons to assiduous diligence on all sides. For this very reason also are they, along with what they had already, to apply diligence in every way.

Thus it may be seen that salvation, as Peter was given to view it, is not regarded (as in Eph. 2:8, 2 Tim. 1:9, and Titus 3:5) as complete in Christ, but rather a process going on to the end of the journey through the desert (as also in the Epistles to the Romans, Corinthians, Philippians, Hebrews, etc.). They are distinct aspects of the truth, and one as true though not so elevated as the other, but both highly important to hold fast and discriminate. For it is our privilege as full-grown, or in that sense “perfect,” Christians to enjoy the unclouded certainty and comfort of a salvation so complete, that we are not only quickened together with Christ, but risen together, and seated down together in the heavenlies in Him. For this we must turn to the later Epistles of the apostle Paul. Yet none the less are we, as full grown also, to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God that works in us both to will and to work for His good pleasure, with the prize in view, and at the goal of His coming as Saviour to conform our body of humiliation unto His body of glory (Phil. 2, 3).

We are already by grace partakers of a divine nature; but we are still in a body not yet redeemed, and passing through a world of corruption through lust. And we that are in the tabernacle do groan, being burdened, not as once when in bondage, but because we are only freed in the spirit and have still to await sonship in full, the redemption of our body (2 Cor. 5, Rom. 8). Hence we need meanwhile to bring to bear all diligence in presence of the world, the flesh, and the devil. Nor is it only a question of our weakness and exposure, if unwatchful to prayer or in any measure heedless of the word; for we belong to the Father and the Son, and are

bound to witness a good confession by the Holy Spirit in word and deed.

It is assumed that all those addressed have faith, and are therefore not told to furnish it. But that we might be formed spiritually, or grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, as is said later, we are exhorted here, not exactly to “add to” our faith, but to “supply in it” virtue, or spiritual courage before a hostile world. Phil. 4:8 has been cited vainly to oppose this: whether moral worth or spiritual vigour, it is just as clearly the sense there as here. A sense more vague would enfeeble both texts. It is the first out of seven requisites here laid down for practical need and power. The Christian has urgent occasion for them all, and it might be an any day and every day; so that we are not to conceive a progress from one to the other by successive stages, however wisely the order is here given by His power who inspired the writer. There is a perceptible rise in their character; but the principle of each and all more or less marks the believer from first to last, though here he is called very impressively to make them all practically his own.

Assuredly the youngest saint quickly finds the value of supplying in his faith virtue or moral power. This he needs to support faith, that he may not swerve from his new-born capacity of seeing things in God’s light, instead of using the light of his own eyes or those of other men. As the Lord Himself, after He was divinely acknowledged the Son of God, was led into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil, so it is with each son of God by faith in Christ Jesus. We too in our measure are put to the proof, and need courage to resist the adversary, stedfast in faith, and subject to scripture.

The confession of faith makes one an immediate mark for Satan's attack. But we have to apply scripture in due season. It may be for the babe the guileless milk of the word; but this is just the food whereby he grows unto salvation. It may be rather the solid for those of full age. In any case it is not the mere bread of man's labour, but the revelation of God which is the means of growing up unto Christ in all things. "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." His word quickens. It reveals Christ the life-giver, and thus associates the quickened soul with God Himself immediately.

But clearly spiritual vigour is not all. Knowledge is necessary as well as courage. Scripture supplies it reliably, and in the N.T. both amply and with special precision to Christian privilege for direction and instruction. How beautiful the scene which Luke 2 presents of our blessed Lord, at twelve years of age, sitting in the midst of the Jewish teachers, both hearing them and asking them questions, when all that heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers! He was true man as well as God, advancing in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and men. As partakers of a divine nature we have a new capacity from above; and yet more we received not the spirit of the world but the Spirit that is of God, that we might consciously know the things freely given us by God. There is thus the fullest provision made for these wants, and no excuse for a Christian's ignorance of divine things. The natural or soulish man receives not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But the spiritual discerns all

things, and himself is discerned by no one. For which knew Jehovah's mind, who shall instruct Him? But we have Christ's mind. How wondrous yet true is this abiding privilege of the Christian!

Again, "in knowledge" supply "temperance" or self-control. Knowledge, however precious, has its danger of puffing up, and begetting contentions; and in itself it is a poor safeguard against lust, ill-feeling, or passion. There is therefore the utmost need of self-restraint. Against such a guard there is no law: rather is it a calm preservative against inflation, and so falling into the fault of the evil one, as well as reproach and his snare. At no time do we more need to watch than when our feelings are acutely wounded. For they only blind us to the character of any hasty impulse and hurry us to sacrifice every Christian consideration to self. But this we are bound to distrust. It wars exactly what in no case or degree wrought in Christ, who ever bowed to His Father in accepting from Him the utmost slight, dishonour, and contempt which came from those among whom He went about doing good, especially from God's people in their unbelief.

No doubt, there is the deeper pain if our trial come from His children, and the keener if from such as we specially trusted and valued. But the point for the soul, and above all for God, is not what this one has done or that said (lest it should rankle and inflame), but am I above it all by grace? am I self-restrained through (not self, but) Christ working in me? This enables one not to feed on what provokes, but to think on the things lovely, and of good report, which heat on our own account makes us forget. If others stumble, am I manifesting Christ?

But there is suffering for righteousness, if not for Christ's name, which is never far or long from a Christian's path; and thus he has need of self-control supplying "endurance." He is not to quail if called to suffer ever so wrongfully. How unworthy, natural as it is, to complain because of this! Would it be any satisfaction, or real alleviation, if one deserved it? "For it is better, if the will of God should will it, to suffer as well-doers than as evil-doers." "But if as a Christian, let him not be ashamed but glorify God in this name." Yes, believers have need of endurance. Let us then, in "self-control" that puts a quiet but needed check on ourselves and on every device of self-will, supply "endurance" under any wrong inflicted by others. This is quite compatible with, not reserve, but plain rebuke of a saint who so errs.

Yet another want of at least equal or greater weight is next urged: "in endurance godliness" or piety. What more momentous for the soul than to preserve the links of reverence and affection, of dependence and obedience, in fresh and constant exercise with God and our Lord Jesus! Yet such is the pressure of work, to say nothing of the course of the age, the deceitfulness of riches, the disappointment at loss, or lusts of other things, that the peril from any earthly preoccupation is great. But here we are reminded to supply godliness in its constant place. To confide in Him, to bow implicitly to His will assured that it is the best, is all the more blessed in the pressure of the persecutions that try our endurance. For indeed He is good, and does good, overcame evil in our case with His good, and strengthens even us not to be overcome by evil, but to overcome evil with good. If we do not know what we should pray for as befitting, we do know that all things

work together for good to those that love God. And surely this true piety feels. To the same end he bade them in his First Epistle (1 Peter 3:14, 15) not to fear the world's fear, nor be troubled, "But sanctify in your hearts Christ as Lord," as He had Jehovah always before Him.

Then we are reminded that paying God His due takes nothing from "brotherly affection," but on the contrary both cherishes and controls it; for in godliness, which is fitting and necessary to be supreme, we are told to supply this exercise of grace. As the apostle Paul wrote concerning it to the young and dear Thessalonian converts, "Ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another. For also this ye do toward all the brethren in the whole of Macedonia. But we exhort you, brethren, to abound yet more." Nevertheless brotherly affection has its limits because of its nature and its objects; for it is not God, and it may often let in what shuts Him out. Thus brethren too frequently slip into evil of one sort or another; and if brotherly affection be pressed (as commonly it is) as the acme of love, what mischief must arise for the saints! and what dishonour to the Lord and the truth!

Therefore mark the divine wisdom and the profit for us, in that the apostle here distinguishes, instead of confounding, "love"; for he closes with "in brotherly kindness love." Higher than this last he could not rise; for not only is love of God, but God is love. It is of all moment that in brotherly kindness we should supply that love which is of God, and which God is. Nothing here evinces the wretchedly fallen state of Christendom more than the chorus of commentators who think of nothing beyond brotherly kindness save love to all

mankind, even enemies, overlooking the source and power of all good. So Alford and Wordsworth, Bloomfield, Webster and Wilkinson, etc., among moderns speak for most shades of modern theology; and the ancients as far as one knows are no better.

Even John Calvin's remarks, which were consulted after writing thus, are singularly meagre, passing by the beautiful circle of truth here given us. From virtue and knowledge he turns off with few words to brotherly affection, and has no more to say of love than "Charitas latius patet, quia totum humanum genus complectitur" ("Love extends more widely, because it embraces the whole human race"). This is enough to represent the mind of the Reformers, of whom Calvin was regarded as the chief expositor. It is wholly defective and erroneous; for such a view loses what one of them calls "the crown of Christian virtue." Surely it would be, not a meet climax, but a descent from the deep and faithful character of special affection toward the holy brotherhood to universal and benevolent love for men as such. He speaks like the author of Saturday Evening, chap 12, who was far too humanitarian.

On the contrary it is an immense and blessed elevation from that affection, high as it is, to "love" in its fullest nature. And so speaks the apostle Paul who communicated not a little to his brother apostle of the circumcision for both his Epistles, and wrote to the Galatian brethren, after pressing on them "bowels of compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, longsuffering," with a forbearing and forgiving spirit. "And over (or, to) all these, love which is the bond of perfectness" (Gal. 3:12, 14), as he wrote to the Colossians at a later day. Nor need we quote the Epistles

of John, rich as is their contribution of proof to the same effect. The reason too is quite plain. God's nature in its active energy of love is the complement of all, the standard withal that strengthens us against every evil. Love, as known in Him, of which Christ is the full expression, while the most expansive of affections as it is necessarily, maintains all His character intact, refuses any sacrifice of His rights to indulge or palliate a brother's fault or error, and rises to its full height in God.

Yet how deep and wondrous this is in the God who gave His beloved Only-begotten Son that we, lost and dead, might live through Him, who was sent into the world with life eternal in Himself for every one that believed! yea, to be the propitiation for our sins, that the evil in us, intolerable to Him and grief and abhorrence to us, might be blotted out for ever! Not that we then loved Him, but He us to the uttermost: wherefore we do love Him whose perfect love casts out fear. We love, because He first loved us. God is love; and he that abides in love abides in God, and God in Him. Thus love gives its best force but also its preservative guard to brotherly affection; whilst it has its own highest and deepest scope according to its divine spring, nature, and character. "Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought to love one another" (1 John 4:11); but he never says that we "ought" to love God; for this we do, if indeed called according to purpose. It may be hard sometimes to love a brother when naughty: but we do love God always. What does it tell to leave this out?

It may be of interest for some to know that the too famous Bp. Warburton preached a sermon on these three verses, entitled, "The Edification of Gospel

Righteousness" (Works, v. 123-143, 4to, 1788). But able as it is in his peculiar fashion, and not without his strong impression of its divine wisdom, it is vitiated by his ignorance of grace and truth, and so completely that he takes for granted (p. 127) that the N.T., here as elsewhere, refers us to what the Religion of Nature (!) taught concerning virtue for example.

The apostle enforces the importance of that diligence to which he had exhorted saints by a twofold consideration expressed in verses 8, 9. In the first of these he points out the blessing of being thoroughly furnished in our practical state for every good word and work; and in the second, the blighting effect of negligence as to our state.

"For these things being in you and abounding make [you] not idle nor unfruitful for the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ: for he with whom they are not present is blind, shortsighted, having forgotten3 the cleansing of his old sins."

These varied qualities, set forth in a just order, were all of them requisite for the Christian character. The disciple is not above his teacher, nor the bondman above his lord. The Christian follows Christ and is His witness in the ways of every day. "Ye are our epistle," says Paul to the Corinthian saints when recalled to obedience, "written in our hearts, known and read of all men, being manifested that ye are Christ's epistle ministered by us, written not with ink but Spirit of a living God, not on stone tables but on the heart's fleshy tables." The new divine nature does not imitate outward points of moral propriety, but beholds Christ objectively, which with delight in His perfection works inwardly. Hence it participates in every thing that pleases God, and is

particularly vigilant where an awakened conscience has felt and judged special failure. So we read here “These things being in you.” Divine life works energetically in every right direction.

But the apostle was led to seek more. He urges that these things should “abound” also; and this they do where Christ dwells in the heart by faith. No doubt the words in Eph. 3:17 go out immensely farther; but Christ is and must be the spring and strength of the heart for all that is acceptable to God. The exercise of the heart in the full confidence of Christ’s love promotes growth in what is good. These things are therefore not only a real subsistence in the Christian, but also abound through dependence on His grace. Nor do troubles distract, if instead of intensely occupying ourselves with them, we are simple in casting the burden on Him, who cares for us, and delights in hearing the cry of faith’s confidence in Him, and gives His own peace to guard our hearts and our thoughts by Christ Jesus. If we be ever so pained, the new nature, while in no way sparing self in ourselves or others, gives us to turn to its own congenial occupation with what is pure, true, noble, just, lovely and of good report, to think on these things, rather than to be occupied with evil, where it is not a positive duty.

What is the effect? They “make you not idle nor unfruitful for the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.” It was a change for the worse when the A. V. for “idle” rendered the word “barren,” and led so many readers and preachers to guess what the difference could be between “barren” and “unfruitful.” But there is no room for doubt or difficulty. The first word is properly translated “idle” elsewhere in the A. V., as it should be here; and so Tyndale, Cranmer and the Geneva V. had

given. Wycliffe and his follower, as well as the Rhemish, have “voide” or “vacant” (as the last), which can hardly be said to have any just sense.

If the practical characteristics of Christianity abound in the saints, they themselves would be neither idle nor unfruitful. How unworthy to be idle, not only as standing in so blessed a relationship and possessed by grace of a new nature so excellent and repellent of every evil thing! How unworthy to be fruitless, if branches in the True Vine, such as those whom the Father purges that they may bear more fruit (John 15:2, 1 Peter 1:17)! “Herein is my Father glorified that ye bear much fruit; and ye shall be my disciples” (John 15:8). So the apostle Paul prays for the Philippian faithful that they might be pure and without stumbling for (or, against) Christ’s day, “filled with the fruit of righteousness that is through Jesus Christ unto God’s glory and praise” (Phil. 1:11).

The holiness of the new nature makes all sin to be hateful in the believer’s eyes. But as the flesh is still in us, and ready to work and manifest itself, there is the constant necessity of prayer and the word watchfully applied in self-judgment. The brotherhood too has unceasing claims that we should never wink at sin but abhor it both in brotherly affection and yet more strongly in that love which strengthens us in keeping His commandments and in rebuking a brother’s disobedience and every iniquity. And if we cleave with purpose of heart to the Lord, can we be insensible to mankind around who remain, as once we were, unintelligent, disobedient, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another? If idle in confessing earnestly according to our measure the saving grace of God in the gospel, we

cannot be but unfruitful “for the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Where is our heart then for God and His Son, for saints or for sinners? For what are we, since our deliverance, left in such a world as this? Is it not that God in all things may be glorified, as far as His children are concerned, through Jesus Christ, to whom is the glory and the might for the ages of ages, Amen?

But the other side is next noticed, and we do well to take heed. “For” (this is the true connective, not “but”) “he with whom they are not present is blind.” How sad that such a description should apply to one bearing the Lord’s name! For had not Peter in his First Epistle set forth Christians as loving Him whom they had not seen, and not now looking on but believing, they exult with joy unspeakable and full of glory? Theirs was no mere natural but supernatural sight in God’s wonderful light. What a fall from divine privilege to be “blind,” or even short-sighted! It is the lack of spiritual perception by the neglect of communion with God, the result of habitual indifference and self-seeking, to the slight of Christ, and grief of the Spirit.

It is explained by the next word, “shortsighted”: the things afar off, the heavenly, are no longer the objects before the eyes of the heart. Thus things that are near and before all mankind absorb the mind. It is a worldly spirit actively at work after the things of the world, and not those which the Father loves. Because all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world, as the apostle John urges. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof; but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever. The knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ is hindered and its separating power annulled, if

we thus look, not at the unseen, but at the seen; for the things that are seen are temporal, but the things that are not seen are eternal.

Another immense loss too follows: “having forgotten the cleansing of his old sins.” It is not that a soul may here deny the truth of the gospel, or oppose his justification by faith of Christ and His work. But enjoyment of peace with God is gone. For the Holy Spirit, instead of bearing present witness to his spirit that he is a child of God, testifies to his inconsistent and evil state. The doctrine, however certain and true, that the worshippers once purged have no more conscience of sins ceases to be his joy, and becomes forgotten. His conscience is not clear but troubled as to his condition, instead of being trustful and bold before God. Till he is thoroughly self-judged, he feels, when he reflects, that his own heart condemns him; and if so how much more must the God who is greater than our hearts, and knows all things!

Is it not in this duty and sense that he incurs forgetfulness of the cleansing of his old sins? It is not that he either gives up the truth or despairs as to himself; but there is no comfortable consciousness of that cleansing of our sins which the very gospel proclaims to every believer. How can it be otherwise in that government which God as Father keeps up with His children in our time of sojourn here? When the cleansing of one’s old sins is truly remembered, it acts on the soul to cleave to Him who for us died and rose, and strengthens us to hate evil of every kind, especially in our own ways. To forget the profession of being purged from one’s sins is to lose the power and duty of practical purity; and to be a Christian becomes but a name.

Here again in these concluding words of the introduction we may see the practical earnestness which eminently characterises our apostle. His aim is not dogmatic clearing up but spiritual power for every day.

“Wherefore the rather, brethren, use diligence to make your calling and election sure; for in doing these things ye shall never stumble. For thus shall be richly furnished to you the entrance into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (vers. 10, 11).

The true knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord is characteristic of Christianity, and rises far above what the law and the prophets conveyed, excellent as they were and are. But that knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, which the gospel communicates, is meant to make us, as partaking of a divine nature, neither idle nor unfruitful meanwhile. Flesh has to be judged, and the world held aloof by such as have escaped its corruption by lust. We need, as all life does, to grow by suited divine fare; and we are called to do God’s will.

There are the due affections to cultivate around us and upward. The pointed warning was just given of what surely follows indifference to the moral side, the blindness that ensues, the shortsightedness as to God’s own glory and excellence, Jesus crowned with honour and glory in all that becomes our relationship, and dangers here ever present. Otherwise one forgets the gracious and solemn remission of the gospel, and the meaning of baptism to Christ’s death at the start of the Christian profession.

