Exposition of the Epistle of James

William Kelly

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Exposition of the Epistle of James

With a translation of an amended text.

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Editor’s Preface

This Exposition of the Epistle General of James was written, and appeared in serial form, some fourteen years ago. It is now for the first time presented complete in one volume, with a translation of an amended text as rendered by the author, prefixed, for the more ready convenience of the reader.

It is hoped that the work as now published may find access to a yet larger body of readers than was reached by the long-known Monthly in which it originally saw the light. That it may, in the goodness of God, be graciously used of Him to the better understanding of this portion of Holy Scripture is the earnest prayer of the Editor!

London, October, 1913

Introduction

The Epistle by the title as well as by its contents proclaims its peculiarity. It addresses the twelve tribes that were in the dispersion, not the elect strangers of the dispersion, but the mass of the old people of Jehovah. Nor is this quite unexampled even in the apostle Paul’s feeling and phrase; for on the occasion of his speech before king Agrippa and Festus the procurator of Judæa he speaks of “our twelve tribes, earnestly serving day and night,” hoping to attain to the

promise made by God unto the fathers (Acts 26). There is thus, as has been remarked, a striking counterpart between the Old and N.T. in this, that one book in the New is devoted as a testimony to Israel, as one in the Old (Jonah) is devoted similarly to the great Gentile city of that day (Nineveh), both exceptional and proving the rule.

Hence only is accounted for in this Epistle appeal (James 4:1, 4, 9; James 5:1-6) to unbelievers in Christ or unconverted Jews, interspersed with addresses to those Jews who did believe (James 2:1, 5, 14; James 3:1, 13, 17; James 5:7, 8). There is no ambiguity as to his own confession of the Messiah. From the very first verse of the Epistle he announces himself bondman not more of God than of the Lord Jesus Christ; and he begins with the blessedness of enduring trial or holy temptation in a way that applies clearly to Christian Jews, while he proceeds to warn against sins which go beyond the faithful to mere profession in chap. 2 and afterwards farther still.

As a whole the Epistle consists of exhortation from beginning to end; even its doctrine bears closely on moral ways, as in James 1:13-15, 16-21; James 3:5-8, 15-18. James is pre-eminently a teacher of righteousness; and was used of God in Jerusalem to meet the transition state between the old state that was about to close and the Christianity that was known more simply and fully among Gentiles. Accordingly his teaching, though as truly inspired of God as that of Paul, does not develop redemption in itself, its source, its objects, or its effects, but connects itself with the new birth, and the life we have from God by the word of

truth, as opposed to outbreaks of temper and tongue which are the workings of fallen nature.

For this reason no one brings out more clearly than James “the law of liberty” (James 1:25; James 2:12), which is indeed his own phrase, in evident contrast with letter and its bondage. This, we shall see, supposes the new life which God’s grace gives the believer, and which finds its pleasure in the things which please Him as shown in His word.

Nor is there the smallest excuse for imagining discrepancy between the teaching of Romans 3, 4, and James 2 on faith, however common the idea was of old as it is now. The object before each writer is wholly different. The apostle Paul unfolds to the Roman saints how an ungodly man is justified, and declares that it is by faith. The apostle James lays down to the twelve tribes that a dead faith, destitute of works, is vain, and that the only faith of real account is that which is displayed in ways which glorify God. Living faith produces living works. He is exposing the worthlessness of an intellectual reception of the gospel, which had even then grown up among the Jews. We see the same principle during our Lord’s ministry, and His repudiation of such faith. See John 2:23-25; John 6:66; John 15. Nor is the self-same truth lacking even in the Epistle to the Romans, as in Rom. 1:18 (latter half), and also Rom. 2:5-11. He is destitute of living faith who does not walk in the ways, and by the word and Spirit, of God. “For if ye live after the flesh, ye must die; but if by the Spirit ye mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live” (Rom. 8:13). So thoroughly is the great apostle of the Gentiles at one with this pillar of the circumcision, when the occasion of a godly walk calls for notice in the very Epistle which

ignorant haste conceives to stand opposed. All the truth of God is in harmony, whether doctrinal, or ethical as this Epistle is eminently.

It may be well to add that, whatever the doubts of Alford, Neander and others, the writer was no other than James “the little,” son of Alphaeus or Clopas (really the same Aramaic name rendered into Greek somewhat differently)*: the same man who took the lead after the martyrdom of the son of Zebedee, as is plain in the Acts (Acts 12:17; Acts 15:13; Acts 21:18). Compare 1 Cor. 15:7, and Gal. 2:9, 12. His words and ways elsewhere are strikingly in agreement with his letter. Patience and purity, love and lowliness, characterise the apostle and his writing for the sphere he laboured in. It is remarkable that his language, and style, consist of excellent Greek with great energy. But the work given him in the Lord was, not to unfold divine counsels or to insist on redemption, but the urgent assertion of the moral consistency day by day, in affection, speech, and ways, of those who are called to endure patiently the various temptations of this world. This becomes such men as look for the crown of life, being already begotten of God by the word of truth according to His sovereign will.