Thus the diligence called for in vers. 5-7 is impressed in another way in vers. 10, 11. There it was in faith as the starting-point to furnish the necessary and blessed

elements that form Christian character, from moral courage to divine love reproduced in the heart and ways, with the happy result where they exist and abound, with the saddest effect where they are lacking. Here looking at both sides the apostle exhorts his "brethren" all the more to give diligence, not merely to bear in lively recollection, in thankfulness, and exercised conscience, their first confession of divine grace to them as guilty sinners, but "to make their calling and election sure." In our fallen state, as in the world, there is nothing at all to help for life and godliness. The fairest show in flesh is the most deceptive and dangerous; and if Gentiles, like the Galatian and the Colossian brethren, were so prone to this snare, how much more were those who had been Jews, both to slip back from grace, and to make it a creed to own, instead of the spring and proof and joy of faith?

It is plain that the fresh appeal is to our state and consequent course and character of walk. The very order of the terms indicates this; for on the side of divine grace election according to scripture necessarily precedes calling. God's choice of the Christian is in eternity; as His calling of us is in time out of darkness into His wonderful light (1 Peter 2:9). So in the opening of the First Epistle the saints were said to be elect according to God the Father's foreknowledge; but it was in virtue of the Spirit's sanctification that they were separated unto the obedience and blood-sprinkling of the Lord Jesus Christ. The well-known summary in Rom. 8:28-30 is still more precise and full. "And we know that all things work together for good to those that love God, to those that are called according to purpose. Because whom he fore-knew he also predestinated [to be]

conformed to the image of his Son, that he should be firstborn among many brethren. And whom he predestinated, these he also called; and whom he called, these he also justified; and whom he justified, these he also glorified." Thus the chain of blessing is completed when the many brethren are brought even as concerns the body into conformity with their glorified Lord. The order is as clearly of God's grace; as that in our text, where calling comes before election, is of its actual application to man. And this is in keeping with the context which deals with the present moral government of souls.

The passage answers in its place to what we have in 1 Peter 1:17, 18: "And if ye call on him as Father that without respect of persons judgeth according to the work of each, pass the time of your sojourn in fear, knowing that ye were redeemed, not with corruptibles, silver or gold, from your vain manner of walk handed down from fathers, but with precious blood of Christ as of a lamb unblemished and spotless," etc. The fear enjoined is not from lack of certainty in our redemption, which on the contrary is enforced with all power and clearness. It is filial fear strengthened by the only efficacious sacrifice, but tempered because a Father holy and impartial watches over every step of our pilgrimage; and as He will not condemn us with the world, He chastens because He loves us too well to gloss over our failures. Here Christian responsibility is pressed, that there should not be inconsistency in our ways. His calling like His election is a matter of sovereign grace, and admits no question. But the case is different when we hear of our calling and election. Here negligence disorders the walk, and compromises our profession of

His name, takes away our joy and enfeebles or hinders our testimony, and all the more if our conscience be tender. The heart condemns us, as is said in 1 John 3:20; and how much more does God, who greater than our heart knows all things, and draws us into self-judgment, so that it should not condemn us!

Practical fidelity, then, is urged the more with diligence to make our calling and election sure; “for doing these things” which please God, and are His will concerning us, they are made firm to our enjoyment, instead of being loose and unstable by a careless state; and so one may add, they are to others who look for our ways agreeing with our words. Walking in dependence and obedience we shall never stumble. It is therefore a most humbling thing when one thus trips by the way, and mistakes his own will or the enemy’s suggestion for the Lord’s guidance. How painfully it is learnt that all knowledge here fails; and that we must be brought to deep self-judgment, and vigilance in looking to and leaning on the Lord that we may follow Him closely. For any one can see a failure, and flesh can censure without measure or heart. Grace alone can purify according to the standard of the sanctuary; but this may be retarded by failure in penetrating to the roots of what misled. And here it is ourselves who are to blame; for there is in Christ and the word all resource to meet the need, yea, so as to strengthen one’s brethren also, as Peter himself had to learn, and learnt so well.

But more encouragement follows here. “For thus shall be richly furnished to you the entrance into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.” Here again it is not a predicted fact that is prominent, but the full realization even now by the soul

that walks blamelessly before God. Thus it is that the entrance into the kingdom should be furnished. One is thus enabled to anticipate in rich measure the everlasting kingdom. So the Spirit was pleased to describe it. At any rate it is not put as a mediatorial display of glory in reigning over the earth for a thousand years, blessed as this will be; but rather what is unchanging. For there is also revealed that His servants shall serve Him and see His face, and reign for ever and ever.

Here then to those walking by grace faithfully “shall be richly furnished the entrance into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.” Not only is evil avoided, but there is nothing to dim the eyes or burden the heart. And the future glory is made richly to fill the soul as that which, as it belongs to Him, is shared with us, heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ. We are thus led into it for heart enjoyment; for the Spirit, being ungrieved, is not stopped by our errors and wrong-doing to humble us, but can show us things to come. “He shall glorify me, because he shall receive of mine and shall declare [it] to you.” The entrance into it shall be richly furnished in the case described for practical joy and power over all that is present, whereby Satan seeks to dazzle and occupy the unwary.

A great principle of God appears in the words that follow, to which we do well to take heed. For the proof is abundant and plain, and a serious warning at this very time, and at all times, of the peril to God’s glory, so far as His saints are concerned, from neglecting it.

“Wherefore I shall be ready always to put you in mind of those things, though knowing [these] and established in the present truth” (ver. 12).

Can any thing give clearer evidence of the all importance of the written word, not only to communicate the truth on divine authority, but to keep it intact in the living remembrance of the saints, than the earnestness with which this inspired bondman and apostle of our Lord impresses its need in his last message?

We learn, from Gal. 1:6-10, how prone those mercurial Gentile brethren were, under evil influence, to forget even the fundamental principle of the gospel they had heard from the greatest preacher that ever lived. “I marvel that ye are so quickly removing from him that called you in the grace of Christ unto a different gospel, which is not another [one]; only there are some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But if even we, or an angel from heaven, proclaim a gospel to you besides [or, other than] that which we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we said before, now also I say again, If anyone preach a gospel besides that which ye received, let him be accursed. For am I now persuading men or God? or am I seeking to please men? If I were still pleasing men, I should not be Christ’s bondman.”

We learn also from 1 Corinthians, that the vain Greek mind in the capital of Achaia, where the same apostle had preached and won much people to the Lord, was soon slipping away, when his back was turned, from the ways and will of God, even to the compromise of the resurrection, though not of the immortality of the soul,

which philosophy favoured and the first man might and did misuse to exalt himself. Hence that first Epistle, early as the date was, reproved their carnal schools with leaders, their low moral sense, their worldliness in going to law, their tampering with idol feasts as if nothing, and the laxity as to natural relationships. Even the gospel demanded re-statement in 1 Cor. 15, as their disorders at the Lord's supper, and in the assembly, called for rebuke and rectification in 1 Cor. 11, 12 and 14.

Nor need there be more than a reference to the "doubtful disputations" which endangered the peace of the saints in Rome; nor to the preaching for envy and strife of some at Philippi, nor to others who caused weeping to the apostle while he named it, enemies as they were of the cross of Christ, whose end was destruction, whose God was their belly, and their glory was their shame, who minded earthly things. Nor does the Epistle to the Colossians here call for notice, though it might well be a lengthened and appropriate one in view of the havoc which threatened those saints from the inroads of Gentile philosophy and of Jewish elements on the glory of the Head and the unity of the body with Him. We know too that the Epistles to the Thessalonians were written among other things especially to disabuse those young Christians of error: the First, as to the departed saints at Christ's coming, the Second, as to His day for the living saints. Then the letters to the trusty fellow-labourers, Timothy and Titus, explicitly deal with falling away from the faith, profane babblings, with vain talkers and deceivers, specially those of circumcision; and in every case supplying the adequate remedy in God's grace and truth, as we ought to learn.

Eminently instructive is the opposite snare exposed in the grand Epistle to the Hebrews. Therein the apostle sets out the glory of Christ in person, office, and work, to deliver the circumcised believers from their traditional attachment to Judaism with its priesthood, ordinances, and sanctuary, from which they had not got clear after so many years of knowing Christ. But the Spirit of God would no longer tolerate this dulness, natural to babes, but inconsistent with the solid food of full-grown men, who have their senses exercised for distinguishing both good and evil. There is therefore exhortation from God to take their true Christian place of entering with boldness into the holies by the blood of Jesus, and of going forth unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach. This was expressly before the destruction of the city and the temple; that the saints might shake off their old swaddling clothes, to be thoroughly and only Christ's by faith, before the coming acts of God's providence.

The later Epistles are just the fullest on the impending ruin of the professing church, the latest of all (Jude's and John's) pointing out apostasy at the end with the Lord's unsparing judgment. For "the last hour," however it might be prolonged in divine patience, was characterised even then by "many antichrists," the sure token of "the Antichrist" to be destroyed in the day of the Lord.

Even this short survey of inspired correction is the most convincing proof how dependent the Christian saints were on fresh scripture to guard our souls from forgetfulness of the truth and the aberrations from all round its circle provoked and promoted by the spirit of falsehood. But, besides this, food was provided in due

season. To the Roman saints the apostle only refers to revelation of a mystery or secret as to which silence had been kept in everlasting times, but now manifested, and by prophetic scriptures according to the eternal God's command made known for obedience of faith unto all the nations. But it was not here revealed. Nor was it to the Corinthians in its heavenly side but only in its earthly working; still less to the Galatians or the Thessalonians. Not till he was a prisoner in Rome did he unfold it fully to the Ephesians and the Colossian saints, and thence to the church gradually far and wide. The word is the truth, and its written form under the inspiring power of God adds to it His abiding permanence as alike the supply and the standard for His children.

Nor can it be doubted that today beholds the most fearful and widespread and deadly onslaught on scripture ever since the apostles departed. At all times bad men had yielded; and with more or less daring circulated their doubts and disbelief. But now so shameless is unbelief that the seats of human learning are its citadels; and theologians vie with scientists and literary men in thinly if at all disguised denial of God's word from Genesis to the Apocalypse. Divine revelation is therefore a burning question today; and the more because it taints largely and deeply every sect in Christendom.

And how fares it with such as abjure a sectarian place? Has it not been affirmed among such, orally and in print, that the church needed not scripture, at least if walking decently and in order? Again, "it is no good sending out Bibles if there are not preachers"? Again, "the word of God is in the scriptures"? Not that scripture is the

written word but Christ is the word of God? That “the scriptures are more the record of it, than the thing itself”? We are all familiar with such language among adversaries of the truth; but how solemn that such praise of incredulity should pass as from God’s Spirit among the more ignorant of those once most staunch for the Bible! And how still more solemn that such impiety has not been judged on the guilty, and repudiated with horror and humiliation by the more intelligent! Are there not some true-hearted enough for God and His word to be above the dread of consequences?

There is another phase of unbelief which prevails among such brethren as claim to be the faithful in disowning and separating from that depraved confraternity. Their danger made itself manifest from the time when both these parties, now opposed, staked all on what they called assembly-judgments. It was a phrase unknown in days when faith and patience reigned, and scripture was demanded and given for every legitimate judgment. No right-minded saint conceived of a godly action save in obedience of the word. What honour the Lord habitually put upon it! But just when party-spirit was beginning to blow up ecclesiastical fire to a white heat, and scripture was found unavailable to justify an extreme and revolutionary action desired, the strange proceedings brought in strange phrases.

Scripture was denied to be necessary, when it could not be produced. Very distressing became the course of these brethren who claimed all the faithful qualities and denied them to those who blamed their doings as without and beyond scripture. It was laid down that all were bound by an assembly-judgment, however partial or hasty, nay, even if known to be wrong! And this, not

only prima facie but excluding in future any revisal, when it was distinctly urged that the right should alone be done by such as were assured of error.

No, there could be, there ought to be, no rectification, no owning of a wrong! An assembly-judgment, once made, must be accepted as irrevocable, even if known afterwards and certainly to be unrighteous and erroneous! This did not matter; it was bound on earth and in heaven! Therefore the prime duty henceforth of the intelligent saint was to accept this as due to the Lord's word and name! The natural home for such fanaticism seems to be Babylon.

No doubt in regular cases of discipline, conducted according to scripture, the assembly is entitled to pronounce in the Lord's name, and individuals are bound to hear. Even then elder men acquainted with facts well knew that, in ordinary times, errors if unredressed might be fatal, and that unsound decisions were abandoned to the Lord's honour and the assembly's shame, yet so done heartily for His name's sake. How much more was it called for, when souls were perplexed, agitated, and prejudiced on all sides; when the unprecedented step was taken, as in the world's way to change the venue, and this not as even there to secure impartiality, but to judge a question where strong bias for and against was known to exist! Hence some were satisfied that there was no scriptural authority for such a case, declined even going to hear, and only staid in fellowship till there was no remedy, and a case occurred which compelled them to act according to conscience guided by the word.

These samples of the need, not exemplified among the distant denominations, but among saints who were once simple, gracious, and faithful, may help, as really existing facts, to show how invaluable was the help of which our apostle here speaks to the saints. He should be ready always to put them in remembrance of these things, just before urgently pressed on their heed, though they knew them, and were established in the truth present with them. How considerately he appeals, and gives them credit for the utmost possible! He was truly a bondman as well as apostle of Jesus Christ, and ruled not over their faith, but as with Paul a fellow-worker, not only of their joy, but of their stability and safety.

It was not enough then that the saints should know the things which the gospel communicates to them, nor even that they should be established in them. Those grand facts of divine grace with the moral responsibility they involve are “the present truth”: Jesus the Messiah actually come, rejected by the chosen nation, as the prophets did not omit to announce and the basis of all, yet easily let slip, because of the glowing visions of His kingdom not yet accomplished but apt to eclipse what was deepest and essential. Hence the earnestness of the apostle to impress on his brethren the truth which was then before them, so distinct from the past and from the age to come.

It is, as he had said, the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord (ver. 2); the knowledge in particular of our Lord Jesus Christ (ver. 8), without which none can know God as He now needs to be known. In vain people cried up that which was so precious in foregoing time. All the prophets and the law prophesied until John; and none

greater than John the Baptist had arisen among those born of women. But from his days the kingdom of the heavens suffered violence, and men of violence seize on it. It is now a question of faith breaking through every difficulty and obstacle in the power of the Spirit to receive the Son of God come, which necessarily tests every soul of man. For this is life eternal, that they should know the Father revealed by the Son whom He had sent to this end. What was any knowledge compared with that? In vain they talked of “father Jacob,” or of all the fathers from Abraham, who exulted that he should see Christ’s day, as he by faith saw and rejoiced. For One was come, who, though man also, could say, Before Abraham was, I AM. This changed all for faith, and made inexcusable the unbelief that only stuck to the past.

To slight “the present truth” was to lose God and His Son. For it alone puts the believer into living relationship with God, and makes available His divine power which has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness; for this is inseparable from the knowledge of Him that called us by His own glory and excellence. It is in fact what we mean by Christianity, as the life no less than the faith we confess; and therefore it involves growth practically as we have seen in all that becomes the Christian, of which God is the judge, who deigns to instruct us with all precision, as having become partakers of a divine nature, and thus escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh! God, sending His own Son in likeness of flesh of sin and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous import (or, requirement) of the law might be fulfilled in us that walk not according to flesh but

according to Spirit. For He slights mere forms now and will have reality in those that are His. The greater the present privileges; the more are saints to be diligent to make their calling and election sure, avoid stumbling, and have richly furnished to them the entrance into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. For as another apostle dear to Peter says, “he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.”

But practically believers are exposed to such injurious influences, distractive of spirit and attractive to flesh, that they are like watches in need of habitual winding up. It is not enough to know and to be established in the present truth. Therefore the readiness of the apostle always to put them in mind of these things (ver. 12). Here again he reiterates it as their urgent need while he lived, and in view of his speedy departure.

“And I deem [it] right, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting [you] in minds knowing that the putting off of my tabernacle is speedy, according as our Lord Jesus Christ manifested to me” (vers. 13, 14).

Whoever believes, as every Christian is bound to believe, that the great enemy sets himself most against all that God has actually in hand, can readily understand the importance of this care for the saints. It was always so. Cain and Abel were severally put to the proof by the then urgent truth of sacrifice, which faith prized and unbelief disdained. Enoch and Noah both recognised the old truth, but were tested by, and faithful to, what God revealed to each in their day. Abraham held all that went before, but believed in the promises and confided in the divine revelation of “God Almighty” to himself, a pilgrim among races to be destroyed for their iniquity. Israel

again had God bringing them out of Egypt, through the wilderness, and into the land of Canaan, under condition of the law which they undertook to obey in their self-confidence. The Christian begins with redemption by His blood who gives us life eternal, walking in the light of the true God revealed in love and calling us to His eternal glory. In every case power of faith shows itself in specially appropriating “the present truth,” whilst valuing all that had been made known previously, because it was all God’s doing and communicating.

But, if this be true as a principle, the infinite nature of God’s revelation of Himself in Christ makes the actual deposit of faith precious and momentous beyond all comparison. It is not merely revelation from God but of God. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are now made known through our Lord a man, and in His work of redemption who is now consequently in heavenly glory, and, by the Spirit sent forth from heaven, the Spirit of God and of glory rests on the Christian. Not that our apostle makes known all these wondrous privileges, individual or of the church, Christ’s body; but he does insist on the all-importance of the knowledge of God, which is now the portion of faith, beyond what could be before Christ came, or what is to be displayed in the kingdom to the world by-and-by.

It was the inspiring Spirit who laid this duty on the apostle, knowing that his time was short, and the putting off of the earthly tabernacle at hand. Of tradition, in the sense of handing down man’s oral addition, he never thought. What had this done for men before the deluge or after it? What was the issue of pretending to it in Israel or in Christendom? The prophet spoke out on the worthlessness of the fear of

Jehovah taught by a commandment of men; the Lord still more decidedly, as transgressing the commandment and making void the word of God on account of their tradition. Inspiration makes it not a word of men, but as it is truly, God's word, which also works in those who believe, and clothes it with divine permanence as being written in the Spirit.

So the apostle Paul bade Timothy abide in the things which he had learnt and was assured of, knowing of whom he learnt, and that from a child he had known the sacred letters that are able to make wise unto salvation through faith that is in Christ Jesus. This of course refers to the O.T. But he adds more: "Every scripture [is] God-breathed (or, inspired), and profitable for teaching, for conviction, for correction, for instruction that is in righteousness; that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly fitted for every good work." It is a sentence framed expressly to embrace not only whatever of the N.T. had already appeared, but every part of it that remained to be written. Terms could not be devised more simply or absolutely predicating God's authority of every part of the written word. To call it genuine or authentic was wholly short of what is conveyed. It was inspired or God-breathed, that we might know the things freely given to us by God; and this spoken in words, not taught by human wisdom, weakness, defect of any kind, but taught by the Spirit. Thoughts and words were alike spiritual, that the result might be God's word certain and complete.

Our apostle, like Paul, had his dissolution before his eyes as well as the increasing evil through false teachers in depravity, and scepticism. Both are distinct in pointing to scripture as the great safeguard. As they alike set

aside tradition, so they exclude any thought of apostolic succession. Grace might raise up faithful men to teach the truth they had learnt, or even to instruct others competent to communicate it. But scripture alone is the rule of faith, the sole unerring standard given of God to all His children whereby to test what they hear; and it is all the more blessed and necessary, as wicked men and impostors advance for the worse, leading and led astray. Scripture alone has divine authority. Therein God speaks directly to every soul; as indeed the apostle John also expresses it in his First Epistle, We [the inspired, apostles and prophets] are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. From this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error" (1 John 4:6). No one honoured scripture as Christ did from first to last, on the cross, and when risen from the dead. He even set the written word as a definitive witness beyond His own spoken words (John 5:47).

These are but a portion of what might be cited to explain what the apostle here felt as guided of God to write these last words of his. Tradition must be a foundation of sand; and the foundation of the apostles and prophets is too well laid by divine grace to admit of a supplement, either of a vague and imaginary apostolic succession, or of a rival twelve set up by modern (?) prophets. Scripture must be itself complete to make the man of God complete and fully equipped for every good work But divine power is needed to receive, enjoy, and carry out the written word; and this is imparted to every Christian in the gift of the Holy Spirit abiding in and with us for ever. Yet that word is the only standard. With his departure in near view the apostle would write his last inspired words to stir up the saints by recalling

what is easily forgotten, but by his speedy departure made the more urgent, “according as our Lord Jesus Christ manifested to me.”

Peter remembered the grave lesson he had learnt through Paul at Antioch, when he himself failed to keep in mind the truth conveyed so vividly by the vision at Joppa and its fulfilment in Caesarea, the grace of God to Gentile now as to Jew. The pillar of the circumcision stood condemned, and he who was entrusted with the apostolate of the uncircumcision resisted him before all, and for the truth’s sake recorded so great a failure in scripture. For little as it might seem to carnal eyes, it was dissimulation to please certain that came from James, compromised Gentile liberty, and surrendered the truth of the gospel. God thus took care to register it as such, the overwhelming disproof of an infallible Roman see, even if there had been evidence, which there is not, that Peter was the founder of the church there, or its first bishop. So tradition says, and the credulous believe, not only without but contrary to the clear testimony of the written word. Nor did Paul found it, but wrote his Epistle to the Roman saints before he was carried there a prisoner of Jesus Christ for the Gentiles, as at length also His martyr there.

Yet Irenaeus, who stands above all the fathers in the second century as Clemens of Rome above those in the first, tells us, in his book III. against Heresies, that Matthew brought out his Gospel in Hebrew, “when Peter and Paul were evangelising in Rome and founding the church.” This the famous and we may say first ecclesiastical historian, Eusebius, adopts (H.E. v. 28), though an error irreconcilable with scripture; as he had before (2:25) from Dionysius, bishop of Corinth, that

Peter and Paul had founded the church in Corinth before going on to Rome for a similar work. Paul we know to have been its planter, not Peter. Can any thing more plainly indicate the absurdity of trusting tradition even of early days, in presence of the sure light of God's word? Yet all goes to justify our apostle in his zeal to leave nothing for edification to such a haphazard channel, but to write all needed to help, guard, and stimulate the saints in words taught by the Spirit, that they might thereby be brought face to face with Him who inspired these exhortations. Thus only can we know and have communion with God.

In a third form the apostle presents the urgent importance which he felt in the Spirit for the written word; here expressly that "after his departure" they should be enabled also at any time "to call to mind these things."

"And I will be diligent also that at every time ye may have [it, or the power] after my departure to call to mind these things" (ver. 15).

This is one of the many and immense advantages of scripture above the oral word, no matter how distinctly this might be given by the highest authority. No one lays it down more clearly than our blessed Lord in John 5, where to the reluctant Jews He recounts the varied testimonies to Himself as grounds of faith. (1) "Ye have sent unto John, and he hath borne witness to the truth." (2) "But the witness I have is greater than John's; for the works which the Father gave me to complete, the very works which I do bear witness concerning me that the Father hath sent me." (3) "And the Father that sent me hath himself borne witness concerning me." (4) "Ye

search the scriptures, because ye think that in them ye have life eternal, and those are they that bear witness concerning me.... For if ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me; for he wrote concerning me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?"

Never spoke man as this Man, His enemies themselves being judges; yet in His great climax of witnesses the Lord does not hesitate from that point of view to set the written word in the superior place of authority with a permanence peculiar to itself, so that the reader or hearer can weigh it again and again with prayer. Those who slight scripture to the exaggeration of ministry ought to consider His decision. And how remarkable that the Lord should thus speak of the books of Moses, which beyond fair question were then what they are now as many citations show, and not least His own! Yet modern audacity has lifted up its heel against those books quite as much as against Isaiah's or Daniel's. But He who knew what is in God no less than what was in man anticipated and pronounced against all this self-vaunting criticism of unbelief.

It is equally plain that the apostle followed His Master in abhorrence of tradition. Never was it trustworthy since God saw fit to convey His mind in holy writ; least of all then, when a fresh body of truth was being revealed for the enlargement, instruction, exercise and comfort of faith in what we call the N.T. The higher the truth, as is necessarily due to the person, work, and offices of Christ, opening out to an unlimited sphere, even of heavenly things morally, as well as of things to come, the more was new scripture needed imperatively and supplied bountifully, with the same Spirit personally

given to help the believers as had inspired the chosen instruments for its perfect communication.

One of the greatest perils which the apostles foresaw on their own departure is the rise and increase of impostors, corrupted in mind, reprobate concerning the faith. These men withstand the truth: some by superstition, fables, and tradition; others by scorn and scoffing at God's word generally, and at prophecy in particular. As it may be read of Paul in 2 Tim. 3, so here of Peter, the great safeguards are (1) knowing of what persons the truth had been learnt, not teaching only but conduct, purpose, faith, long-suffering, love, endurance, persecutions, sufferings; and (2) not only the sacred scriptures, the O.T., able to make wise unto salvation through faith that is in Christ Jesus, but "every scripture," divinely inspired as it is and profitable for teaching, for conviction, for correction, for instruction that is in righteousness; that the man of God might be complete, out and out furnished unto every good work. The value of a known source in immediate relation to the God who communicated His mind and grace and will is thus shown to be of the highest degree, as well as the divinely assured certainty that the words were as unequivocally Spirit-taught as the thoughts themselves. No safeguard entrusted 'to the church, not to ministers only but to all the saints, is so sure and unfailing as scripture.

It is merely a cheat of unbelief to argue from the infirmity of the men employed for this all-important work. Granting all the infirmity, we are assured (from what God tells us in 1 Cor. 2, as well as 2 Tim. 3) that His inspiration precludes the action of human weakness to impair the absolute reliableness of what is revealed to

bring our souls who believe it into direct subjection to God. Conscience, understanding, and heart, are all addressed suitably; but the aim is that we may have fellowship with the inspired messengers, and thus by the Holy Spirit have communion with God Himself, with the Father and His Son Jesus Christ, and have power in the new life for holy walk.

Hence the prime duty for the Christian to turn away from these evil men, no matter how learned humanly they may be, and sanctimonious in manner, who either undermine the scriptures or substitute tradition for them. The form of godliness only makes such self-deceived deceivers more dangerous. It is in vain to reason on the scriptures as partial or fragmentary. It is an essential feature of them that God therein selected, out of much more that was given by the Spirit orally, all that was intended to be permanent and useful, all that was requisite to make the most advanced and honoured complete, fully equipped for every good work. Even if we could have from an uncertain source stray words carried down from the Lord’s teaching or that of any apostle, what could it add to produce the spiritual result which scripture claims for itself? Nor is it the least of its merits that scripture, so astonishingly full as it is to meet every want and to refute every error, should be also unburdened by superfluity. How worthy of Him who gave it as it is!

Nor is it only against the sceptic we have to be on our guard. Corruption comes in through those who do not openly deny but pare down inspiration, allow errors in history or other (as they call it) secondary matter, and attribute the selection of what is written to the instruments without God. But this is to deceive

themselves and others, to say and unsay. If God inspired the writings, He suggested, He selected, He included, He left out. He gave the thoughts and the words; He guided and controlled all. This is scripture.

The first and grandest characteristic is that God inspired every scripture, every whit that was so written when Paul wrote his last to Timothy, his final to any. Every scripture is God-breathed, even anything that He would add afterwards. This is enough for all that know God, and have every reason to distrust themselves or other men who were not inspired. As the apostle John later still and most trenchantly says, “Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them [the deceivers and antichrists], because greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world. They are of the world; therefore speak they [as] of the world, and the world heareth them. We [the inspired] are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he who is not of God heareth us not. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error.” What an awful warning to “higher critics,” and their victims! Scripture possesses beyond all else the indelible authority of God, not only what was meant but what is written; but if this be so, it is in the fullest way profitable. Their value, not only as the ultimate source of truth but as the standard by which the highest ministry, even an apostle’s, was to be tried (Acts 17:11), is without a rival.

Ministry is the exercise of a gift from the ascended Lord (Eph. 4) who not only gave His precious gifts at Pentecost, whether to lay the foundation by the apostles and prophets, or to perpetuate other gifts till the body is complete in the fullest sense (ver. 13). But its basis and its supplies depend on the authority of the written word;

and so He led the way when on earth who was the supreme Apostle of our confession as He is the Great Priest. Who so honoured, loved, and used the scriptures with God, with man, with Satan? So we see with all the inspired writers. Whatever new truth had to be imparted, they were led by the Spirit to impress on the saints the divine claims of the old holy writ to the uttermost. Nor is anyone more notable in this way than he who calls himself the least of all saints, to whom we are indebted as to none else for the administration of the mystery hidden throughout the ages in God, but now revealed (Eph. 3), minister of the church (as he says in Col. 1) to complete the word of God.

We may next observe how carefully the apostle Peter excludes all dependence not only on tradition but on ecclesiastical office of any kind after his departure When faith decays and the power of the truth proportionately, then man's energy displaces the Holy Spirit, and the world enters with the love of worldly things to dim, darken, and destroy the love of the Father; external things gain an undue and growingly false place. Baptism and the Lord's supper, instead of being kept in their true niche, become at length traps of error, and engines of destruction, being invested with the reality of the grace that is in Christ Jesus. So it was with the elders, especially when they had no longer apostolic authentication, direct or indirect. And so yet more proudly when the figment of apostolic succession was conceived, to say nothing of the modern dream of a whole twelve-fold apostolate nominated by prophets as pretentious and as false as those apostles themselves. Peter is silent on every such resource for the future. He was led of God to provide scripture for the saints. "And I

will be diligent also that at every time ye may have [it, or the power] after my departure to call to mind these things."

It was exactly so that the great apostle of uncircumcision charged the elders or bishops of the church in Ephesus who met him at Miletus (Acts 20). "I know that after my decease grievous wolves shall come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things to draw away the disciples after them. Wherefore watch, remembering that for three years, night and day, I ceased not admonishing each one with tears. And now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build up and give an inheritance among all that are sanctified." The very elders were to become a danger and evil to themselves and the disciples, not they only but they prominently; for out of them emerged ere long the clergy (not gifted men) unknown while the apostles lived. Had the word of Christ dwelt in the saints richly, such a change could not have been. Man was looked to, and the word of God's grace became more slighted, forgotten, and powerless.

And who that looks at Christendom, or even at that part of it which boasts of an open Bible and separation from the idolatries and mummeries of Popery, can doubt that the apostle's warning has been verified, and that far worse is in rapid progress? Who can survey the enormous change during the last seventy or eighty years, for spreading and deepening evil, whether in superstition or in free-thinking, without humiliation or horror, unless he be under either delusion? One of the most painful and certain signs of the great enemy's work is the all but universal spread of error and worldliness,

not in the greater communities only but throughout them all, down to the least. So it is in the new or western hemisphere as in the older world; so it is in almost every land and tongue, and very markedly in those which once hailed whatever of truth the Reformation recovered to hungry and thirsty mortals.

How little those who glory in the light and liberty and progress of the opening century are aware that both the sensuous and sentimental church revivalists, and the irreligious intellectualists who mangle the scriptures, are fast preparing the way for what the apostle Paul calls the falling away, “the apostasy,” when both the O. and N.T. will be cast away with scorn; when the Saviour and His cross, His glory in heaven and His coming again, will be objects of open derision and general ribaldry! Christianity as a whole will be rejected by Papists and Protestants, by Episcopalians and Presbyterians, by Independents and Baptists, by Wesleyans, etc., by Quakers, passive resisters and disputers of all sorts. The prevalent neglect of the prophetic word will only hasten the awful catastrophe.

His zeal in furnishing the saints with divine grounds of faith the apostle fortifies, by reminding them of an unique display of glory, into immediate vision of which he had been admitted personally and with adequate witnesses.

“For we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, not following cleverly devised fables, but made eyewitnesses of his majesty” (ver. 16).

A sight more marvellous than any miracle, a scene more impressive and august than any other vision on earth, a living miniature of the future kingdom more instructive,

vivid, and glorious than any prophecy could present, was there given to saintly eyes and ears, that it might be divinely recorded and strengthen the hearts of the faithful. All the Synoptic Gospels had already recorded it.

But manifestly it did not fall within the scope of the fourth Gospel to describe it, though many have conceived it alluded to in the latter clause of John 1:13. But here our apostle attests it as one of the chosen three who actually beheld the glory and heard the Father's voice about the Son, by a word in the N. T. peculiar to Peter, capable of a wide application, but going beyond eye-witness and appropriated to those admitted into the highest grade of the mysteries among the Greeks. For ἐπόπται here is not the same as αὐτόπται in Luke 1:2.

Nevertheless, without going into details, we can all perceive that the Epistle omits one most important lesson for the Christian which the Gospels were inspired to convey: "hear Him," the Christ, the Son of God. It was drawn out by Peter's hasty, shallow, and irreverent proposal to make here three tabernacles, one for the Lord, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah. For, as Mark adds, and Luke too, he knew not what to answer, being affrighted as the others also. And their fear could not but be aggravated by the bright cloud (the pavilion of God's presence) that overshadowed them, into which they entered and out of which the Father's voice said in gracious rebuke, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I found my delight: hear Him," Moses and Elijah disappearing.

Yet "hear Him" Peter alone omits, as he alone gives the emphatic personal expression of the Father's

complacency (ver. 17). To impute to men's shortcoming either the omission or the addition is to betray one's own unbelief in God's perfect word. These differences are as much intended as their concurrent evidence; they are in no real sense discrepancies, but distinct intimations of the truth to carry out the Holy Spirit's special design in each part of holy writ. The Gospels were to initiate and maintain the primary value and authority of Christ's word, not only as spoken but to be communicated permanently in due time in what is commonly called "The New Testament." Peter is here corroborating the testimony to Christ's kingdom by the magnificent scene witnessed on the holy mount of the Transfiguration. But no body had such reason as himself in every point of view to remember "Hear Him" in that never to be forgotten incident. His omission is therefore the fruit, not of weakness but of divine design. He is here, as he says, making known to his believing Hebrew brethren "the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ," to which that blessed oracle was comparatively as uncalled for here as indeed it was of the utmost moment for God's purpose by the Synoptic evangelists.

Let us then briefly consider the character and teaching of what came to pass on the mountain. What drew out the display of His glory in the kingdom before the time of its establishment was to strengthen His own in taking up the cross and following the Master. For the disciples, like the unbelieving brethren, like Christendom too, looked for progress and triumph, and overlooked faith and love put to the proof in suffering with Christ, the pattern of all holy endurance. Hence the Lord told them plainly of His own sufferings and the glories after these. So indeed it must be for sinners to be saved righteously;

and for saints that, suffering with Him, they may also be glorified with Him. If we endure, we shall also reign together. “For whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him shall the Son of man also be ashamed when he shall come in the glory of his Father with the holy angels. And he said unto them, Verily I say to you, There are some of those standing here that shall in no wise taste death till they see the kingdom of God come in power. And after six days Jesus taketh with [him] Peter and James and John, and bringeth them up on a high mountain by themselves apart. And he was transfigured before them” (Mark 8:33, Mark 9:2). Not only did the fashion of His countenance become different as He prayed, shining as the sun, but His garments were effulgent as the light. Again, not angels but Moses and Elias appeared in glory, and spoke of His departure which He was about to accomplish in Jerusalem.

Here then was an anticipative and unparalleled sample of the kingdom, not as it has ever been since in mystery, but in manifestation as when He comes in its power and glory. As there was so much to try the disciples in His yet to be deepened humiliation, what could be more gracious on His part, or more suited to their need, than to grant chosen ones of the twelve who were to be alone with Him in His anguish, to be also with Him beholding so unexampled a foretaste! For here were the great elements of the coming kingdom.

It is not at all a picture of eternity, when the kingdom is given up to Him that is God and Father, after Christ shall have annulled all rule and all authority and power, and the Son Himself shall be subject to Him that put all things in subjection to Him, that God (Father, Son, and

Holy Spirit) may be all in all. This we easily recognise in Rev. 21:1-8. But here it is the exalted Man, made both Lord and Christ after man crucified and slew Him. Here He is seen as He will reign in power that all shall see, with the dead saints raised and the living changed, answering to the two glorified men. There will be also the righteous in their natural bodies, like the three honoured disciples made free of the blissful vision.

This may seem to Corinthian minds, that savour the things of men, an abhorrent mixture. But what an utter prejudice! For the kingdom is God's "Hand scheme and answer to the shame the world puts on the faithful Christians, as before on Christ to the uttermost. If they in their devotedness to Him became a spectacle to the world, both to angels and men, how righteous in the coming day of glory their exaltation with Christ! Then the world shall know that the Father sent the Son, however low He stooped in grace, and that He loved the saints, however weak and unprofitable they feel themselves to be, as He loved Christ (John 17:22, 23) here will be "the world" of men not glorified; there will be Israel and the nations on earth to learn this; not indeed in the eternal state, but in the kingdom which Christ will establish and manifest during the "age to come." When eternity follows the "white throne" judgment, righteousness dwells in the new heavens and a new earth, instead of ruling as in the millennial earth. For the latter the Son of man receives the kingdom and returns (Luke 19:15) to reign; for the former He gives up the kingdom to the Father, that God may be all in all, after the mediatorial reign and judgment are quite over, and the universe is brought into perfect harmony with

God’s counsels and ways in grace and in righteousness, and as to good and evil, for His glory for ever and ever.