James 1

The title taken by the writer deserves our consideration: “James, bondman of God and of [the] Lord Jesus Christ.” It expressed his absolute devotedness to God as well as to the Lord Jesus Christ. He was bondman of both equally. He honoured the Son even as he honoured the Father. He avowed from the beginning his unqualified subjection to both. This was just what was most needed

by the Israelites to whom he wrote. He sought the everlasting good of them all, as the style of his address attested: “to the twelve tribes that [are] in the dispersion, greeting” (ver. 1). The last word reminds us that it is in the letter which the apostles and elders with the whole assembly sent to the brethren from among the nations in defence of Christian liberty (Acts 15). But here the letter is directed only to the ancient people of God in their entirety, now a long while in a state of dispersion. For the return from Babylon had not hindered this, as only a small minority had returned from their exile. To all the twelve tribes he wrote, as being of the circumcision, even more widely than did Peter when he addressed his two Epistles to the sojourners in Asia Minor. For he qualified it by terms of vital Christianity, “elect according to foreknowledge of God the Father, by sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.” No such restriction appears here, though James without reserve confesses his own self-abnegating service of the Lord Jesus Christ no less than of God, and specifies living faith in Him among those to whom he writes.

But the Epistle is characteristically moral and hortative, not basing its appeals as the apostles in general did on an unfolding of grace and truth, so much as revealing by the way now and then the sovereign goodness that comes down from above, from the Father of lights, Who alone is reliable in a world of incessant change, and has quickened us by the word of truth, and has promised the crown of life to them that love Him.

Hence it opens with a cheering call to such as were in danger of being faint-hearted and cast down by their trials. The Jews naturally looked for outward marks of

divine favour; yet psalms and prophets revealed deeper things. James goes farther still.

“Count [it] all joy, my brethren, when ye fall into various temptations, knowing that the proving of your faith worketh out endurance; but let endurance have a perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, lacking in nothing” (vers. 2-4).

It is the counterpart of our Lord’s beatitudes in Matthew 5. For the blessed in His eyes and mouth are, not only of no account in the world, but sufferers from it for righteousness’ sake, and for Christ’s, poor in spirit, meek, mourners, hungerers after righteousness, merciful, and more. They are called to rejoice and exult, for great is their reward in heaven. So here, “count it all joy, my brethren, when ye fall into various temptations.” In this world of sin and ruin, God not only works in grace but carries on a discipline of souls, and turns trials of all sorts into an occasion of blessing for all that own Him and seek His guidance. Selfwill hardens itself against each trial, or yields to discouragement and even despair. Faith recognises the love that never changes, and judges the self that resists His will or despises His word; and, as faith bows submissively, it reaps profit, and grows by the knowledge of Him.

Hence is the believer entitled and emboldened to think it every sort of joy whensoever he falls into varied trials, as indeed they may be of all kinds. It is not that Christians are exempt from sorrow — far from it, or that we should not feel the sorrow, any more than forget God’s grace. Thus the trial throws us back on Him without Whom not a sparrow falls on the ground and by Whom the very hairs of our head are all numbered.

Affliction comes not forth of the dust, nor does trouble spring out of the ground. All is under His hand Who has made us His for glory, and meanwhile puts our faith to the test in this present evil age, habituating us not only to patience but to endurance.

So it was that Christ walked here below, leaving us an example that we should follow His steps. His meat was to do the will of Him that sent Him and to accomplish His work; His joy was in His love and the glorious counsels which He knew, and which will soon be the manifest issue. He indeed endured the cross, as was only possible to Him; but He suffered all through in a way proper to Himself, and learned obedience through it (for before, He had only commanded); yet what was not His joy, man of sorrows though He was and acquainted with grief beyond all others! He could and did upbraid the cities wherein most of His mighty works were done, because they repented not; for their guilt was worse than the worst judged of old. But at that season it was that He answered and said, “I praise thee [I confess to Thee], Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou didst hide these things from wise and prudent, and didst reveal them to babes: yea, Father, for thus it was well-pleasing in Thy sight...Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest for your souls.”

Here, too, the ground of joy in sorrow is explained, knowing that the proving of our faith worketh out endurance, as the apostle in Rom. 5:4 speaks of the saints “knowing that tribulation worketh out endurance.” Both are equally true; but it is plain that tribulation could produce no such effect unless there was the faith that stood the test. And such was his

prayer for the Colossians that they might be "strengthened with all power according to the might of His glory unto all endurance and long-suffering with joy." The character of the inspired writings may differ ever so much in suitability to God's design in each; but there is unity of spirit also beyond all doubt in His revealed mind. He cannot deny Himself.

There is an important caution added. "But let endurance have a perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, lacking in nothing." The contrast of this we see in Saul, king of Israel, who did not wait out the full time and lost the kingdom (1 Sam. 14). Even in David we see failure of endurance when, fleeing from Saul, he sought Achish in Gath (1 Sam. 27-29). Christ alone was perfect in this as in all else. Endurance has a perfect work, when we judge our own will and await God's. Then and thus only are we perfect and entire, deficient in nothing. It cannot contradict James 3:2 for all that.

When a soul has fairly entered on the path of trials, which faith never fails to experience in a world departed from God, he soon finds his lack of wisdom. But his comfort is that He with Whom he has to do is alone wise, and ready to guide those that wait on Him. How much better it is that wisdom should be in Him that we may be dependent on His guidance, than if it were a possession vested in us, exposed to the danger of our setting up to do without Him! Therefore comes the exhortation to pray (cf. Luke 18:1); for our need is all the greater because we are God's children in a world where all is opposed to God. "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God that giveth to all freely and reproacheth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing doubting. For he that doubteth is like a wave of the sea

wind-driven and tossed (for let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord): a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways" (vers 5-8).