It was reserved for Pope Leo X. to avow without a blush that to the Roman communion and its chief the gospel had turned out a profitable fable; and St. Peter’s in Rome stands as the monument, built out of part of the cash paid by benighted souls for indulgences! the base traffic in sins, which brought on the Reformation. What a contrast with the holy man whom they falsely claim as their first pope! Here is the simple and true averment of a true fisherman of souls: “For we followed not cleverly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ but were made eye-witnesses of his majesty.” What the three witnesses saw and heard on the mountain was a glorious display which God alone could accomplish. But it was not merely the manifestation of the highest honour put upon the rejected Christ. It was also a most instructive type of His glory in the coming kingdom in due time to close all suffering, when His church should be complete which began to be gathered on and from the day of Pentecost. Of that kingdom the vision shown was the wondrous pattern and the certain pledge. Hence the apostle expresses its difference from His first coming by the phrase “the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” First He came to suffer and to die; “for ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that for your sakes he being rich became poor, that ye by his poverty might be made rich.” Yes, He was crucified out of (or, as we say, in) weakness. But when He appears again, He will come on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory, the indisputable Lord of all.

Hence we must avoid the error of godly Puritans who apply the verse to the power of Christ in the preached gospel for saving from the guilt as well as the corruption of sin. So they applied it either exclusively, or including His future advent also. But such vagueness as this last implies is the way to lose the precision of the truth, and at best a makeshift when men are not sure, and seek to cover it by that style of accommodation. For the Transfiguration was significant, not of grace to perishing sinners, but of that glorious kingdom of God to come, which will consist of heavenly things as well as earthly, and the Lord the glorified chief and centre of them all. Compare Matt. 6:10, Matt. 13:41-43, Matt. 19:28, Eph. 1:10.

It is to be noticed that angels are not seen on the mount of Transfiguration. Yet we know that, when the day arrives for the establishment of His kingdom, the Son of man will come in the glory of His Father with His holy angels, or, as Luke puts it fully, “in His glory, and of the Father, and of the holy angels.” Here not a word is breathed about them. Men are prominent, two saints in glory of the past who represented the law and the prophets, three of the present followers of Christ in their natural bodies. The delights of Divine Wisdom were with the sons of men; the Life was the Light of men, and so when He deigned to enter on His earthly mission and work, He takes not hold of angels but of the seed of Abraham, not only for all that the promises to the fathers assured, but for heavenly and eternal counsels.

But there is more that we do well to observe, the unmistakable voice out of the cloud of the Divine Presence, not in thunder but in accents of the tenderest love, and in evident answer to Peter’s well-meant but

utterly unmeet desire to exalt His Master. The Father alone knows how His Son should be honoured; as He indeed loves the Son supremely, and has given all things to be in His hand. Let us too hear the Father; for He is Christ's Father and ours, His God and ours.

"For he received (literally, having received) from God the Father honour and glory, when such a voice was borne to him by the magnificent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I found my delight (or, complacency)" (ver. 17).

The Lord Jesus was Man, the Messiah, on the road to the most extreme humiliation, even to the death of the cross, and by none so keenly consigned to it as by His own people, the Jews. Such was the ruinous blindness and the guilty unbelief which pervaded mankind. Hence to encourage His feeble followers in a path of suffering, least of all anticipated by themselves, it suited Him Who is wise and good and righteous to rise above all natural limits which ordinarily prevailed, and to manifest in the most unwonted fashion and impressive way His predestined exaltation in the coming kingdom. This indeed is not even yet come; while Israel abides in hard incredulity, and the church is meanwhile being called to its special blessedness in heavenly places. Then the Jew too shall become object of God's healing mercy, as the Gentile now does, though rapidly abandoning the truth for the crisis at the end of the age like the mass of Jews.

Hence, in view of Christ's sufferings, and His glories to follow in due time, not only in the heavens but on the earth, grace gave to chosen witnesses this extraordinary anticipation on a small scale but with divine depth and power. As He prayed (so tells us Luke, who speaks most

of His human perfection), the fashion of His countenance became different, and His very raiment white, effulgently so. And the two men of olden time, so renowned for fidelity to Jehovah and His people, talked with Him, the central Object for saints above or below. They appearing in glory spoke of His departure which He was about to accomplish in Jerusalem. How full of interest and instruction! One was the promulgator of God's law, the other its restorer and vindicator when Israel apostatised and worshipped Baal. Yet it was of our Lord's death they talked, not of the law. Where was anything comparable to His death? and how ominous, "in Jerusalem"! Thereby alone was God glorified morally as to sin; there Satan for ever defeated; there man's sin, there the Jew's was darkest; there grace shown to the uttermost; there the judgment of our sins so borne, that God can only justify the believer in Jesus. What had either Moses or Elijah revealed to them that could fairly be put alongside of these truths? Yet they are the common faith of Christians, the faith once delivered to the saints.

Peter who was there does not say a word about His wondrous converse; and Luke who was not there is the only one to record it. Nor was Paul at that time anything but a Hebrew of Hebrews, as to law a Pharisee, ignorant of Christ after the flesh, only to know Him as dead, risen and ascended to heaven, and in no way cognisant of the days of His flesh. What it proves is God's design and power and will as to inspiration; who gave to each writer what consisted with His purpose by each. Here the apostle, having before him the power and coming of our Lord Jesus, testifies the honour and glory He received from God the Father, when initiated into that mystery

which transcended all the secret mysteries of the heathen; as much as the Father and the Son in truth and love transcended their wretched divinities, morally contemptible on their own showing, whether in their fables or in moral effect on their votaries. But it was in view of the coming kingdom and Christ's revelation to introduce it, with which this and the former Epistle teem.

Peter does however speak here of "such a voice being borne (or uttered) to him by the magnificent glory: This is my beloved Son in whom I found my delight." Soon, soon, would be proved by His departure in Jerusalem, that the city over which He wept saw in Him no form nor comeliness that it should at all desire; yea, hid as it were its face from Him, as an aversion of men and as smitten of God and afflicted. But here is attested by the voice out of the glory, This is my beloved Son in whom I found My delight. So it had been in eternity before creation; so it was when the world was made by Him, and in all the dealings of providence, in the secret working of grace with individuals, and in the public government of Israel under the law. So still more when the incarnate Word presented that object of His everlasting complacency as man on earth in unwavering dependence and obedience on His way to death for His glory, for man's salvation, for the church's blessedness, for His people's deliverance, and for the reconciliation of all things.

But Peter here too omits, what all three Synoptics tell us, the "hear Him" so important for their purposes, but not for God's task assigned to himself. Christ had lost nothing of His eternal glory by His extreme humiliation even to the cross. On the contrary, as He had thus glorified God both as Father and as God, so He was the

object for God the Father to glorify; and here in view of His coming kingdom, incomparably more glorious in itself and in Him who would display its full character and power than ever Rabbi had conceived. Their aspirations and anticipations were as short of it as of Himself, the true Messiah and the beloved Son of God.

As the apostle once more recurs to the Father's voice, let us follow him also.

"And this voice we heard uttered (or, brought) out of heaven, being with him on the holy mountain" (ver. 18).

The three apostles were truly eye-witnesses of the Lord's majesty, all the more wondrous because it was His power and coming for a brief view in the midst of His humiliation in grace for God's glory. Every part of the scene before their eyes was a magnificent testimony to the future kingdom of the Son of man beheld on a small scale, before the Lord come to establish it in its visible grandeur and its appointed season before the universe. But the emphasis is manifestly laid on "this voice we heard," borne out of heaven as it was, when we were with Him on the holy mountain.

Already had the Father's voice been heard in terms identical with these now recorded, save the pregnant construction of εἰς ὃν for ἐν ᾧ in the Gospel which makes no difference in translating. But none, as far as we know, heard the first time but the Lord Himself and the Baptist, though the Lord adduced it as one of the four testimonies to His personal glory which proved the Jews to be thoroughly unbelieving: John the Baptist His predicted herald; then the greater witness which the Father gave Him to complete; next, the Father that sent Him had Himself borne witness concerning Him by His

voice; and lastly the scriptures, to which He assigned a very great place (John 5). But man's will can resist any and all, as the Jews then verified to their ruin, and will another day and in another form, as He then warned them.

The occasion too was quite different. For the grace of the Lord Jesus led Him to take His place with the feeble remnant of the Jews who obeyed John's call to repentance, and came to the Jordan to be baptised as they did. Holy, guileless, undefiled, He associated Himself with those who had nothing but sins; yet as they confessed them, the first mark of awakened conscience in bowing to God's call, He would not stand aloof though He had not the least evil to confess. It was the perfection of man's position in lowly active love; and so He, the Righteous One, corrected John's reluctance in the gracious words, Thus it becometh us (you and Me) to fulfil all righteousness. "And Jesus being baptised went up straightway from the water; and, behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, and coming upon Him; and, behold, a voice out of the heavens, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." The heavens opened to Him, the Holy Ghost's descent as a dove on Him, the Father's voice expressing His delight summed up there and then, bore witness to the divine delight in Him and never so much as in that act of humiliation in grace.

Yet at the mount of Transfiguration the immediate occasion of the voice again heard, and by the chosen witnesses, was Peter's own attempt to honour his Master in the highest way he could then suggest. But to put Him on a level with the chiefs of the law and the

prophets would not suit the Father. “This is my beloved Son: hear Him.” And the terrified disciples fell upon their faces; but lifted up at the touch and the comforting words of their Master, they saw no one but Jesus, alone with themselves. He was to be heard, He paramountly, He the truth. Others at best were His forerunners.

As noticed already, Peter here was not led to recall this last part of the utterance given in all the synoptic Gospels. His aim was to concentrate attention on Jesus as the centre of divine affection and glory; theirs was also to attest Him as the complete fulness and revealer of all the truth. Matthew gives the Father’s voice undiminished: as his province was to show the full consequence of the rejected Messiah, His larger glory as Son of man, and higher still as the beloved Son of God, the Rock on which the church was to be built. Mark and Luke omit here the expression of God’s complacency in Him, so as to throw stress on hearing Him; the former as the Servant Son in the gospel, the latter as God’s Son, yet fully man. Our apostle omits the clause they carefully record, not because he could or would forget it, but to make the more prominent the good pleasure the Father had in Him, His beloved Son.

We next hear of the confirmation given by the vision on the mount to the prophetic word, the light of which, however valuable, is very briefly shown to yield to the superior brightness of a heavenly light for the hearts of saints, not a display to the world.

“And we have the prophetic word firmer, to which ye do well in paying heed, as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until day dawn and a (or, the) morning star arise in your hearts” (ver. 19).

The prophetic word of O.T. and of N.T. alike converges on the coming and kingdom of our Lord Jesus; and this, the apostle here declares, was made firmer, or confirmed, by what the witnesses were there given to behold and hear, the glorious anticipation and precursor of that day of power and glory for the universe. The predictions were absolutely true and reliable; but it seemed good to the All-wise at the first coming of Christ and in view of His death of shame (so essential to lay a basis for the ways and purposes of grace), to confirm the truth of His second coming and kingdom by a sight which set on the word another seal more. A vivid though brief realisation of its chief elements confirmed the prophetic word in a way beyond aught else. No season was so appropriate for it as when He earnestly charged and enjoined His disciples to tell no man that He was the Christ, saying, The Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and the third day be raised up. This was a fact wholly unexpected by all, even by him who had just owned His personal dignity as the Son of the living God. It was the substitution, for the Messianic testimony and hope utterly rejected by the people and their rulers, of the death and resurrection of the Son of man and Son of God. This laid the basis for introducing not only the kingdom of the heavens but the church, which now occupy the place which Israel once had in an earthly way under law, and when they repent shall have under Messiah and the new covenant.

The Christian Jews, as the apostle says, were doing well in paying heed to all that the prophets had announced of those coming days of glory. They did not misapply their words, as Christendom soon began to do, to the different

character of the parenthesis which runs on between the first and the second comings of Christ. It is now an unseen victory which faith beholds in Christ raised from among the dead and seated on His Father's throne, and in Christians united to Him on high by the Spirit sent here below, whilst they suffer on the earth as their Master did (His atoning death excepted), not of the world as He was not. It will not be so in that day when Christ will appear and sit on His own throne, and they shall reign with Him, who now suffer with Him, if not also for Him.

Then Israel, instead of being lost in unbelief, shall be saved, and become Jehovah's witness in truth of heart and in power. And all the nations shall bow to His behest, not only having learnt righteousness when His judgments are on the earth, but truly subject to His anointed King on Zion, the centre of all the world's kingdoms, whence the law goes forth, their idols of silver and gold consigned to the moles and to the bats. For the great invisible organiser of iniquity is shut up in the abyss, whilst this display of righteousness, peace, and glory is enjoyed by all the earth, till the hour strikes for God to sift those who have multiplied when war and want and pestilence are unknown. But those who are on the earth (the risen being above), as many as are not born of God, will fall under Satan's power once more, when he is let loose to tempt, and prove that man's fallen nature is as unimprovable under a dispensation of glory, as of grace, or law, or anything else. Man ever prefers Satan to God that he may have licence for his corruption or his violence.

Dull as the Jewish Christians were as to our highest privileges, they were not so beguiled as to imagine that

the prophetic word, save quite exceptionally, describes the Christian state which is now our portion. Their danger was rather to make the future kingdom to be their hope, instead of reading in the prophets the hope of Israel and of all the peoples who in that day accept Jehovah's word from Jerusalem. It is the delusion of Christendom to appropriate it now by what they call spiritualising, and relegating to eternity what they cannot thus force. The believer called to heavenly hopes meanwhile does not forget that Jehovah will renew and restore Israel to their place of promise on the earth.

Here accordingly they were told that, however well it was to heed the word of prophecy, it is but "as a lamp shining in a dark place;" for so the earth is and must be till the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in His wings. But he just glances at the higher light of heavenly truth, which they might have as yet but feebly entered into, however truly they had received Christ Jesus as their Lord. The prophetic word did show the ruin of Israel as a whole for its idolatry, and the special further sin of Judah for the rejection of the Messiah. The prophetic word made clear the rise of the four Gentile empires while the Jews are Lo-ammi (not-my-people), and between Daniel and the Apocalypse also the reappearing of the last or Roman empire with the apostate Jews, who set up the Antichrist in Palestine, to be destroyed by the Lord shining out from heaven.

But the prophetic word nowhere reveals those heavenly counsels which the mystery (hid from the ages) made known through Paul. Nor does Peter here do more than allude to it under the strikingly distinct figures of "day" and "morning star." The lamp is excellent to cast adequate light on this dark world, its evil and its doom;

and they did well in paying it heed, “till day dawn and a (or, the) morning star arise in your hearts.” That is to say, till they apprehend with enjoyment the bright heavenly relationship which Christianity fully understood gives us now in Christ, and the heavenly hope of His coming to introduce us into the Father’s house. The prophetic lamp is good to help us against the squalid place; but how much more is “daylight” in Christ to lift us above the world in all our associations of faith, and the bright hope, Christ as Morning Star, which He not only is, but has promised to give the overcomer (Rev. 2:28, Rev. 22:16, 17)!

The apostle adds an important caution to the commendation in ver. 19. They did well in taking heed to the prophetic word. God alone can speak with certainty of the future, for a world in confusion and change, prone to sin; and He has been pleased, not only to speak but to write by chosen instruments, that those who believe may profit by His communications, where otherwise they were liable to stray, but thereby were enabled by faith to enjoy the measure of light thus afforded. His people could not despise it, save to His dishonour and their own loss.

Before the deluge Enoch prophesied as to the ungodly in deeds and words, whose daring would bring on the Lord’s coming with His holy myriads to execute judgment on their ungodliness: a prophecy preserved and cited by the inspired Jude as yet to be accomplished on those that deny our only Master and Lord Jesus Christ. Later still by faith Noah, oracularly warned concerning things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his house; by which he condemned the world, and became heir of the

righteousness that is according to faith (Heb. 11:7). Abram had not only prophecy but a prophetic vision, centuries before the facts of his seed's oppression in Egypt and of deliverance from the oppressor by divine judgments, which should also deal in due time with the enemies who filled Canaan (Gen. 15). Further, he was given as: a mark of divine friendship to learn from Jehovah Himself the imminent destruction of the cities of the Plain.

Nor is it otherwise with us Christians; for if given an incomparably "better thing" now in and with Christ glorified after the accomplishment of redemption, we do not lose the present value of prophecy. The same Holy Spirit, who guides us into all the truth (as He empowered the apostles and prophets to make it known to us), was to declare unto us the things that are to come, and He is in us to make all good instead of leaving us to unprofitable guesswork.

But for this reason we need the authority of God's. word, and here we have it, "Knowing this first that no prophecy of scripture is (or, becometh) of its own interpretation" (ver. 20). "Its own," which is the simplest and the strictest and the most frequent usage of the disputed word, alone satisfies the context. It is hard to see why the A.V. and the Revision adopted "private" except that they did not know what to make of it. So does Dean Alford, following in his commentary Huther's idea "that prophecy springs not out of human prognostication." Such a view may be intelligible where the freethinking of higher criticism prevails as an antidote; but it could only be regarded with horror by the Christian Jews, whom the apostle was addressing. Nor was the canon which the apostle lays down directed

against such humanizing sceptics; it is a serious caution to the believer for his profit in seeking edification and intelligence in studying the writings of the prophets.

Dean A. says “two references seem to be possible” (to us, and to the prophets themselves). He has overlooked a third, which is even grammatically the most exact, the prophecy itself, “No prophecy of Scripture is, or comes to be, of its own interpretation.” If you isolate prophecy and make each part its own interpreter, you counteract its origin and character, and lose its force as pertaining to God’s grand scheme for glorifying His Son, the Lord Jesus. It is divine design which gives prophecy of Scripture, like the rest, this character.

The apostle is therefore guarded in his language beyond what the commentators in general have apprehended. He does not deny that many a prophecy had its scope only in a particular and passing event of sufficient moment to call for it. And not a few such are mentioned in scripture. Take in Genesis the dreams of Pharaoh and of his two chamberlains previously. Take in the Acts of the Apostles the prophecies of Agabus as to the faming and the apostle Paul. Many such are recorded in the O.T. Yet none of them is a prophecy of Scripture as here intended, not for instance so much as Jacob’s in Gen. 49 or Moses’ in Deut. 33., nor yet Balaam’s in Num. 23, still less the Prophets’ so-called. They had their importance at the time, as the Scripture intimates.

By “prophecy of scripture” the apostle, to my mind, appears to mean exclusively such as look on to the future Kingdom of God for Christ’s glory; and this is the object in the prophets, so that it may be predicated of every “prophecy of scripture” whether in O. or N.T. They

may speak not a little of the moral evil which necessitates God's intervention to put down Satan and a revolted world, and to bring in the long promised reign of the Lord in righteousness, peace, and glory. But it is of that blessed Kingdom as His theme that the inspiring Spirit delights to speak, because it will then be the sphere of Christ's glory manifested in the universe; as He has already in the N.T. made known to the Christian His hidden glory as the exalted Man on high.