It is of the essence of the new nature that the believer has to live in dependence on God, and to find its present exercise in the midst of trials by cultivating that confidence in Him which finds its proper expression in prayer. Hence it is that, if any one becomes sensible of deficient wisdom in presence of the many difficulties of this life, he is directed to ask of God that gives to all freely and upbraids not. How full of cheer and re-assurance! Even Christ, Himself God's wisdom, habitually waited on God, prayed at all times where men least look for it, and spent the night in prayer when the occasion called for it. If He then Who never lacked wisdom so lived, how much should we be ashamed of our failure in so drawing near to God and drawing from Him what He so readily gives!

The expression employed to encourage us is striking. He "giveth to all freely and reproacheth not." Wisdom no doubt is primarily what is sought, as it is in our trials peculiarly requisite; but the Holy Spirit is pleased to enlarge our expectation, that we may know better "the giving God," "the unreproaching God." And a word is used here to characterise Him, to which the apostle Paul exhorts the Christian in his giving (Rom. 12:8): "He that giveth, in simplicity." For how often do mixed motives seek entrance into the heart in giving! Liking rather than love here, dislike hindering there, self-importance, regard for character, sympathy with others on the one hand, and on the other prudential or unbelieving fear under questionable pleas. Hence the call on the giver among us to give with simplicity. Singleness of eye here

as elsewhere promotes love, as it ensures light; and the issue is liberality. And so the various English versions agree, from Wiclif to the Authorised. For both Wiclif and Purvey give the primary meaning “in simpleness,” Tyndale, Cranmer, and the Geneva, “with singleness”; Rheims “in simplicity,” and the Auth. “with simplicity.” Again, Wiclif, and the Wiclifite have in our text “largeli,” Tyndale and Cranmer “indifferently,” Geneva “freely,” Rheims “abundantly,” and the Auth. “liberally”: all of them a secondary meaning. Of these “freely” seems to suit God best, as flowing readily from the primary force which hardly befits Him, while it well becomes us. And it may be added that these respective meanings are in excellent keeping with the writers; of whom Paul looks at the inner source, James rather at the result.

That God in giving freely does not reproach the receiver is no small favour. How often in man’s case the fact is, that the grace is accompanied with such a drawback express or implied! God acts worthily of Himself Who is good.

But if a petition is thus freely and graciously given of God to him that asks, there is the requisite condition, “let him ask in faith, nothing doubting.” God will be enquired of suitably; and the least of all does it become man, so favoured, to fail or to doubt in anything. “He that spared not His own Son but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not also with Him freely give us all things?” Even in the very trials which are most painful — “in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us.”

“For he that doubteth is like a wave of the sea wind-driven and tossed (for let not that man think that he

shall receive anything of the Lord): a double minded man, unstable in all his ways." Here is the contrast, alas! not uncommon even of old. Collectively "surge" is a known sense of the word rendered "wave," which is not the ordinary term (κῦμα) though this occurs repeatedly in the N.T. It is rather a billow singly, but here the sport of winds to and fro. How could it be otherwise in him who in his weakness does not lean on the Lord? Whatever may be given, there is no real receiving from the Lord on his part who does not trust Him. If in one way he speaks, in another he feels and acts, being of double soul. Instability marks all his course. Is not God ashamed to own such a one? (Heb. 11:16).

There is indeed no excuse, for him that confesses the Lord Jesus Christ, to be a double-souled man. Without the knowledge of Him a man may easily be unstable in all his ways; and it is no real credit to him if he be firm in the pursuit of self, braving trial instead of bowing to God with profit and joy to his soul. Christ alone is the true measure of all; and such was His manifestation here below in absolute superiority not only to every circumstance but to all evil. He and He only was the Faithful Witness. In Christ is God's secret of stedfastness for man in a world of sin. And there is more, yea all, in Him to fill the heart with joy and give needed wisdom.

"But let the lowly brother glory in his elevation, and the rich in his humiliation, because as flower of grass he will pass away. For the sun arose with its scorching and withered the grass, and its flower fell away, and the comeliness of its look perished: thus also will the rich one fade in his goings. Blest [is] a man who endureth trial; because, having been put to the proof, he shall

receive the crown of life which He promised to those that love Him" (vers. 9-12), Here again it is Christ Who alone sheds the full light of God on the inequalities of position on the earth, and turns them into a ground not of acquiescence only, but of pleasing God in exercising suitably the new nature. In the world covetousness is the universal idolatry, and mammon its idol. And the Jew fell under a similar condition readily, as he looked for blessings on his obedience, in the city and in the field, in the family and in the flock, in the basket and in the kneading trough. But the day is coming when God will put down all evil, stilling the roaring of the seas and the tumult of the peoples, and lifting Israel out of their low estate, when at the feet of Messiah they truly own the God of their salvation. Then will the outgoings of the morning and evening rejoice, when God visits the earth and waters, when He crowns the years with His goodness, and His paths drop fatness, and the hills are girded with joy, and the valleys, covered over with corn, shout for joy and sing.

For God will have blessed Israel then, and thenceforward will for ever bless them, and all the ends of the earth shall fear Him. It will be the day, not of man, but of Jehovah, when a king shall reign in righteousness and princes shall rule in judgment, Jehovah (yet Man) the judge, Jehovah the lawgiver, Jehovah the king, when the inhabitants of His land shall not say, I am sick, for the people dwelling therein shall be forgiven their iniquity. Yea, the wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose. It shall blossom abundantly and rejoice even with joy and singing: the glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon. And no wonder:

for they shall see the glory of Jehovah, the excellency of our God. And Jehovah will answer the heavens, and they the earth; and the earth the corn and the wine and the oil; and they Jezreel. And Jehovah will sow her to Him in the land, and will have mercy on her that had not obtained mercy, and will say to Lo-Ammi [not My-people], My-people thou, and they shall say, My-God.

But now the Holy Spirit, sent from heaven, is bearing witness to the church in one way, to the world in another. Christ is not ruling, as He will in power and glory during the age to come. It is the present evil age, out of which Christ, having given Himself for our sins, is delivering us who believe and constituting us members of His body for heavenly glory. We shall be displayed with Him on high when that day dawns on the earth. Thus, being called into God's marvellous light, it is our privilege to have the mind of Christ, and judge all things according to God in this scene of confusion.

Hence the lowly brother can glory in his elevation, for the glorified Christ is not ashamed to call him brother; and the rich one can glory in his humiliation, in fellowship with Him Who emptied and humbled Himself to the death of the cross. Whatever our natural place, we are now by grace not of the world as Christ is not. Thus we are enabled to read glory in the humblest believer; the wealthy and honourable can write nothingness on what the flesh values highly. For indeed as the Lord said, That which is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God (Luke 16:15). Truly and beautifully is the evanescence of all that men think great and stable, here compared to the fleeting bloom of grass, put in the past tense of transiency: as the Lord put his case who abides not in Him (John 15:6). So

certain is the passing away of that which flows not from life in Him. As flower of grass perishes before the scorching heat of the sun, “thus also will the rich one fade in his goings.” What is surer, or sooner forgotten?

From this parenthetical comparison in vers. 9-11 we return to a kind of summary of the previous exhortation; and happy is pronounced a men who endures trial. So it was with men of marked faith of old, Job, Abraham, David, and the prophets; so it is now for every believer, and made plain by Him Who endured more than all, and as He alone could. And what an encouragement in the path of trial for him whom grace has called! “Because, having been put to proof [or approved], he shall receive the crown of life, which He promised to those that love Him.” Faith receives the word of God that reveals God’s holy love in giving us a divine Saviour Who died for our sins; and we love Him Who first loved us; but also how sweet while pilgrims and strangers to have so cheering a promise in the trial we endure! The new nature is exercised in trial and drawn out in its affections by God’s love, and becomes more conversant with the things above and the coming glory.

There is another class of trials, with which souls are everywhere conversant in Christendom, even though they know but little of the blessed ones, which our Epistle heretofore has brought before us. It is ridiculous to deny the evident distinction. How could it be said, Count it all joy, when ye fall into various temptations in the form of inward lusts? or, blessed is the man that endures solicitations to evil from his corrupt nature? We have already seen that thus far the trials are from without. Our Lord knew then not only as do others, His saints, but beyond any, as we hear not only in the three

earlier Gospels, but in Heb. 2:18; Heb. 4:15, where it is expressly treated for our consolation, yet with the all-important reserve, “apart from sin.” He was tempted in all things in like manner, without sin, not without sins or sinning, but sin excepted. Of sinful temptation He knew nothing, for in Him was no sin. His nature as born of Mary was holy. It was so constituted from the womb; and therefore it was said by the angel Gabriel, “The holy thing which shall be born shall be called the Son of God.”

But the believer, though born of God, has another principle — what the apostle calls “the flesh,” which is not subject to the law of God, for neither can it be. Its mind is enmity against God. Not that the Christian is excusable if he allow it to act, now that he has a new life, and the Holy Spirit also given to dwell in him expressly that he may in no way fulfil flesh’s lust but oppose it, and not do the things which he naturally desires. For “the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control: against such things there is no law. But they that are of Christ Jesus crucified the flesh with its passions and its lusts.”

From this, our naturally deplorable state, the person of our Lord Jesus was wholly exempt. He was the Holy One of God. Even the demons owned Him thus, though men are not wanting who have dared to blaspheme His moral glory by imputing to Him the same fallen nature with its proclivities as we have. And such as thus lower His person are only too consistent with that fundamental error by obscuring or even annulling the true sense and power of His atonement, thus in their ignorance and unbelief humanising alike His person and His work. It is

the working of the antichrist, of which we have heard that it comes, and now it is already in the world; nor is any error more dishonouring to God or more deadly to man. It is the more dangerous because with it is often mingled a good deal of truth apparently in advance of what is commonly known, which some perceiving are enticed to accept the error. But no lie is of the truth; and no lie more sure or evil than that which denies the Christ, the Son of God.

It is blessedly true that Christ died to sin once for all; but this was not for Himself but for us who had sin in the flesh. To teach that Christ could say till the resurrection, Not I but sin that dwelleth in me, is apostasy from the truth, and is Satan's enmity to it, in order to degrade His person and to exalt ours; also to insinuate that sin in the flesh was conquered in Him as it may be in us, instead of being condemned in Him made sin. Never therefore is it, nor could it be, said, that the Lord mortified His members that were on the earth, never that He reckoned Himself dead to sin and alive to God. Precious as all this or more is for the Christian, it would be to the last degree false and derogatory to Him Who knew no sin but was made sin for us.

The Epistle then turns from our holy trials to our unholy ones, and shows their source to be, not in God, but in sinful man. "Let none when tempted say, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted by evils, and himself tempteth none. But each is tempted when by his own lust drawn away and enticed; then lust having conceived bringeth forth sin; and sin when completed giveth birth to death" (vers. 13-15).