Hence it is that from Isaiah to Malachi no "prophecy of scripture," whatever the importance of any event in God's providence and the application of prophecy to it meanwhile, stops short of the grand fulfilment, "when the powers of the heavens shall be shaken," Satan loses his bad eminence, and Israel shall be saved, to blossom and bud and fill the face of the world with fruit. It is what the first man never attained, neither Nebuchadnezzar nor Cyrus, neither Alexander nor Caesar. It will be verified in Jehovah Jesus when "Jehovah shall be king over all the earth; in that day shall be one Jehovah, and His name one" (Zech. 14:9).

We need not here speak of Christ's exaltation over all the heavens as well as the earth; nor of the church's union with Him, as Head of the body over all things: the two parts of that mystery which, hidden from the ages in God, was now revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit's power, and hence to us Christians in the N. T. But the kingdom was in full and increasing view from God's sentence on the serpent throughout the ages; and any turning aside at the comparatively small events within their compass frustrates the design of God in the testimony of them all to the coming Deliverer and King.

Yea, this was so notorious that the very heathen were aware that His birth was expected at or about the time when our Lord appeared and had the cross assigned Him by the Jews and Gentiles, instead of the crown. Tacitus and Suetonius attest this; and so does their own historian of the siege of Jerusalem. Yet prophecy of scripture predicted that so it was to be, and in the true moral order of "the Christward sufferings, and the glories after these" (1 Peter 1:11). For thus only could those who believe be rescued from evil and share His glories. To reign first, and afterward suffer, would be nugatory and purposeless, with utter confusion. But because Christ was thus faithful in His infinite love, the unbelieving Jews rejected Him; and therefore God rejected them for a season of rich mercy to the Gentiles meanwhile.

We can understand accordingly that "prophecy of scripture" is fraught with God's mind about Christ's kingdom in power and glory, and this after His sufferings, though the latter element is not so frequent as the former, yet well attested in one form or another in the Law, the Psalms, and the Prophets. But where is not the future kingdom over the earth held out?

One exception may be alleged, the very peculiar but deeply interesting and instructive book of Jonah, which on the surface has no "prophecy of scripture," but only a conditional threat of judgment arrested by repentance. Yet it conveys a true prophetic narrative on which the Lord affixed His seal, not only as preaching to the heathen Ninevites that repented, but as a sign of His own death and resurrection, when the Gentile that believes enters the blessing of grace, and the Jew who refused reaps the judgment of his unbelief. For Jonah

shows us Israel shut up in a selfish prejudice that despised the Gentile, unwilling to warn, and jealous lest, if Nineveh repented, God should be gracious enough to arrest the judgment, and thus set aside the prophet's denunciation.

In the way of a contrast Jonah typified. Christ, though himself an unfaithful witness, and hence cast into the sea, and even for three days and nights swallowed by a great fish. Even then whilst going to the Gentiles, he sulked at God's grace, at the time when God made him feel his folly. Whereas Christ was the Faithful Witness, saved His ungrateful people, delighted in grace to the Gentile, and for the joy lying before Him in love and obedience endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of God's throne. Jonah's course was a true type prophetically of Christ, but as much to his own shame as to God's glory in the end; as to which his writing the book by inspiration is the best proof of his repentance. It also contrasts strikingly with the perfection of Christ, and prefigures the mercy God as a faithful Creator will show, not only to the dark heathen but to the meanest of His creatures. Had He listened to the Jew, yea and a real Jewish prophet, not a Ninevite had been spared in honour of his woe on the city. But God is righteous to the claims and worth of Christ's atoning death, which in the coming kingdom will shine in the mercy and blessing of all nations, so that "beasts and all cattle" shall join the chorus of praise to His name from the earth (Ps. 148).

Thus even the book of Jonah in its exceptional way differs only in its form from other prophecies of scripture. All point to Christ's coming Kingdom over the earth, which was so soon forgotten after the apostles,

that there is no proper statement of it in a single ancient creed, any more than in the symbols of the Reformation. Neither the Fathers, nor the Reformers, were at all versed in prophecy. The Oxford revival of the Fathers accordingly in no way helps; still less does the Rationalist school, which denies it in principle. Nor has Nonconformity any light of God as to the future, least of all since it has entered the arena of politics, and become as worldly as Popery itself in setting its mind on earthly things.

The last verse of our chapter gives the reason why no prophecy of Scripture can be limited to its own isolated solution, but forms part of a vast circle of divine predictions centring in Christ and His kingdom.

“For no prophecy was ever brought by will of man, but [holy] men4 spoke from God, moved (or, borne along) by [the] Holy Spirit” (ver. 21).

It is not surprising that those who are only conversant with man, his thoughts, sayings and doings, believe not in prophecy any more than miracle, and despise grace and truth. For all these are of God, and utterly impossible save by His power: grace and truth are only in and through our Lord Jesus. If we now turn our attention to prophecy, consider how Isaiah the prophet was led to triumph over heathen prognosticators and idolatrous stargazers, as Moses did over the magicians of Egypt, and Elijah over the priests of Baal.

“Produce your cause,” we read in Isa. 41:21 etc., “saith Jehovah, bring forth your strong reasons, saith the King of Jacob; let them bring forth and show us what will happen; let them show the former things what they [be] that we may consider them, and know the latter end of

them; or declare us things to come. Show the things that are to come hereafter, that we may know that ye [are] gods; yea, do good or do evil, that we may be dismayed, and behold [it] together. Behold, ye [are] of nothing and your work of nought: an abomination [is he that] chooseth you. I have raised [one] up from the north, and he shall come: from the rising of the sun shall he call upon my name; and he shall come upon princes as [upon] mortar, and as the potter treadeth clay. Who hath declared from the beginning that we may know? and before time, that we may say, [He is] righteous? Yea, [there is] none that showeth; yea, [there is] none that declareth; yea, [there is] none that heareth your words."

Here the challenge was beyond any votary of a false god to take up, though the demand was small compared with prophecy of scripture. It was beyond mar's will to speak even in an isolated way of a future person or event. But those given by God's intent are each part of an immense web which He has woven, on which is indelibly traced His purpose of glorifying Him who gave up the glory proper to Him as divine, that He might become man and by His death and resurrection conciliate the most jarring principles and join the most opposed persons. He will take away all the sins and iniquities of believers; He will establish righteousness, peace and joy over all the earth where self and will wrought only evil and mischief. He has defeated and will defeat the subtle and mighty adversary and all his host. He wine back the weak rebels (deceived to set God at defiance) into repentance, meekness and humility, rejoicing to be the ready servants of His will; for God deigns to make them His children, and His sons, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ. They enjoy even here and now fellowship with

the Father and the Son in the power of the Holy Spirit by His working on life in Christ; and they reign with Him when He reigns before the world, as for ever before God.

Nor is it only that the reconciliation is what we receive now; but it will embrace the heavens defiled by the enemy's evil, and the earth where he, through man's servitude, set himself up as prince and the god of the world. Through Christ's death on the cross all things shall be reconciled unto God, the things whether on the earth or in the heavens; not those who live and die despising alike the unseen God and His Son who stooped so low and suffered infinitely for sin that God might be able to say righteously to the worst, Be reconciled to God. As He will have the risen saints above with Christ, thus giving His children their special joy in the Father's house, so they share Christ's glory before the universe. Nor shall anything fail of His magnificent plans for the earth, when Israel shall be delivered from his stiffneckedness, and adore the crucified Messiah, and rise out of all abasement to be God's son, His firstborn nationally upon the earth; and all the nations shall abandon their shameless idolatries, and willingly own the long guilty people to be the seed Jehovah has blessed. "And the sons of strangers shall build up thy walls, and their kings shall minister to thee; and the nation and kingdom that will not serve Zion shall perish," when Messiah reigns, and Israel are under the new covenant.

To all this the will of man is adverse; but were it ever so zealous to help, who is sufficient but God to take in a range so vast, deep, and high? Hence the only possible power is that of the Holy Spirit; and God has deigned, in

His great love of man's blessing, to tell us beforehand of those coming glories of Christ, as by holy men He also predicted His sufferings. It was a competency so entirely conferred by God's grace, that now to pave the way for the apostasy Satan has raised up a new school of men in all the world's seats of learning, and very largely among the clerical and ministerial ranks, who agree in nothing so much as that true prophecy is impossible. They thus bear on their forehead and hands the stain of infidelity, and spend their activities in propagating their lie about a large part of both Testaments as God's truth.

Yet the fact is that direct, formal, and avowed prophecies abound in scripture, positive and definite, some of the largest and loftiest character, and others minute to a degree that none could expect who is not familiar with the most condescending tenderness in God. But also the narrative of persons and facts from the first book of the O.T. has a deep scope of prophecy below its surface. The same principle applies to His instructions for His earthly people which none but the unspiritual fail to see running through not Genesis only but Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and in a less degree Deuteronomy, and really scripture in general which is not open prediction. Who but God was sufficient for those things? Truly when we accept and understand as well as believe that no prophecy was ever brought by will of man, but men spoke from God moved by the Holy Spirit, we can but say, flow gracious of God! how needed by us! But how base that man should be so deaf to His word, so ready to heed the shallow reasonings of Satan's emissaries who add to their guilt the pretence of bearing the Christian name, though sinking lower than decent Jews!

1 It may interest the reader that the most learned and able theologian among the Congregationalist Puritans did not understand “the righteousness of God” here to refer to Christ’s obedience of the law, as so many moderns have argued. Here are his words: — “In 2 Peter 1:1, the saints are said to obtain ‘precious faith, through the righteousness of God.’ It is a righteous thing with God to give faith to them for whom Christ died because thereby they have a right unto it. Faith, being amongst the most precious fruits of the death of Christ, by virtue thereof becometh their due for whom he died” (Works of John. Owen, D.D. Goold’s ed., X. 468). It is not that he understood its true bearing, but he was too intelligent and logical, not to say conscientious, to force the text as his followers and others commonly do. It did not occur to him to connect it with the believing remnant of the Jews and their peculiar hold on the promise; from which indeed his high Calvinism tended to preclude him.

2 The Vatican supports most copies in reading “through glory and excellence,” as in the Text. Rec. But ACP and other good witnesses warrant what is here given, and followed by the better critics save Westcott and Hort. It is peculiar to our apostle to predicate ἀρετὴ of God, whether plural as in 1 Peter 2:9, or singular as here in the Second Epistle. Virtue or moral courage suits the word, where man is meant. God’s excellence works virtue in the saint.

3 λήθην λαβὼν here may be compared with 2 Tim. 1:5 and the simpler cases of Heb 11:29, 36. It occurs in both classical and Hellenistic Greek, as in Jos. Ant. ii. 9,1, is precisely the same phrase.

4 The MSS. are here very confused, both in order which is of less importance, and in words added or omitted. Yet all the uncials omit the article before ἄνθρωποι (men) as the best do ἅγιοι (holy).

2 Peter 2

The apostle turns to the first of the evil classes among those of the circumcision who, if not now, had once professed the Lord's name; the class of corruption in word and deed (2). 2 Peter 3 deals with the philosophic and sceptical class.

"But there were false prophets also among the people, as there shall be also false teachers among you, such as shall bring in by-the-bye sects of perdition, denying even the Sovereign Master that bought them, bringing on themselves swift perdition; and many shall follow their dissolutenesses;5 because of whom the way of the truth shall be blasphemed. And in covetousness with feigned (or, well-turned) words, they shall make merchandise of you: for whom judgment from of old is not idle, and their perdition slumbereth not" (vers. 1-3).

Thus we see that the downward progress in Israel was to have its counterpart in Christendom, and a similar tide of moral pravity both cause and effect of hateful heterodoxy. If God of old, as we were told, raised up for the evil day prophets as marked for the truth as for holiness of life, Satan was not slow to supply prophets as shameless for their lies as for their selfish and corrupt ways. This the O.T. shows but too abundantly; and here the apostle foretells it would be no better but more guiltily where grace under the gospel was more open to be abused than the law.

Let me refer to a modern development as a sample; the party extensively spread over Great Britain and America which adopts J. S. Russell's Parousia, London, 1878. It is the antithesis of the Seventh-Day Baptist school, which

destroys the gospel by its extreme judaizing, and is therefore too repulsive to attract any save those completely under law. But the Parousia delusion captivates the wider and more refined minds who cannot shut their eyes to the “better thing” that Christ has introduced, and the ministry of the Spirit with its subsisting and surpassing glory; yet all herein is taken up in a way merely natural. It starts with the assumption that the Lord’s second coming or presence took place at the destruction of Jerusalem A.D. 70! and that thenceforward the promised glory is fulfilled, so that we are now reigning with Christ! and therefore the fullest change so long looked for in both O. and N.T. has already taken place!!

Hence dogmatic and practical Christianity are alike and absolutely annulled in such a pseudo-scheme. For the N.T. contemplates us and our communion; and our walk and our worship are in view of the blessed presence of Christ to receive us glorified to Himself for the Father’s house, where He is now (not we till then). Not only the Gospels cease to apply but the Epistles, to say nothing of the Revelation; for they unquestionably exhort us to a path of suffering, both for righteousness’ sake and for Christ’s name, in a world wholly opposed to Him and His reign. When He really appears, God will use His solemn judgments, so that the world will learn righteousness, especially as Satan cannot then seduce. In short, the enemy has beguiled these visionaries into an entire abolition of all the state and duties of believers on which the Bible insists till “that day,” when all things become new, however true now to our faith and hope, as they will then be in fact and to every eye.

Nor need one do more than glance at another egregious folly under the strange claim of “Christian Science.” It is worthy of a female teacher who cannot be ignorant that the apostle by the Holy Spirit calls her to learn in quietness with all subjection, saying by St. Paul “I do not permit a woman to teach nor to exercise authority over a man, but to be in quietness.” He forbids “exercise,” and not usurpation only. Here too the notions are too preposterous to need anything but a rebuke for their presumption and impiety. If these set up to be new inventions, it would be a very long task to survey all the old schemes of falsehood which have been accumulating since our Epistle, and are designated as “heresies” or more correctly “sects of perdition.” For therein lies the difference of “schism” from “sect”: the former a party within, the latter, more aggravated as being a different party without, as 1 Cor. 11:18, 19 makes plain, though habitually forgotten in systematic divinity.

Even before the Kingdom of the heavens came or the church was founded on the Lord dead, risen, and ascended, He warned (in Matt. 13) of the darnel which the enemy would sow among the wheat. Clearly it is neither pagans nor Jews but nominal Christians, who were not to be cut off, and would pursue their destructive evil till the Son of man come in personal judgment. So in Luke 12. He also described the faithless though professing servant who would put off His return, and accordingly be marked by worldliness and oppressive self-exaltation, and must have his portion with the unbelievers, punished all the more severely because he made not ready nor did His will though he knew it. What an appeal to conscience!

Again in Acts 20 the apostle Paul in his charge to the overseers or elders of the church in Ephesus told them that he knew of there coming in among them after his departure grievous wolves not sparing the flock, and from among their own selves men rising up speaking perverted things to draw the disciples after them. Earlier to the Thessalonian saints he pointed out the mystery of lawlessness at work, not among Jews or Gentiles desperately wicked as they were, but among Christian professors of the latter day which was to develop into the apostasy and the man of sin, the lawless one, to be consumed (not by preaching however sound, but) by the judicial breath of the Lord Jesus. Later to the Philippians he mourned over “many” as enemies of Christ’s cross whose end is perdition. So in 1 Tim. 4 he says that the Spirit speaks expressly of some in latter times falling away from the faith, heeding deceiving spirits in hypocrisy of legend-mongers without conscience yet ascetics; and in 2 Tim. 3 he speaks of the opposite school of self-will or self-indulgence and proud lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, with a form of piety but denying its power. From these the word is, “Turn away,” with a twofold announcement, that all those wishing to live piously shall be persecuted, and that wicked men and impostors shall wax worse and worse. See also 2 Tim. 4:1-4.

The Epistle of James (James 5:7-9) calls to patience and establishment of heart, “because the presence of the Lord is drawn nigh!” “Behold, the judge standeth before the doors.” So Peter in his First Epistle declares it “the time for judgment to begin from the house of God.” And here we begin with his full testimony as to false teachers who corrupt the springs of all truth and righteousness.

Jude goes over the same ground, only denouncing its apostate character which was a deeper view. 1 John fully characterises as the “last hour” the appalling prevalence of antichrists gone out, the more freely to work their nefarious way. And we may regard the Revelation as the great Christian prophecy of the approaching judgments, first providential, then personal when Christendom becomes but a sad object for divine punishment. All point to the awful issue: not reunion save in an evil way so far as it may be; but the Lord’s appearing in relentless dealing when the cup of iniquity is full.

There is no difficulty in the apostle’s predicating of these false teachers that the Sovereign Master bought them. It is “purchase,” which is universal, not “redemption” which is limited to those who have in Christ the forgiveness of the offences through His blood. In the parable too we read that He bought not only the treasure but the field. Purchase acquired all as His slaves or chattels; but redemption sets free from Satan’s power as well as divine judgment. Hence they are nowhere said to be “redeemed,” but they were bought though they disowned the purchase in rebellion against His rights.

What can bring a deeper stigma on “the way of the truth” than the dissolutenesses, whatever their form, of these accredited teachers? It is in Jeremiah’s writings where we find most fully the prophets prophesying falsely and the priests conniving at the evil so as to rule. “And my people love to have it so; and what will ye do in the end thereof?” says the true prophet in his anguish. But throughout Jewish history we see the same principle from the beginning to the crisis in our Lord’s day, which ended in the Romans taking sway both their place and

their nation. Still more terrible is God's vengeance on the abominations of the N. T. Babylon and the false teachers who for their covetousness and well-turned words have all along drawn the mass into departure from the truth, despite of His Spirit, and rebellion against God and His Anointed. Jubilant at man's progress in his own way without Christ, how little they believe that God's eye is on their selfish merchandise, and that their perdition does not slumber according to the judgment pronounced on such evil even before the deluge! How utterly unfounded to expect in Christendom, any more than in Israel, a real reunion and recovery! For the mass it is worse and worse, whatever superficial appearances say to the contrary. Scripture is clear and conclusive.