The distinctness is evident when we read on the one hand that God tempted or tried Abraham (Gen. 22:1, and Heb. 11:17), and on the other that Israel tempted God (Ps. 78:18, 41, 56, compared with Ex. 17:7). Never does God tempt any one to evil, but He may and does so bring out their faith and fidelity; but it is alas! too sadly common for His people to tempt Him by doubts of His mercy and active care. Hence the word in Deut. 6 16, "Ye shall not tempt Jehovah your God," the Lord's answer to the devil suggesting that He should cast Himself down from the pinnacle of the temple on the strength of Ps. 91:11. But the Lord utterly refuses to test God, as if His protection were doubtful in the path of obedience. God is not to be tempted by evils, any more than He so tempts.

The evil temptation comes from within man, though Satan may act on him, for he ever evilly tempts to evil. So it was man at the beginning was tempted when his nature was not evil; but instead of repelling it as the Lord did, he allowed and received it; so that henceforth the race was contaminated like its fallen head. The precise contrast is seen in Christ, to Whom the prince of the world came at the end, and had nothing in Him then any more than when first tempted. But it is wholly different with us, conceived in sin and shapen in iniquity as we are naturally, though now by grace born anew. Therefore have we an altogether distinct class and character of temptation, which the Lord had not, as incompatible with His person as with His work. In Him was no lusting against the Spirit, no contrariety in Him, because He was, as no one else could be, the Holy One of God. The Word became flesh (John 1:14). Incarnation was true of Him, but of Him alone. But the believer,

though having life in the Son, has the fallen nature, and hence is liable to evil temptation.

“But each is tempted when by his own lust drawn away and enticed.” The Lord though tempted in all points similarly could not be in this way, because it would have denied and destroyed His moral glory, and it would have frustrated the purpose of God in saving us to His glory. That the Lord was in like manner tempted in all things has this immense limitation, “sin excepted,” not sinning only in fact, which is true of course, but “sin” in the nature from which He was absolutely exempt He had not and could not have such evil temptations from a corrupt nature, because His was expressly holy. There was no lust of His own to draw away or allure. Evil suggestion from without He therefore uniformly rejected with indignation, even if an honoured apostle, shocked at the suffering before Him as inconsistent to his mind and feeling with His glory, repudiated His death and such a death as an impossibility, and received rebuke stern beyond example. With the believer too often is it likewise, when like Peter his mind is not on the things of God but on those of men. Christ sought His Father’s glory, and unrighteousness was not in Him, but He did always the things pleasing to Him. Self-will there was none. He was come to do God’s will, and did it perfectly and at all cost.

Far different is the saint when thus off his guard and ceasing ever so little from dependence on God. “Then lust, having conceived, bringeth forth sin; and sin, when completed, giveth birth to death.” How graphic and true! But it is the strict line of James who looks at the moral effects,” and does not occupy himself or the reader with that deep sounding of “causes” which we

find in the Epistles of Paul. It is scarce needed to say that both views are invaluable, and alike given by inspiration.

There is no small danger of error on the subject of man's nature as it is, and the new nature which the believer receives by grace. Mistakes abound to this day, as they ever have since very early days. How many speak of the original Adamic state as holy? It was merely one of innocence, which was lost at the fall irrecoverably. Through the word applied by the Spirit in the faith of Christ we become partakers of a divine nature. It is not restoration to the primeval creature estate, but an incomparably better life in Christ the Son of God, the ground of fellowship with the Father and the Son, and of a holy walk with God. Christ Himself and alone was the manifestation of this eternal life on earth; and chosen witnesses were given to see and hear and come into the closest contact with Him, and enabled to bear witness by inspiration that we too might have fellowship with them. Never was there such intimacy, never such testing, never such scrutiny, that we might behold and know life eternal in every variety of circumstances, in the simplest as well as the most profound here below; and this is the life we have in Him.

But while we have in Christ an incomparably higher and sure standing, there is the effect of the fall in our old nature which abides for the present life with its lusts which Adam innocent had not. It is not a change merely, but a new life never possessed before. The disciples were born of water and the Spirit; and what is so born is "spirit," not flesh improved, changed, or annihilated. They were purged already because of the word which Christ had spoken to them before the gift of the Holy

Ghost in power at Pentecost. The heart is purified by faith, yet there is a new life, life eternal, given in Christ; and there is progress and growth through the truth. But besides, we are in Christ, and freed from all condemnation, as we are purged by His blood from our sins once for all. Our being perfected in perpetuity (Heb. 10) is true of all Christians, as it is by His one offering in Whom and in which we believe. The notion of an attained state where no lusts work for a few superior souls is a mere delusion; it is the real unholiness of denying sin in them and excusing evil because the will does not consent. The apostles Paul and John are no less opposed to the dream than James, though he is occupied with the process and result, rather than with its origin and spring as they.

“Do not err, my beloved brethren. Every good giving and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom can be no variation nor shadow of turning. Having purposed He begot us by the word of truth, that we should be a certain first-fruits of his creatures” (vers. 16-18).

Men’s thoughts being so far from the truth, as it is a subject altogether beyond his mind, we are the more bound to see that we be not misled, but subject to scripture. Here there is no obscurity, but all is light; for God is light, and His love has communicated all that we need to know. As man’s nature is defiled and sinful, the God (Whom we know by faith and with Whom grace has given us the nearest relationship) is good. He cannot be tempted by evil and tempts none in this way. He is so absolutely good that our Lord laid down that none is good save one, God: not of course as Himself disclaiming

it if owned as God, but refusing it from him who saw no more than humanity in Him.

But God is much more; He is the source of all good. He gives freely and fully to those who were evil and enemies. So we are here told that “every good giving and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights.” In Him is no darkness at all; in the world it is so dense that, though Christ His Son was here, the true Light, and shining in the darkness, the darkness comprehended it not: so much did moral darkness exceed the natural which is dispelled by natural light. It is humbling that man, with all his boasting, should be proved thus evil. But Christ solved the difficulty, the giver of a life in Himself risen from the dead, after being made sin to annul it righteously. Thus of His will or purpose (for nothing was more remote from man or more opposed to his will) did God beget us.

There is another consideration added, full of comfort. The greater the blessing, the more is the sorrow if it be exposed to loss or change. Now in our relationship with God we are assured that the goodness displayed suffers no diminution, nor eclipse. Even the greater light that rules the day, which men adored early and long, the bright orb of the sun to which they applied the epithet here predicated of our God, is liable to the variations of nature all day long, and is the salient example, in its apparent motions, of shadow that is cast by turning. But it is not so, as here declared, with the Father of lights, Whose unchangeableness is as perfect as His goodness, and His goodness to us who deserved nothing less, still in our weakness, and still in a world of evil.

But His purpose is to have the world governed righteously. This cannot be according to God till His Son, the Lord Jesus come forth to make good the kingdom, the world-kingdom in power and glory; as He has already vindicated His God and Father in obedience and suffering that He might save to the uttermost. Of this the Old Testament prophets have spoken amply, and the New Testament reiterates the truth in all plainness of speech, as it shows also the more distant and glorious vista, when all evil shall be done away and the new heavens and a new earth shall be, not in measure and pledge only, but in fulness. For government shall yield to everlasting righteousness dwelling in unbreakable peace, after all judgment is executed by Him to Whom it is given. Of this we are a certain first-fruits already, for we are begotten by the word of truth, and this nature is holy. But there is another which we ought never to ignore, and which, if not judged, breaks out into sins; so that, till we are changed at Christ's coming, we can only be called "a certain first-fruits." We follow Christ's steps and ought to walk as He walked; but we shall be like Him when we see Him as He is.

The critical correction which opens verse 19 rests not only on excellent authority, but on internal evidence of no small weight; while the common reading followed by the A.V. seems a rather obvious change of transcribers who failed to apprehend the force of the verb here.

"Ye know [it], my brethren beloved; but let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for man's wrath worketh not God's righteousness" (vers. 19, 20).

It is characteristic of Christianity to know not only the privileges and experience of saints but the depths of

God, as we are told in 1 Cor. 2:10, and not simply as revealed objectively, but in inward spiritual consciousness, as being born of God and thus having a new nature derived of Him. Of this we were fully told in the verse before; and, as knowing it, we have important consequences now urged on us. It is not that saints of old were destitute of that nature, as answering to faith which is the ground of all divine affections and of everything that pleases God in holy conduct. But it would be difficult to find, throughout the Law, the Psalms, and the Prophets, so simple an enunciation of it as our Epistle lays down; and this not as a novel communication to those addressed, but as a truth so known to them that there was no need of enforcing the fact or enlarging on its importance. We are therefore led at once to weighty practical results.

Others were given to set forth the work of redemption in Christ, or His personal glory, which are outside the believer and of all moment for purging the conscience and filling the heart. But it was the place of James writing to those peculiarly liable to be content with objects of sight only, to instruct in that interior dealing with the heart which is no less essential to the Christian, and secured to faith, both by a life given in Christ and by the gift of the Holy Spirit consequent on His blood-shedding and ascension. Here James had taught them in the clearest terms, that of His own purpose God gave us birth by the word of truth. So in the Fourth Gospel the apostle told us that “as many as received Him (Christ), to them gave He title to become children of God, even to them that believe on His name: who were born, not of blood nor of flesh’s will, nor of man’s will, but of God.” It is inexcusable to mistake so plain an intimation, or (if

seen) to lower its importance. The believer has already this new life, knows it, and is called to manifest it accordingly. Christianity is not only the revelation of a Lord and Saviour not less truly divine than the Father, but this inseparably from a new nature now imparted to the believer, who is responsible to walk suitably in the practical exercise of that life.

The exhortation therefore here is: “let every man be swift to hear.” Christ Himself is the model of this, as of all else that is good. Though the Holy One of God, never was any so swift to hear God’s word. So the prophet distinguished Him, “The Lord Jehovah hath given me the tongue of them that are taught, that I should know how to speak a word to him that is weary. He wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as they that are taught. The Lord Jehovah hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away backward.” Nor was it, otherwise with His bearing in presence of the tempter: the word of God was His constant resource, and only the more if Satan perverted it. “It is written again” was His lowly God-honouring answer. And so it is, and has ever been, with His sheep. They hear His voice, and follow Him; they know not the voice of strangers.

The word of truth abides in its value. By it they were begotten of God; by it the new life is fed, formed, directed, and strengthened. All the written word is prized as well as authoritative; but for special instructions God has been pleased to furnish those communications we call the New Testament. If we rightly heed all scripture, we assuredly shall welcome every word that explains the new life and its duties, and His glory and grace Who is its spring and fulness.

But we are told also to be “slow to speak.” For we have another nature which is self-confident and impulsive; and there do we need to be on our guard, that, knowing ourselves weak, ignorant, and naturally prone to evil, we may look up to God and wait dependently on Him. As born of Him, it is ours to be jealous that we may neither misrepresent nor grieve Him. And therefore are we warned of another danger, when it is added “slow to wrath.” How often it is impotent and hasty self-will! We are now sanctified to do His will, to obey as Christ obeyed. There is of course a right occasion for wrath. So the Lord looked round about on those that misused the sabbath to oppose God’s grace in an evil world. But we are exhorted to be slow to wrath, and to let it soon be over. “Be ye angry and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath; neither give place to the devil” (Eph. 4:26, 27).