In the three opening verses the apostle pointed out in plain and pointed terms the very class of false teachers which is now poisoning the fountains of Christendom. It is itself a prophecy fulfilled to every believer of spiritual intelligence. As in Israel the false prophets, so now the false teachers are a fact more manifest in our day than ever before. The very scattering, which ought not to be among true-hearted saints, but which is inevitable under personal or party pressure, makes the peculiar evil more apparently the work of the spirit of error. They may differ each from the rest doctrinally in other respects; but they all agree to let in scepticism as to scripture, which necessarily destroys divine authority for every article of faith, and therefore directly tends to dissolve the credit of its rule in anything. Now where is there a single denomination free from this malaria? And the worst is that it is no longer eccentric individuals winked at to avoid trouble and split, but now leading seniors

and energetic juniors in the ministry are those more zealous for that deadly error, though nominally some may not deny Christ and the truth of His work.

In former days, as the rule when such unbelievers found themselves opposed through their speculations to the Articles of faith they had subscribed, or to their public profession on becoming religious guides, they withdrew from a position they could no longer hold with common integrity. But in our day we see how those who are false in doctrine are bold enough to set conscience at defiance, and cleave to their position and emoluments when they abandon the truth which they had solemnly pledged themselves to preach and teach. It is not therefore the Lord and the truth only which they betray; but they sacrifice plain honesty of principle for a place and a living which they value. This depravity too is severely exposed in the apostle's words, "through covetousness with well-turned words they will make merchandise of you." Nor is it his rebuke only since he adds the retribution which must befall those who thus mock God: "for whom judgment of old is not idle, and their destruction slumbereth not." The maledictions under the seal of the Fisherman may return on the guilty illwisher, but God will surely give effect to the words of the bondman and apostle of Jesus Christ His Son in the solemn Epistle before us.

The apostle proceeds to give examples of divine judgment executed on angels as well as men.

"For if God spared not angels when they sinned, but cast them down to lowest hell and gave them up to chains [or, pits6] of gloom reserved for judgment, and spared not an ancient world but preserved Noah an eighth (i.e.

with seven others), a preacher of righteousness, having brought a flood upon a world of ungodly ones" (vers. 4, 5).

We must not confound this fall of angels with the original defection of the devil and his angels, which had a distinct character and a different treatment on God's part. What can be plainer than that the earlier defection was before man was created? For the devil their leader became man's tempter, as his own fault was being lifted up with self-importance and pride against God, and his aim was to lure our first parents into like independence and rebellion. In the case before us the direction of sin was toward man in a way contrary to the nature of angels or of mankind; and so abhorrent to God that He executed an exemplary dealing of His displeasure at the time of the deluge. This too continues through all the ages of man on the earth till final judgment come for wicked men and angels when the eternal state is to open. The devil and his angels have quite another destiny; for they are allowed to tempt man, as their chief tempted even the Son of God when here incarnate, rising more and more during the season of divine long-suffering till the ruin of Christendom, as well as of the Jews, shall revive the Roman empire in the Beast, and the False Prophet of Judea, the Antichrist, to sit not only as Messiah but as God in the temple of God showing himself that he is Gad. Even at the end of Christ's thousand years' reign, Satan will be loosed once more to deceive man for a little space. All so far is in contrast with the sinning angels here.

But the comparison with Jude 6, 7, renders another fact sufficiently clear; that the particular time and the special enormity of their sin point to what is described

in Gen. 6:1-4, which played a prominent part in the accumulated evil for which the deluge was sent to destroy the world which then was. One knows how repugnant to most minds is the natural sense of this episode, what violent efforts have been made by learned men to evade it, provoked by absurd rabbinical legends gloating in what is vile and strange, and availing themselves of our Saviour's words in Matt. 22:30 on the very different truth of the resurrection state to deny its possibility. Besides, the word does not necessarily mean "wives" but "women," though ordinarily so employed. However this be, we may all admire the holy wisdom of God in telling us briefly and even obscurely a tale on which man has so much to say, and so great a desire to fill up the details, if he could.

Next the apostle speaks of Noah with his family of seven preserved when God spared not the ancient world. For this is important in his account of God's government. If His hand brought a flood on a world of the ungodly, He took care to guard the safety of Noah's house for the sake of its faithful head. And he draws attention to the interesting fact that Noah was not only a righteous man but "a preacher of righteousness." The hundred and twenty years of which Jehovah spoke was the space of the preparation of the ark and of Noah's preaching It has nothing to do with the duration of human life, as some have fancied, but of divine patience before "the flood came and took all away." To the same time refers the mention of Noah and his preaching also in 1 Peter 3:19, 20 where we are told of their spirits, disobedient as they were to the word of his testimony, and therefore in prison awaiting a judgment still more terrible than aught of a temporal nature, however vast and

exceptional And so it is now. The day of the Lord, of which the Lord Himself warned, and calls His servants to warn, is at hand; and it will come when men say Peace and safety, while their hearts are filled with fear and foreboding of what is about to be on the inhabited earth. Assuredly the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven with angels of His power taking vengeance on a guilty world disobedient to the gospel will even more terrify men in its sudden destruction.

The apostle adduces another divine judgment, not so vast as the deluge, but even more solemnly significant, though on a small scale.

“And reducing to ashes [the] cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, he condemned [them] with overthrow, having set an example to those that should live ungodlily, and rescued righteous Lot, distressed by the behaviour of those abandoned in licentiousness; for the righteous [man] dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing was tormenting a righteous soul day after day with lawless works” (vers. 6-8).

The awful story is told with holy plainness of speech in Gen. 19. The sinning and doom of angels consigned to the deepest pit of gloom in chains of darkness for a judgment still more terrible; and the ensuing and unsparing destruction of an old world except Noah and his family, are followed by a catastrophe of fire and brimstone on the cities of the plain. There the bold monstrous depravity of mankind sunk to its lowest depths and cried aloud for heaven’s open and indignant vengeance. These were early days comparatively speaking. The boasted civilization of man had borne much fruit to glory in, not only on the banks of the

Euphrates and the Tigris, but on the Nile. And here on the borders of Canaan, destined for the seed of Abraham, and round the sea into which debouched the waters of the Jordan, were men sunk into unblushing vileness not to be named, save in the days long after by the classic authors of Greece and Rome, who liked moral filth without shame. Host righteously did Jehovah execute His judgment on these cities, setting an example to those that should live an ungodly life, not providentially through the hand of man, but Himself raining upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire out of heaven.

Do any now bearing the name of Christians question this dealing of Jehovah? They may plead the unbelief of an erratic speculator like Origen to excuse their own scepticism, to which, as they allow, the free thinking of Hobbes and Spinoza and the like gave a great impulse; and they are not afraid to cheer one another with the godless cry that they are the winning side. But how will it be when, in the approaching consummation of the age, the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with angels of His power in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God and those that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ? Will it be any consolation to the teachers of those responsible to preach the truth that they were successful in undermining God’s authority in His word under colour of historical investigation which has no real facts but fancy, and of criticism which is not to get rid of human error but to enthrone it and to dissolve, in will at least, all that is divine? Will they encourage one another in their work of mischief when such impious infidelity pays the penalty of everlasting destruction from the Lord’s presence and from the glory

of His might? O that where conscience is seared by the power of evil, there might be an ear to hear, and repentance be given to the acknowledgment of the truth, so that out of the snare of the devil, taken as they were by him, they might wake up for God's will! They may flatter themselves that they are as moral as the old cities were corrupt. But after all to reject God's word, and claim title to sit in judgment on it, is to have a character of pride and malignity more destructive than the abominable and unnatural debasement of Sodom. If God, not man, is the measure of sin they who are caught red-handed in their war against His inspiration will learn then, if they mock now, what it is to have helped on the apostasy and the man of sin.

But the apostle here as before attests divine mercy as well as judgment. For as before He preserved Noah preacher of righteousness with seven others who shared the ark with him, so now He saved "righteous Lot, distressed by the behaviour of those abandoned in licentiousness." Peter's appointed view is righteousness and unrighteousness; as Jude's was apostasy from a place given by divine will. Both were true of old, and shall be true again in those who hate and deny prophecy, yet will prove its truth in the ruin of those they mislead. And shall they escape, who served Satan's aim and despised God's word, because they die before that day to which all the prophets point, though they had "settled" it to have been a mistake? Lot was not like Abraham in the secret of the Lord apart from the scene. But he wee no scoffer, any more than a sceptic; "for the righteous man, dwelling among them in seeing and hearing was tormenting a righteous soul day after day with lawless works." Whoever heard of such seriousness

in a dilettante higher critic? Lot's was not the more blessed part of Abraham, yet was he truly grieved for the Lord's sake. And so it will be with a righteous remnant, when the Jews are in their last trial and the mass accept idols once more, and the antichrist too, as the Psalms and the Prophets amply prove.

Thereon the apostle goes out to show the divine government in a more general way both as to good and evil.

"[The] Lord (or, Jehovah) knoweth to deliver the godly out of trial, and to keep unjust [men] for judgment-day to be punished; and especially those that walk after flesh in lust of uncleanness, and despise lordship. Daring, self-willed, they tremble not speaking railingly of dignities (or, glories), when angels, being greater in might and power, bring not against them before [the] Lord (or, Jehovah) a railing charge" (vers. 9-11).

Though it is still the evil day and the enemy is not yet hurled from his place in the heavens (Eph. 6), the eye of the Lord is not closed to the trial of the godly any more than to the ways of unrighteous men. There is a constantly active care of His own to deliver out of temptation, as He reserves unjust men for another day when judgment must requite them. But this is allotted to the Lord Jesus, whom the world despised and rejected. He it is who was determinately appointed of God Judge of living and dead. The Father judgeth none but has given all judgment to the Son, that all may honour the Son even as they honour the Father. He the Son is therefore the test. He that honours not the Son honours not the Father that sent Him. And as it is the self-emptying and humiliation of the Son in becoming man

and dying on the cross which gave occasion to unbelief and contempt, instead of love and subjection, it will be as Son of man that the Lord will judge mankind. Those who believe on the Son of God receive in Him life eternal; those who despise and disobey Him as if only man must be judged by the glorified Son of man; and His judgment on the great white throne (Rev. 20:12) will be as everlasting as His life He gives the believer. There will be no escaping judgment for unjust men, even if a day of judgment too punish them in this life at His appearing.

The gospel has saved those who believe for heaven; but it has not purged the earth of iniquity. This will be in the age to come when the Lord reigns over all the earth. It is not what God is doing now, nor will it be till He appears in glory. The darnel was to grow with the wheat in the world of profession. His servants were too ready to uproot; but His word is, Suffer both to grow together unto the harvest or the age's completion. Then shall He send His angels; for it will be their work, not ours even then. We have to witness grace. Then a king shall reign in righteousness; and as the result of retribution executed on the wicked, not only shall the righteous nation enter in, which keeps faithfulness, but "when Thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness."

But "specially those that walk after flesh in lust of uncleanness, and despise lordship" shall incur the divine indignation. To this the grace which God is now showing in the gospel will contribute, because unbelief works to indulge all the more in evil. For if favour be shown to the wicked, he does not learn righteousness, but trifles with sin, and hopes to walk as he likes with impunity; or as it

is written in Eccles. 8:11, “because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the children of men is full in them to do evil.” Nor is it unclean lust only that is peculiarly offensive to God, and nourished by the abused grace of the gospel, but despising lordship. For God in His providence has set up the check of magisterial authority against evil; and what undermines this more than the self-will of man in these last days which pleads liberty against law to indulge in licence and rebellion? It was bad in Judaism; it is worse in Christendom, as this Epistle anticipates, and the corresponding Epistle of Jude. How this defiant haughtiness abounds now! And it will increase to more ungodliness, as the end of the age approaches.

In vers. 10, 11 the wicked spirit is still more pointedly designated. “Daring, self-willed, they tremble not speaking railingly of dignities (or, glories, literally); when angels, being greater in might and power, bring not against them before [the] Lord (or, Jehovah) a railing charge.” The tongue as is shown in the Epistle of James is pre-eminently the index of the inner man’s feelings, aim and character. He cannot always do what he would; but his lips express what he is in audacity and self-will. The fact that some are set in a place above others in authority is enough to rouse hatred and revolutionary desires, to lower and destroy. Men tremble not to speak railingly of dignities. A debased Christianity helps this where the truth does not reign to produce self-judgment, yet is sufficiently known to make little of man’s pretensions and worldly glories. With such presumption of the baptised the apostle contrasts the humility and awe of angels, superior as they are in might and power, who have such a sense of reverence before God as to

restrain their speech before Him, whatever be the evils to call out their abhorrence.

Even such a sketch did not suffice adequately to convey what the false teachers would turn out in Christendom. The Holy Spirit proceeds yet more vividly in His anticipative description of their words and deeds.

“But these, as irrational animals born by nature for capture and destruction, speaking evil in what things they are ignorant, shall also perish in their corruption, receiving as they shall wages of unrighteousness, accounting [their] ephemeral luxury pleasure, spots and blemishes, luxuriating in their love feasts [or, deceits], feasting with you; having eyes full of an adulteress and without cessation from sin; setting baits for unstable souls; having a heart practised in covetousness, children of curse; abandoning as they did a straight way, they went astray, following out in the way of Balaam [son] of Beor, who loved wages of unrighteousness, but had reproof of his own iniquity; a dumb beast of burden speaking with man’s voice forbade the madness of the prophet” (vers. 12-16).

It was already shown generally from ver. 10 how these nominal Christians proceed after flesh in lust of pollution, instead of walking according to Spirit, as freed from the law of sin and of death. Then their boldness was contrasted with angels greater in strength and power who are as reverent before the Lord as those were scornful. Now they are compared to such irrational animals as by nature are born to be captured and destroyed. How overwhelming that the apostle has thus to describe false teachers and those that follow their dissolutenesses! They were once enlightened, had tasted

the heavenly gift, and became partakers of Holy Spirit, and tasted God's good word and power of a coming age (not evil as the present is), and now yielded to malevolence, speaking evilly in what things they were ignorant. What was before such but also to "perish in their corruption?"

We may profitably remark that Heb. 6 in reviewing the many and great privileges of such spurious professors does not speak any more than Peter of being born anew or of God, any more than of being sealed of the Spirit. They had accurate knowledge of the Christian revelation and special gift in its characteristic power Mind and feeling can go far in appreciating the wonderful works of God, and the moral beauty and grace of Christ. But in all the scriptures which designate natural men, the utmost care is taken to leave out the communication of life eternal and a divine nature, or "repentance unto life." This supposes a real self-judgment before God, an overwhelming sense of sin in His sight, of total moral ruin, so as absolutely to need sovereign grace, but it is never found save in those begotten of God. Yet short of it, what is there that the intellect cannot appropriate, enjoy, and proclaim? Ere long the test comes, which life in Christ with the Spirit's power alone can stand; and Satan so touches and masters them that their departure from God becomes more apparent and complete. Shall they not receive wages of unrighteousness? Can any course of life be farther from Christ than esteeming ephemeral luxury pleasure? He never once sought to please Himself but in every thing to do His Father's will; and did He not call His own to hear His voice and follow Him? Did He not suffer for us, leaving us a model so that we should follow in His steps?

“Spots and blemishes” were these men, “luxuriating in their love-feasts (or, deceits),7 feasting with you.” To bring self-indulgence into a love-feast was a shame to Christ, and the forerunner of worse corruption. “Having eyes full of an adulteress and without cessation from sin.” It was bad enough at a heathen celebration: what was it before the Holy and True? “Setting baits for unstable souls” in honour of Him who suffered to the uttermost to win the foulest from their sins to God! Who could wonder that they “have a heart practised in covetousness” in order to carry on the basest self-indulgence, where all are bound, denying impiety and worldly lusts, to live soberly, and justly and piously in the present age, awaiting the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ! But these who act as if the cross of Christ opened the door for any abomination, are they not “children of curse?” It was sinning that grace may abound.

“Having left a straight way” (and such surely is Christ), “they went astray, having followed out in the way of Balaam [son] of Beor, who received wages of unrighteousness.” No more solemn or apposite warning could be drawn from the Book of God; none of one who more deceived himself and others; none that so combined the most glowing and grand anticipations for Israel from Jehovah with the subtlest efforts to ensnare into evil which should compromise and endanger them. Yet had he crafty care for his own interest while pretending to be quite above it. Whatever his words, he loved wages of unrighteousness, but had reproof to his own iniquity, and in a form eminently adapted to appeal to his conscience and to be a continual warning in the

ease, less sceptical than the west. “A dumb beast of burden speaking with man’s voice forbade the madness of the prophet.” He who boasted of having his eyes open saw not what the ass was given to see, and knew not why she turned aside (from the sword drawn in the angel’s hand), and why she thrust herself unto the wall that Balaam might not have his head smitten, but at most his foot crushed; and why she fell down where there was no other way for her or her master to escape destruction. How much more guilty are false teachers since the Son of God came and gave us understanding to know Him that is true!

The indignant invective of the apostle is not even yet exhausted. So various are the forms of hypocritical unrighteousness, he would have the faithful fully informed and on their guard.

“These are springs without water,8 and mists9 driven by storm, to whom the gloom of darkness is reserved.10 For uttering overswellings of vanity, they allure in lusts of the flesh, by dissolutenesses, those that are just 11escaping from them that walk in error, promising them liberty while they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by whom a man is worsted, by him is he also held in bondage. For if after having escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, but again entangled and worsted thereby, the last for them is become worse than the first” (vers. 17-20).

It is no longer contrast with angels or comparison with Balaam, but the gravest picture of spiritual worthlessness with the seal of everlasting darkness affixed before judgment consigns to it. It is the privilege

of every Christian, not only to be begotten of God but to have the Spirit of His Son given to be in him a spring of water springing up into life eternal. Yea the Lord adds elsewhere, He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, Out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water; and that this great gift should not pass away like Jewish favours, but abide for ever. And surely the Christian teacher has yet more, not only the δωρεα; to enjoy but his special χάρισμα to make it known, and appreciated, and applied. But these teachers of Christendom, certainly not of Christ, “are springs without water” (they never had any), and “mists driven by storm,” instead of luminaries directed by the Holy Spirit; they express nature empty and fallen, and under gusts of feeling if not the enemy’s power. And the end is not death only but divine wrath for ever, in character with the darkness they loved because their deeds were evil.

For what are the utterances of those that figure for mischief on the ecclesiastical stage? “Over-swellings of vanity” by which to “allure in desires and lusts of flesh by dissolutenesses those just escaping from them that walk in error.” Take three plain examples of false teaching which directly tend to lower the standard of holiness and make provision for flesh’s lusts. 1. Sin is not “the transgression of the law” (as in the A.V. of 1 John 3:4), but “lawlessness” which rejects all subjection to God, and applies to Gentiles who knew not the law as well as to the Jew who did, and to the wicked that heard but obeyed not the gospel. How much evil in Christendom is not touched by the Decalogue! 2. What licence for evil ways is not covered by “so that ye cannot do the things that ye would” in Gal. 5:17? Its real

meaning is the wholly different force, “that ye should not do the things that ye would” or desire. The error becomes the religion, or at least practice, of despair which is as far from Christian holiness as can be. 3. There is too the dogmatic error in the misreading of Rom. 7:6, where the too confiding public were taught that the law was dead, instead of the believers’ death to it, so that they should serve in newness of spirit, and not oldness of letter which alas! has ever been the bane of mere profession. It was sad that good men were blinded to what their spiritual instinct must have revolted from; but who can tell the enormous influence of such a threefold cord for misrepresenting God’s word, especially in the hands of unscrupulous, false teachers who gloat in misrenderings which thus consecrate their wicked life and labours?