A weighty reason is added which calls for explanation, because the similarity of phrase might lead the hasty to confound it with the well known but little understood language of the apostle Paul. The two writers can only be rightly appreciated by giving due weight to their respective aims. In Romans and elsewhere in that apostle’s writings, it is God’s consistency with what is due to Christ’s work in redemption. God therefore justifies him that believes in Jesus according to the value of His atoneing death in His sight; and so we are made (or become) that righteousness in Him risen and ascended. But James is occupied with our practical ways in consistency with God’s sovereign will in begetting us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first-fruit of His creatures. And He looks for conduct according to that new nature He has given us by faith.

Submissiveness of heart becomes us in hearkening to Him, and in avoiding our natural haste of speech and proneness to wrath; for, he adds, man's wrath worketh not God's righteousness. It is practical, not our standing according to Christ's work as in Paul's epistles; and it recalls our Lord in Matt. 6:33, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness." This again is not our standing in Christ by virtue of God's righteousness, but the power of His kingdom and character in our souls and ways.

Conduct is bound to be according to relationship; and this flows from what God our Father has already formed by the acting of His own purpose and mind in giving us birth by the word of truth; a fact which it was the more important to press on saints who were used to take their stand on being sprung from Abraham as their father. They were now taught how much higher and holier was the new descent; and this not only from God but in the most blessed way which gave full place to the Son as well as the Spirit, and had its title-deed indisputable in the written word. So the Lord had Himself laid down to the Jews, "If ye abide in My word, ye are truly My disciples; and ye shall know the truth; and the truth shall make you free If therefore the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." How little do souls, that loudly boast of their liberty, suspect that they are bondmen of sin and thus in Satan's chains! Even the believers, whom Christ has set free, are but a kind of first-fruits with an evil nature in no way set aside as a fact by the new nature which is ours through the word and Spirit of God. In virtue of this we have by grace to judge and refuse every working of the old nature, living on the Living Bread whereof we have eaten, yea, eating

His flesh and drinking His blood, and so living not merely by reason, but on account, of Him, as He did when here below on account of the Father. No character of life for purity can compare with that which the word of truth conveys. How different and inferior is the being of blood or of flesh's will or of man's will, which we once sadly knew, as our only experience, and still know to be productive, if allowed, only of evil, even since we were born of God!

But it is not enough, though it be much every way, to be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath. The exhortation follows definitely against imminent dangers. "Wherefore, having laid aside every sort of filthiness and overflowing of wickedness, receive with meekness the implanted word which is able to save your souls. But be word-doers, and not hearers only, deluding yourselves" (vers. 21, 22).

It is well to take note of the aorist in ver. 21, as compared with the present in ver. 22: in the last a constant continuous call, in the former acts done once for all. Pollution might be, as the apostle tells us in 2 Cor. 7:1, of spirit no less than of flesh, and the more ensnaring because more subtle. But the call is to have once for all put every kind of filthiness away, as also of that rank growth of wickedness which. is inherent in fallen nature. It would be indeed a hopeless call if we had not a new Life in Christ; but this every believer possesses, and the Holy Spirit's indwelling to work suitably to Him Who is its source, fulness, and standard. The flesh is still there; but in the cross of Christ it has already received its condemnation in Him Who was the one and efficacious offering for sin (Rom 8:3). Thus there is no excuse for the believer allowing its evil

working in himself or others: God condemned it fully when Christ thus suffered, that we might have even now this immerse comfort for faith as a settled thing.

“The word of truth,” which first reached us when under the dominion of the falsehood of sin and Satan, and delivered us through faith in Christ and His mighty work, is spoken of also as “the implanted word” which we are told to receive as an accomplished act. It is in contrast with a merely external rule that could only condemn what was opposed to itself. It works inwardly in that life which the believer has, being perfectly akin to it and congenial with it, as both are of God. Hence there is nothing strange in the call; and the call is to receive it “with meekness,” as becomes those who have already tasted that the Lord is good, and desire to profit more and more. For indeed only that word is “able to save our souls” (compare the end of 1 Peter 1, and the beginning of 1 Peter 2). The God who began so gracious a work does not forget or relinquish His care. He exercises and disciplines our souls, He spares no fault; but He has proved fully in Christ that those whom He loved that were in the world He loved unto the end. Still He works not by rites or forms, but by our faith in His word (compare 1 Peter 1:5). We are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

But as this exceeding value of God’s word is capable of being abused into a school of dogma, and consequently of mere knowledge, the next verse summons us habitually to reduce the word to practice. “But be word-doers, and not hearers only, deluding yourselves.” This is the great business of every day. Our Lord had already enforced His most solemn warning against the same

self-delusion. “Not every one that saith to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of the heavens; but he that doeth the will of my Father that is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name, and in thy name cast out demons, and in thy name done works of power? And then will I avow unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work lawlessness” (Matt. 7:21-23). The word must not only be heard but produce fruit accordingly. To hear the Son is the urgent call of the Father, but it is to form the new life in obedience; otherwise it is to mock God and delude ourselves. And hence the grave caution here.

Reality is indispensable. It was so of old and always; much more is it now due to God, who has done such great things for us in Christ. Begotten of God with the word of truth, we are called to walk accordingly. The higher or holier the speech, if it go no farther, the more are we self-condemned and inexcusably guilty. Life is given to the believer for exercise in every way pleasing to God.