Love, lowliness, purity are essentials of the new nature, and hence so characterise the Christian that, when failure in any of these respects occurs, the weak are stumbled, and the strong are grieved for the Lord’s sake. But when haughty vapourings as in ver. 18 takes the place of truth as it is in Jesus, one need not wonder that underneath they allure in flesh’s lusts by wantonnesses those just escaping with the skin of their teeth from them that walk in error. For the young are peculiarly open to danger from these seducing ways in those they trust for precept and example. The promise of liberty has a fair sound to their ears. But the apostle points his finger to the fatal spot, which is not now nor ever that of God’s children: they are veritable bondmen of corruption. No swellings can hide or excuse the evil, or disguise effectually to the simplest saint the enemy at

work. “For by whom one is worsted, by him also is he held in bondage.”

The very babe in Christ only just escaping is sensitive to vileness and turns away, where old ones are dulled and deadened by theories which apologise for error or evil. Nor is any plea more insidious or successful than unity, precious where Christ is its centre; but where it is not really His, it is the gilded bait of the soul-destroyer. “For if, having escaped the pollutions of the world through true knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, but again thereby entangled, they are worsted, the last for them is become worse than the first” (ver. 20). How graphic and energetic and solemn is the apostle’s picture of the soul’s ruin! And this after God’s work in the cross of Christ, this gift of the Spirit sent forth from heaven, and His full revelation to man. Yet the cross had already shown man’s enmity and guilt and ruin, with Satan’s power over him; but, thank God, it has also shown man in Christ perfect for God, for sinners to save, for saints to keep, guide and bless, that Satan be wholly defeated.

But nowhere is the divine value of the cross more ignored than where it is made an external idol, the rival of the crescent that rules the night, or of the sun that rules the day. In all these sin is not seen to be already dealt with to faith for God’s glory; but man profits by unbelief to make a tariff for it in a way suited to circumstances sad his own will for Satan’s pleasure.

The apostle confirms the awful end of the course he had just portrayed by the two concluding verses, one explanatory, and the other in the true proverb applied with its telling figures, too often exemplified.

“For it were better for them not to have known well the way of righteousness than knowing well to have turned back12 from the holy commandment delivered to them” (ver. 21).

The righteous tone of the warning is sustained with apostolic gravity to the close. Knowledge even of the most accurate sort, however desirable, is not the indispensable thing, but faith working by love and yielding our members in bondage to righteousness unto holiness. It is never affirmed or hinted that these false teachers were begotten of God; but they had professed His name who secures every thing that is good to the partaker of a divine nature, to which they had ever been strangers. They had once abandoned the pollutions of the world through the moral effect of what they had received. For the light of Christianity has had not a little influence even on Jews and heathen and infidels; and this the false teachers had profited by as much or more. But when the crisis came personally, and they deliberately succumbed to known evil, their downfall was profound if not rapid.

Therefore it is that we know now that “it were better for them not to have known well the way of righteousness than knowing well to have turned back from the holy commandment delivered to them.” What can be clearer or more certain? The way of righteousness is Christ made known in the gospel; but the truth and the life accompany the way when it is taken by a living faith, and fruit of righteousness follows only through Jesus Christ to God’s glory and praise. Here was nothing but the ground of fallen nature bringing forth thorns and briers, and therefore the end is all the worse for a beginning of outward culture and cleansing, and the end

is to be burned as we read in Heb. 6:8. God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this also shall he reap. For he that sows to his own flesh shall reap corruption from the flesh; but he that sows to the Spirit shall reap from the Spirit life eternal. In this the false teachers had no more part or lot than Simon Magus in the early days. Their ruin was all the more aggravated by the morning cloud of seeming promise or the early dew of good words perhaps blessed to others, without effect in themselves. The attempt of some to attribute to them a passing from death into life is disproved by scripture which never goes so far, but stops short of salvation by grace. The holy commandment delivered to them was not even mixed with faith in their souls; and from this they at length turned back, that they might do their own will and gratify their evil lusts.

We may see in Heb. 10:26-30 more analogy with our chapter than in Heb. 6:4-8. For in the latter case it was rather a return to Jewish ordinances after having professed the grace of the gospel. In the former it is a return to sins after being confessors of Christ's death, which means for us death to sin. This case is what we read of in the warning of Peter before us, only that he dwells on the aggravated guilt of false teachers, as the Epistle to the Hebrews does on the apostasy of professing Christians in yielding to sinful lusts. How fully and precisely scripture provides for every danger, and against all evil!

"[But]13 there hath happened to them the [saying] of the true proverb, A dog returned to his own vomit, and A sow washed into rolling in mire" (ver. 22).

The yielding to sin, described in ver. 21, is entirely confirmed by the application to their case by the point of the true proverb that follows: “a dog returned to his own vomit, and a sow washed into rolling in mire.” Never had these evil workers been sheep of the Good Shepherd’s pasture. They had never been transformed by the renewal of mind which is of God’s effectual grace. There was therefore no such anomaly in the Christian sphere as the degradation of a sheep to a dog, nor such a metamorphosis as into swine. When born anew, there is a new life and nature imparted; but the old abides to be disallowed, because we died with Christ to sin. But a dog does not become a sheep, nor do sheep become swine, save in the false science of theology. “That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (John 3:6). And this it is which the believer receives through faith in Christ, even His life communicated now to the soul in the Spirit, as by-and-by to the body also at His coming again. There is not the most distant thought that the false teachers were ever thus born anew. On the contrary they are described as having no more than what the natural mind is capable of knowing. They might have accurate knowledge in the intellect, but no divine work whereby they were begotten of God. Hence at last came a turning back to a worse state than before they professed Christianity.

What can exceed the loathing our apostle feels and expresses, as he denounces not only the errors but the immoral practices of these false teachers? The apostle of the circumcision describes in solemn terms the ruin of which Paul at Miletus warned the elders of the church in Ephesus. “I know that there will come in among you after my departure grievous wolves not sparing the

flock; and from among your own selves shall rise up men speaking, perverted things to draw away the disciples after them" (Acts 20:29, 30). "Grievous wolves" are surely enemies, whether or not they get the position of guides; they were enemies who, instead of loving and tending the flock of God, ravenously and at all cost preyed on the sheep. And the alienated elders, who forgot the Lord with the grace and truth which came through Him, fell sadly from their office when they by means of perverted things drew away the disciples after them. Thus what man built in the Lord's name, man's will should mislead and destroy; and such is Christendom, an utter departure from the heavenly witness of Christ to which the church and every Christian is called. That which Christ has built will alone stand, for it is kept through the grace that is in Him, which is unfailing. But all that bear His name are responsible; and guides must give account, not merely as all saints, but of that entrusted to them in particular.

Still these self-seeking chiefs, and even the grievous wolves though violently injurious, are not depicted with the contempt which the apostle attaches to those of whom he warns in this chapter. What figure more expressive of abominable impurity can be found to express "A dog returning to his own vomit, and A washed sow into rolling in mire?" The dog so returning we hear of in Prov. 26:11, where the application is to the fool returning to his folly. Here it is still more emphatically said of him who once knew clearly the glad tidings of Christ and the truth of God in a general way. The better the knowledge, the worse if corruption ensues. What could match it but "A washed sow" again gone back to roll in mud?

Thus the awful issue of unrenewed man here set out in the unerring word of God keeps the security of grace wholly untouched. May the true believer not slip or fall? Surely he may, if unwatchful. But “he shall be made to stand; for the Lord is able to make him stand (Rom. 14:4). Without Him he owns himself lost; but now “we more than conquer through Him that loved us” (Rom. 8:37). A man may preach ever so acceptably; but if he live evilly as one not born anew, he perishes a reprobate. And why any Christian should question this is the leas excusable, since scripture is perfectly plain in its call to self-denial, and in its denunciation of unholiness particularly in such as profess the Lord’s name, with full warning of the awful end.

5 There is no doubt that the Text. Rec. must here yield to much better authority, and the intrinsic sense.

6 It is a question between

σιροῖς or

σειροῖς (ABC) and

σειραῖς (KLP and the cursives). Here

τηρουμένους has better support than

τετηρουμένους.

7 There is no small diversity and correction in the readings here. Cp. Jude 12.

8 For “clouds,” the best authorities give “and mists,” and omit “for ever.”

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 “Those just (or, a little) escaping,” not “those clean (or, really) escaped,” as in the Text Rec. In ver. 20 it is the aorist participle, not the present as in ver. 18.

12 ὑποστρέψαι B C P etc.

ἐπιστρέψαι K L etc.

13 δέ is not in A B etc., but in c C K L P etc. Lesser flaws we may leave.

2 Peter 3

From the humbling and awful indictment of false teachers in 2 Peter 2 beginning to play their corrupting part in Christendom, as the false prophets had wrought the ruin of Israel in the past, the apostle turns to speak of this Second Epistle, and its aim in the grace of God. But even so, as we shall soon see, he has to warn of another daring snare to be, and a wholly different class of adversaries.

“This already a second epistle, beloved, I write to you, in both which I stir up your pure mind by putting in remembrance, that ye be mindful of the words spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of the Lord and Saviour [by] your apostles14” (vers. 1, 2).

The apostle of the circumcision here presents scripture, both O. and N.T., as the grand safeguard, just as the apostle to the nations in his second Epistle to Timothy. Neither has the least thought of apostolic succession; which, if really given of the Lord, might well be regarded as no small stay for beleaguered saints exposed to the worst of perils from misled leaders, and these at work within. But the truth is that the mystery of lawlessness was actively at work from early days, as 2 Thess. 2 informs us. It was restrained by the power of the Spirit, and especially by apostolic energy. But, as the apostle Paul let the Ephesian overseers know (Acts 20:29, 30), his own decease would be the signal for fresh and successful efforts of the enemy. “I know that after my departure there will come in grievous wolves not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves shall rise up men speaking perverted things to draw

away the disciples after them". What then was the resource? "And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all that are sanctified." Not a hint of a successor, but the assurance to faith of God and the word of His grace.

Just so here our apostle, in view of the danger, and horrors of the false teachers carrying on their nefarious work, casts the Christians from among the dispersed Jews on the words that were spoken before by the holy prophets, and on the commandment of the Lord and Saviour by their apostles. Both the prophets and the apostles were inspired to write as they did; for only by the faith of divine communications are those who believe brought into living relationship with God. Thus His word separates the soul to God, and by the revelation of Christ is the source of their joy and the formative power of obedience. In this faith the elders from Abel downwards obtained witness, whatever the dislike of the world, which was not worthy of them and awaits sure judgment from God. Still the O.T. at best was predictive, and could not make known as the N.T. does the infinite glory and grace of the Saviour, nor the God-glorifying efficacy of His work for our souls, before the salvation of our bodies at His coming again. known eternal life and accomplished redemption give the believers now to walk in the light, as could not be given before Christ came the first time, and renders him as a worshipper once purged to have no more conscience of sins, yea to have the Holy Ghost sealing him, and the earnest of coming glory with Christ as a joint-heir.

These privileges of the believer are the outcome of His actual advent and of the atoning work done and

accepted by God, so that His love has been and is shed abroad in our hearts through the Holy Spirit given to us. The First Epistle of Peter makes much known, the Epistles of Paul much more, which could neither be known nor enjoyed as they are since redemption. Thus the commandment of the Lord and Saviour by “your apostles,” while it fulfils the spiritual promises of the O.T., goes far beyond it in the revelation of blessings in and through and with Christ in the heavenly places. Hence Paul refers to the mystery or secret which was kept silent in times everlasting, but now manifested according to the eternal God’s commandment for obedience of faith to all the nations. For, after the cross (which entailed the setting aside of the Jew meanwhile), God set up the rejected Christ above as the Supreme Chief over all things heavenly and earthly, and makes us who now believe (few or Greek), His body and bride, to share all glory with Him at His coming. This glory of the Head and the body over all things is far higher, wider and deeper, than anything in O.T. prophecy; it is the secret now revealed, however little it may be apprehended.

How horrified both the apostles would have been to witness the deadly undermining of the Bible, which, begun by free-thinking men more than a hundred years ago has become a naturalised epidemic, not only in Germany, France and Holland, but now in the English-speaking regions of the earth; growing self-confident, impudent and arrogant beyond measure, not knowing that God has forewarned of this turning away their ears from the truth and readiness of mind for fables. Take their treatment of the Pentateuch in particular, and of such prophets as Isaiah and Daniel. The infinite fact of a

divine Person become flesh as truly as He is God is (with very few exceptions, to whom God may give deliverance) as nothing in their eyes, though of infinite value to those who believe and love as they know His love, God's love, to them.

Christ and His apostles declare that Moses wrote these earlier books. He and they treat the Law, the Psalms, and the Prophets, not only as genuine and authentic, but as of divine authority. Most are not ashamed to be so intoxicated with the poisonous wine of neo-criticism as to deny the certainty of Christ's knowledge, and to regard Him and the inspired writings as under the ignorant prejudice of their age, just like themselves at the present time, impiously claiming for themselves superiority of intelligence ranging over the, whole Bible.

Their success, with the youth chiefly of a mocking and scoffing generation, emboldens them to shut their eyes to the iniquity of sitting in judgment, not on copyists who introduced some errata, but on His word which shall judge them. They believe not that the Judge stands before the doors; nor that the secret of lawlessness is in all this working more fatally than in the priestly party who glorify themselves and their leaders with their self-aggrandising legends. For those give God's written word the lie, and accept as a settled fact that, instead of Moses writing e.g. Genesis, it was really written by a large number of unknown men, fragments interwoven by a compiler, separated by hundreds of years, with perhaps traditionary words of Moses, a priestly document and another quite different and opposed, and only published many centuries after Moses and his successor Joshua. Now even if we do not notice the monstrous perversion of the discovery of the neglected

book of the law in Josiah's day, as if it were a concoction then first palmed on the king and the people, how could such a hodge-podge as all this be the word of God? How blot out the fullest historical proof that Moses wrote as God spoke to him? How get rid of the inspired men from his own day till the O.T. Canon closed? Were these holy men all impostors? Were they, the inspired, more ignorant of divine things, than these infidel reformers?

The faith of saints in all ages fully accepts the O.T. So the Lord taught His disciples, and His hearers generally, as God's testimony, written by those who claim it and by adequate evidence communicated it. Nor does the expression on which stands the modern fable of the Elohists and Jehovists and the many redactors afford the most slender proof. It is simply the reverie of one who was too ignorant and unbelieving to see the depth of truth in the words for "God (Elohim)" sovereign and historical, and "Jehovah" for His reference to relationship. It is a distinction as real as important, which is lost to such as build on the absurd fancy that it springs from different documents or legends. But infidelity took it up to discredit and destroy God's authority, as it must if received, as well as deny those whom we have sound evidence to believe really wrote the various hooks as they stand, with few and brief editorial notes at a later day added by similar divine authority.

But here, as in 2 Tim. 3, we read how the last words of the two apostles call on the saints to cherish what God has given them, things old and new. Be the corruptions as they may, and however veiled by those who are deceived and deceive by them, we have the inspired word to stir up the "pure mind." How different from the

unbelief that denies real inspiration, and fancies the most incredible tissue of authorship to set aside God's word searching the reins and hearts! What more blessed than to have such in remembrance? What could we call to mind for profit and comfort compared with the prophets and the apostles as our teachers? It is not those of old only, but "your apostles." For as one of these wrote, "We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth us not. From this we know the Spirit of truth, and the spirit of error." Solemn word for conscience! "They (that judge the word of God, the sceptics) are of the world; for this reason they speak [as] of the world, and the world, heareth them." O how true is the apostolic word! Even that of old is not enough now without "your apostles." If the O.T. be Blighted, the N.T. will ere long share the same lot. How awful to become an apostate! Yet the danger is most imminent in our day.

A special reason for heeding the prophets and the apostles follows, which gives urgency to the warning as to those who despise the word of God. For do we not recognise that today is a day of prevalent and growing mockery in Christendom among philosophers and those influenced by their speculations?

"Knowing this first, that in the last of the days mockers shall come with mockery walking according to their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming (or presence)? for from the [day] that the fathers fell asleep, all things continue thus (or, as they were) from beginning of creation" (vers. 3, 4).

The apostle first introduced the formula "Knowing this first" when insisting on the divine source and character, with the certainty and value, of prophecy, even while

intimating the still more intimate and elevated nature of the heavenly light and hope of Christianity. “Knowing this first, that no prophecy of scripture is (or rather is made to be) of its own interpretation.” It is not an isolated thing, but part of a vast plan for God’s glory in the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Its true and lull interpretation cannot be apart from His future kingdom in displayed glory. As the Fathers counsels look onward to nothing short of this, so the Holy Spirit has moved in the inspiration of the word to this end. Man of himself is quite beneath such ability. Like the gracious power of good which alone could set aside all the evils under which man groaned, and especially the awful weight of Satanic possession, as a testimony before the age to come will enjoy it fully; so prophecy of scripture anticipatively fills the heart and mind of the believer with the mighty beneficence of that day, and His grace and His glory through it come to pass with everlasting Hallelujahs to God. It was therefore in neither case the working or effect of man’s will. Those who wrought the wondrous deeds, or who wrote the no less wondrous words, did so by the power and Jove of God Who alone could qualify them in honour of His Son, the Lamb of God.

So here the repetition of “knowing this first” marks the importance of the truth. It might have seemed that the proclamation of the gospel to all the creation must have disarmed the hostile spirit, even of those who did not believe through pride, pleasure, and lusts of all kinds, to the saving of their souls. But the mind of the flesh is enmity against God. And our Lord:Himself had prepared us for unbelief and self-seeking and defiance of God and His word, as in Israel, so as bad or worse in

Christendom. “As it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man. They ate, they drank, they married, they were given in marriage, till the day that Noah entered into the ark, and the flood came.and destroyed all. And in like manner as took place in the days of Lot: they ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; but on the day that Lot went out from Sodom, it rained fire and sulphur from heaven, and destroyed all: after this manner shall it be in the day that the Son of man is revealed.” The subject is wound up in His closing figure: “where the body is, there the eagles will be gathered together” (Luke 17). Divine judgment will find its object.

The apostle Paul was given to reveal that lawlessness should come out openly,,as even from the early days of the gospel it was at work secretly, till (the great Hinderer being removed,) it should culminate in the man of sin, the express opposite of the Man of righteousness, the Saviour from perdition instead of its son; “whose coming is according to the working of Satan in all power and signs and wonders of falsehood, and in all deceit of unrighteousness to them that perish, because they received not the love of the truth that they might be saved. And for this cause God sendeth to them a working of error, that they should believe the falsehood, that all might be judged who believed not the truth but found pleasure in unrighteousness” (2 Thess. 2).

No less plain is 2 Tim. 2, 3, and 4, on the growth of haughty unbelief and unrestrained disregard of God in word and deed in the last days, while having a form of piety before even this is finally cast off. The Epistle of James lays bare’ as the beginning of evil, the unjudged creedism which life in Christ was not, and works quite

dead and worthless, and instead of love, worldliness, selfishness, and injustice prevailing. 1 Peter 4 affirmed the end of all things drawn nigh, and the season for the judgment beginning from or at the house of God, a principle to which He adheres; for as His privileges are there, so also is the special responsibility of those who claim them, though every one shall bear his own burden in God's moral government. But it is here in the second Epistle and in that of Jude and in the Revelation of John that the marked form of evil professors at the close is fully defined. It is a return to that materialism which abounded in the heathen that knew not God. Here it comes out in the naked infidelity of scoffers who sit in the seat of the scornful.

Scoffing was an evil sign in pagan Greece and Rome. Yet none can wonder that mockers should rise up like Lucian of Samosata when paganism was exposed in its falsehood, emptiness sad demoralisation under the revealed light of God. Again, when the Bible got read at the time of the Reformation, we are not surprised that natural men treated Catholic legends and traditions, and the decrees of the Popes with contempt, any more than that the unhallowed ribaldry broke out before, during, and since the French Revolution, against truth as well as error and fable in divine things. But here we are apprised of a dense dark cloud, far more widely spread, which would shut out the light of heaven, not merely on the gross licentious ways of evil men who taught for gain as in 2 Peter 2, but on others of philosophic mind, who might be generally correct in moral ways, but were beguiled into such an abandonment of truth, as we have already in Agnosticism, Positivism, and the like. They stand on phenomena, on things seen, on matter. God is

in none of their thoughts as a living reality, His word (if His word) of no account. Things continue as ever. This is the fixed law. All else is idea. God is, for such, an unknown God. These do not openly hate the name of the Lord Jesus, but like other incredulous men have no words too lofty to express their admiration of His life and ministry and death, quite apart from God's testimony to their own guilt and dire need to find redemption through His blood. But their dream of human progress is so judged and cut short by His return to judge the quick, that they all unite with open mouth to refuse and decry His return to judge the habitable earth. Hence their description here, as "proceeding according to their lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of His coming? for from the day that the fathers felt asleep, all things continue thus from beginning of creation."

This therefore is a distinct and solemn part of Christian testimony: not only the judgment of the wicked dead at the end of the world-kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, but that which will fall suddenly on men "as a thief by night" at the end of the age, while they cry, Peace and safety. The yet more awful judgment of the dead is comparatively distant; and men with little effort but extreme peril can put off all thought till a more convenient season. But for flesh and blood, it is intolerable to hear also of a judgment unsparing and universal to arrest the every-day interests of mankind, when sudden destruction comes upon them, as travail upon her that is with child. And He comes with the clouds, and every eye shall see Him, and they which pierced Him, and all the tribes of the earth shall wail because of Him. Where then will be the rock, the dust,

to hide man from Jehovah? For “man’s lofty looks shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men bowed down, and Jehovah alone shall be exalted in that day. And the idols shall utterly pass away.... In that day men shall cast away their idols of silver and their idols of gold, which they made [each] for himself to worship, to the moles and to the bats; to go into the clefts of the rooks, and into the fissures of the cliffs, from before the terror of Jehovah, and from the glory of His majesty, when He shall arise to terrify the earth” (Isaiah 2).

The corruption of the best is the worst corruption. It was an abomination in Israel. It is the apostasy in Christendom. The counsel of the ungodly in a moment comes to nought. The way of sinners is seen to be everlasting ruin. And what will it be to the seat of the mockers when their mocking is confronted with the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven with angels of His power? For He will appear in flaming fire taking vengeance on those that know not God, and those that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. As they shall pay the penalty of everlasting destruction from the Lord’s presence, and from the glory of His might, so He shall have come to be glorified in His saints and to be wondered at in all that believed in that day (2 Thess. 2).

Not only for these the heavenly saints will it be glory with Christ, but times of refreshing, for those who repent and are converted, both in Israel and in the nations on earth, will surely come from the Lord’s presence who sends the Anointed Jesus Who was fore-ordained for His people but now in heaven; but there are times of restoring all things of which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets since time began. So the apostle preached in Acts 3. It is clear therefore that this

word leaves no room for expecting the Holy Spirit as now working to bring in those times. The Spirit had just come for the gospel and the church; and He was in no way grieved and hindered and denied as He soon began to be. But ever increasing woes have been singe the apostles. But even then the apostle explicitly looks to God's sending the Lord Jesus again to bring in the day of earth's blessedness, and the nations rejoicing with Israel, no longer deaf and dumb, but the loudest in that united and continuous chorus of divine praise. Yet the sword, as we have seen, must inevitably clear the earth before Jehovah, Jah the Saviour, "shall be king over all the earth; in that day shall there be one Jehovah, and His name one."

Then too shall all the universe be put into divine harmony, according to Eph. 1:10-12. For it will then be the administration of the fulness of the fit times: to sum, or head up, all things in the Christ,. the things in the heavens and the things upon the earth: in Him in whom too we were given inheritance, being marked out beforehand according to purpose of Him who worketh all things according to the counsel of His own will, that we should be unto praise of His glory.

We have seen that the Holy Spirit lets us know one special trait of philosophic unbelief at the end of the days of nominal Christianity. Mockers with mocking, proceeding according to their own lusts' and saying, "Where is the promise of his coming? for from the day that the fathers fell asleep all things continue thus from creation's beginning."

It is not true. "For this escapeth their notice willingly, that by the word of God heavens were of old, and an

earth having its subsistence out of water and through water; by which [waters] the then world being overflowed with water perished" (vers. 5, 6). It is barefaced materialism which the light of Christ ought to have dispelled. Rather did the proclamation of grace encourage these unbelieving speculators to deny that judgment is imminent for living man upon the earth. The Jews were much less incredulous as to it than the nations, and themselves secured as being the seed of Abraham. Blind to their own sins, their prejudices conspired to read clearly what the Prophets wrote on the downfall of the world in general. Yet the Lord had already reversed all thought of immunity for the ungodly, whether Jew or Gentile. He had declared the universality of the judgment which He Himself would indict on the quick. For it is quite distinct from the judgment which awaits all the unbelieving dead whom He will raise for the purpose at the end of His world-kingdom. But the imminence of the judgment on the quick, Christendom has ever been too ready to put off, if not disbelieve, whatever the common creeds may say: what we wish not we readily forget.

The Lord had done more. In His great prophetic discourse on the Mount of Olives He had compared this very judgment of the quick to the days of the deluge.

"Watch therefore; for ye know not on what day your Lord doth come." It may be urged that He has the judgment of the Jews particularly before Him in these words, which manifestly apply not to the Roman siege of Jerusalem any more than to the judgment of the wicked in Rev. 19. But in Luke 17:29, and following verses, He refers to the days of Lot also, and thus gives it a bearing on the Gentiles too. Again in Luke 21:25-35 He directly

refers to the Gentiles also. For which reason He speaks not only of “the fig-tree” but of “all the trees,” and declares that “as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth.”

The stability of the earth therefore is a vain defence, even according to their own acquaintance with the known geologic facts from the time that the earth was first brought into being. There is abundant evidence to prove that it has passed through many phases of destruction, followed by renewal in the wise ways of God before man existed, and, in general, progressive in character. But when the earth was made in due time the suited sphere for Adam and his race, moral considerations entered. Not only did the earth become corrupt. and filled with violence, but a new violation of all order was perpetrated as in Gen. 6:1, 2, most abhorrent to God and deeper than any natural depravation, which was the immediate occasion of the deluge. Did these men, wise in their own eyes, never hear of the deluge? Hardly a country on earth but has traditions, more or less true, of that solemn dealing with the whole habitable earth, while God preserved in an ark Noah and his family, as well as of the lower creatures which otherwise had perished in the waters. They are therefore without excuse, for what else than the fact could give rise to a tradition so universal among the races of mankind, North, South, East and West? On their own ground it is irrational to pay no heed to an historical tradition which, though different in shape, was alike in substance over the world, that all things did not remain thus from creation’s beginning. Yet those who find pleasure in slighting God’s word are generally apt

to respect relics of the past which have prevailed everywhere.

How then can we account for this slight of so general a report among all the races of men? It is wilful ignorance. “For this willingly escapeth their notice that heavens were of old and an earth having its subsistence out of water and through water by the word of God; by means of which [waters] the then world being overflowed with water perished.” Here we have inspired scripture to set every doubt at rest for those that fear God. The stupendous fact is briefly attested to, the universal destruction of guilty man by the deluge, and this stripped of any local vanity, or of other human accessories; the moral fact is left in all its solemnity. In 1 Peter 3 much is made of the exceptional salvation effected by the ark which Noah was prophetically instructed to make; and this is also referred to in 2 Peter 2:5. Here too the catastrophe is cited to overthrow the alleged stability of nature.

But the passage before us is by some applied only to the earth’s primeval constitution, by others to the deluge. It is plain enough that the apostle looks successively at each. The All-wise God had so constituted it in case of need; and as the apostasy of the race required the drastic remedy, He applied it to destroy the old world. Could unbelief be more suicidal than to presume on its impossibility?

Notice the stress laid on the word of God here. The natural system must bend to His will. The fixed laws which even His enemies set up to block Him out of sight and hearing have over and over again bowed to His word, not only in a small sphere but on the largest scale.

It may repent Him of His work, when it rebels against Him and He interferes to reprove, punish and destroy. But His word He exalts above all His name. It is the expression of His mind, purpose and love, as well as His majesty in judgment.

With the deluge in the past there is analogy as well as contrast in the future. God is not mocked either way; but abuse of greater privilege will infallibly destroy the proud unbelief of the ungodly in the surest way.

“But the now heavens and the earth by the same word have been stored with fire, being kept for a day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men” (ver. 7).

The gospel is a question of faith, not only in the Son, but in the word of God, beyond whatever was in patriarchal days, or during the law, as well as in coming ages.

The displayed kingdom which the Lord Jesus will establish to His glory for a period longer than man ever attained when he lived longest, or even Christianity in practice, can only be in power where each is sanctified by the Father’s word, which is His word fully and finally revealed. Yet tradition, the great enemy of the word, never wrought in Israel so insidiously and widely and systematically as in Christendom to darken, undermine and pervert God’s word; and that in face of the Lord’s own denunciation in Matt. 15 and Mark 7, or by the words of Isaiah in a more burning indignation as became him.

But now there is a new school of deeper pride which disdains ancient tradition, deifies itself, and idolises the working of man’s mind in history and science, so foreign to the will of God and so dear to the world, even to the length of making it the judge of His written word. A

worse or more dangerous form of infidelity there is not nor ever was; it directly leads into the “apostasy” which the apostle of the Gentiles declares must be before the day of the Lord comes in judgment of living mankind. Its success among professors of Christianity intoxicates its votaries so that they are encouraged by its popularity to essay even more daring scepticism.

Here we see that the destruction of the early population of the earth was effected by the vast store of water God provided above and below to overwhelm man and beast save those preserved in the ark with Noah by His command. To this exceeding overflow the language of Gen. 7:11 points: “all the fountains of the great deep were broken up,” “and the windows (or, the flood gates) of heaven opened,” as on the other hand that of Gen. 8:2, when the assuagement set in.

Dealing with the outrageous depravity of that age was just when ignorance was as great. But as since the law, Christ’s coming, and the gospel to every creature, have made the responsibility of man immensely greater, so is his sin in rejection of the truth, and professing science, or ideas, that ignore sin as well as grace, and flatter pride in the progress of the first man whilst forgetting his guilt against the Second. How much sorer a doom awaits man, especially the Jew, and most of all Christendom, when treading under foot the Son of God, and treating the blood of the covenant as vain and unclean, and thus insulting the Spirit of grace! Such guilt beyond measure, through rejecting the only and absolutely righteous One and His propitiation, and the full revelation of grace and truth in Him who was true God and perfect man in one person, will have to face God’s extreme punishment by fire. And this is made

known in the words of the scripture before us, looking back on man visited of old by a deluge of water. “But the now heavens and the earth by the same word have been stored with fire, being kept for a day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.”

God has not left Himself without witness on a small scale of what He intends for the punishment of the ungodly who are willingly ignorant of His warning, and of their awful wickedness against His Son and the wondrous proclamation throughout all the world of life eternal and the forgiveness of their sins, through His death on the cross. The very book of Genesis records, not very long after the deluge, the destruction of the cities of the plain because of their enormous impurity, contrary to fallen nature itself. “Then Jehovah rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah, brimstone and fire from Jehovah out of heaven; and overthrew those cities and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities and that which grew upon the ground” (Gen. 19:24, 25).

Again, in Lev. 10 when Nadab and Abihu, sons of Aaron, were so heedless of the favour shown by the coming of fire out from before Jehovah to consume the burnt offering, and slighted it in the service of their own inauguration to the service of the sanctuary by putting common fire for burning the incense, “there went out fire from Jehovah and devoured them, and they died before Jehovah” (ver. 2). Jehovah will be sanctified in those who come nigh Him, and before all the people will He be glorified, as Moses told Aaron; “and Aaron held his peace.” It was not only the ungodly outside who must be shown that He is the witness and the Judge of evil, but those who approach Him cannot trifle with His sanctity save to their cost.

In Num. 11:1, when the people complained instead of acknowledging His justice, He was displeased and the fire of Jehovah burnt among them in the uttermost parts of the camp; and the people cried to Moses who prayed not in vain, and the fire was quenched. But they renewed their murmuring; and Jehovah, though He gave the flesh they lusted after, smote the people with a very great plague. It is Num. 16 which sets forth this solemn dealing with the gainsaying of Korah, which the epistle of Jude lets us know as the last and worst of the sinful developments reproduced in Christendom. “Woe to them! because they proceeded in the way of Cain, and were devoted to the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Korah.” For here it was ministry usurping the priesthood, and hence rebellion against the efficacious priesthood, as well as denying the Christian title of nearness to God. And what befell them? “And it came to pass as he had made an end of speaking all these words, that the ground crave asunder that was under them; and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up, and their houses, and all the men that appertained to Korah and all their goods. They and all that was theirs went down alive into the pit, and the earth closed upon them; and they perished from among the congregation. And all Israel that were round about them fled at the cry of them, for they said, Lest the earth swallow us up. And there came out a fire from Jehovah, and consumed the two hundred and fifty men that offered incense.” This is by no means all that the O.T. offers on the subject, but it is ample for the proof that from the beginning a still more tremendous destruction by fire in a day both at its opening and at its close is plainly revealed as the way in which the wrath of God will be against the ungodly before the great

white throne, and the resurrection for judgment described in Rev. 20:2-15. Isaiah 9:5 and Isaiah 66:15, 16, are as clear proofs as 2 Thess. 1:8, that the day of the Lord will open with fury and destruction on the wicked, discriminatingly and not as a providential judgment.

The phrase “the new heavens and the new earth” is borrowed from 65:17, Isaiah 66:22. But there, it is the principle as applied to Jerusalem and the land in the future kingdom, rather than its full character which follows. This is clear from the prophet’s explanation which indicates its realisation in the chosen land and people, “But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in what I create; for behold I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy, and I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people; and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying. There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days; for the child shall die a hundred years old; but the sinner a hundred years old shall be accursed. And they shall build houses and inhabit [them], and they shall plant vineyards and eat the fruit of them. They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for as the days of a tree [are] the days of my people, and mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labour in vain, nor bring forth for trouble; for they [are] the seed of the blessed of Jehovah, and their offspring with them. And it shall come to pass that before they call, I will answer, and while they are yet speaking, I will hear. The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock; and dust [shall be] the

serpent's meat. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith Jehovah."

It is plain that the prophet sees in the vast change when Messiah reigns in power, the introduction and sure pledge of the new heavens and earth, rather than the absolute fulfilment. Rev. 21:1-8 makes this evident and certain; for here is no more an earthly Jerusalem nor a people in flesh such as Isaiah describes; no infant of days to die, no more curse to be executed. Neither will building take place, nor planting; nor again labour however blessed, nor bringing forth for joy any more than trouble. In the eternal scene all will be praise and worship at God's counsels fulfilled to the utmost, and for the defiance of God its righteous punishment for ever. It is in the future kingdom over the earth that the wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and there the lion shall eat straw like the bullock, and there that dust shall be the serpent's meat as the solitary mark of degradation. But in the full and eternal sense of the new heavens and new earth these creatures are found no more: only the holy city, new Jerusalem, prepared as a bride for her husband, as before the kingdom in power, so after it to all eternity, and outside it redeemed men with it shall tabernacle when God shall tabernacle with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, their God.

These are the two extreme points of view, the prophet of Israel though giving the glorious prospect, dwelling only on its initiatory application to Jerusalem and the land and the people. Equally seasonable is the beloved disciple's vision, at the end even of the wondrous age and world to come, of the end in its full sense when even a dispensation of glory with the Son of God and Son of

man reigning over the universe closes the proof that such a reign fails, as did His coming in the grace of all His humiliation among men to God's glory, as man left to do his will showed. But He really and everywhere triumphed over the enemy and the race which distrusted God and was misled to everlasting ruin in despising Christ. And the teaching of Peter holds a wide way as became the chief apostle of the circumcision writing to Christians who had been Jews. For he embraces the beginning and the ending of the day of Jehovah as the transition link between Isaiah and John. That such a view is according to the spirit of scripture may be made plain by "new creation" as applied by the apostle Paul in 2 Cor. 5:17: "so if any one [be] in Christ, [there is] a new creation." Yet it is but the risen life in the soul. Only when we are changed into conformity to the body of Christ's glory will it be fulfilled in its entirety.

[Left unfinished by the Author's death].

14 The uncials give

ὑμῶν, the cursives

ἡμῶν as in the ordinary text It does not Seem that any of the ancient versions support the former. No doubt the peculiarity of the phrase accounts for this. But we may be assured that, as it is overwhelmingly attested. so we do well to receive it, and learn the special ground for the unusual expression. It was a reminder of their near and dear relation to Christians.