“Because if any one be a word-hearer, and not a doer, he is like a man considering his natural face in a mirror; for he considered himself and is gone away, and straightway forgot of what sort he was” (vers. 23, 24).

It is a privilege of no small value to have the word, which is of God; and as it was that which revealed Him in Christ to the soul, so also it was made the means of quickening. It therefore is the appropriate nourishment of the life that was given, as the Holy Spirit used it thus efficaciously. So He does to the end, making us know that the Trinity is no mere idea nor objective dogma, but

a living truth in active operation day by day for those who believe. Hence conscience is continually exercised; for we have another nature, not only human but fallen and prone to evil, as previous verses in this chapter fully notice; and we pass through a world which is wholly opposed to God and His glory, having already been tested from the beginning and proving its enmity by crucifying the Lord of glory. Inwardly and outwardly therefore is the most real danger, especially when we take account of a subtle and sleepless power of evil, one who secretly avails himself of every means to compromise the saint and draw him into the dishonour of the Lord.

Nor is there any way more perilous than ensnaring the believers into a merely formal reading of the revealed word. For the conscience may be satisfied that the word is heard, while the heart is unmoved; and thus all becomes powerless. Yet therein God has communicated the most solemn truths, and of the nearest interest to Himself as well as to us; so that reading them there perfunctorily inflicts deep moral loss on the soul, and leads into a hardened state that lays one open to a thousand snares.

Therefore does our epistle urge us to be not hearers of the word only, but doers, comparing him who is a mere hearer to a man considering in a mirror “the face of his birth,” as it literally runs. For, it is added, he considered himself and is gone away, and straightway forgot of what sort he was. A similar warning, we have seen, had the Lord given in the close of what is called the sermon on the mount, as it is indeed not only for all that turn away from what they hear for the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, but expressly for such professors of His

name as content themselves with reading or hearing His good word, which is able to make wise unto salvation. Life is not only receptive but energetic; it is holy and works by love, for it is inseparable from the Son of God, Whose words are profitable indeed: “they are spirit, and they are life,” as He has told us. So also had He said, “That which is born of the Spirit, is spirit.” This no external institution, however important, can possibly effect; nothing but a divine person giving the soul to believe the word and Him who made it known.

Thus is the truth kept sure and safe on all sides, without room for superstition or fanaticism. For the Holy Spirit ever employs the word which witnesses to Christ and His work, and thus brings into communion with God; and as one is thus born of God, so does he grow and work practically. Where only the mind is reached or the affections, it is no more than a sight of the natural face in a mirror. There is no abiding self-judgment, no going out after Christ, no delight in God’s will intimated in His word. It was seen for a moment but forgotten.

Approaching the close of this contrast which verse 22 began, we have a phrase of much and weighty import, which lets us into, or at least flows consistently with, the truth here insisted on, especially and expressly in verse 18. The law given by Moses was in no way a law of liberty but of bondage. It forbade and condemned the transgressions to which the flesh was prone. The curb it applied to man’s will provoked the old man, and the offence consequently abounded instead of diminishing. The law therefore could not but work out wrath; as it is the strength of sin, not of holiness.

But here the Spirit of God presents, as the gift of God's will and grace, the new nature which characterises the faithful, the effect of God's giving birth to His own by word of truth. Christ, as we know from elsewhere, is this life, which he has who believes in Him. And this life, as in Him so in His, shows itself in obedience as its primary action. "What shall I do, Lord?" is the ready answer of the quickened soul to the revelation of "I am Jesus of Nazareth." We are sanctified to obedience no less than to the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus. The word of God has His authority over us; and feeling our ignorance and the goodness of His word, we prize and welcome all that He gives to direct our way. And the indwelling Spirit of God, glorifying the Lord Jesus, is our power, now that we confess Him Lord and own Him as the Son of God, resting on His redemption and beholding Him on high.

Hence the word of truth, by which God begot us, is also our divine directory, and is here designated "a perfect law, that of liberty," exercising faith and effecting obedience by grace. For those that are thus called by the gospel are made conscious of their new and holy relationship to God, as the Spirit of adoption gives them to cry, Abba, Father. Christ was the perfect expression of God, as well as perfect example of man; and He, being our life, as well as righteousness from God and before God, forms us here below accordingly. Begotten by the word, we have a new nature which loves the word as well as God Himself; and thus we in virtue of it wish to do what He wills, as communicated in His word, now fully revealed. "As the living Father sent me, and I live on account of the Father, he too that eateth me shall live on account of me" (John 6:57): how blessed, elevating and mighty the motive. May it be ours who follow Him!

“But he that closely looked into perfect law, that of liberty, and abode close,” as living faith achieves, “being not a quite forgetful hearer but a work-doer, he shall be blessed in his doing” (ver. 25). He has a nature in accord with the word which communicated it to his soul. It is not a law from without that forbids what he likes and demands what is irksome. He knows God’s love inwardly, and finds His word enjoins what the life he professes takes pleasure in. He delights in obeying God; and this is just what the word points out, what to do and how to do it, with Christ revealed Whose light shines and Whose love cheers and strengthens him. And thus it is the “law of liberty.” His heart purified by faith not only accepts but rejoices in the will of God — His good and acceptable and perfect will. This we behold in its untainted and unfailing fulness in our Lord Jesus. He that keeps His word, in him verily is the love of God perfected. And as there is no fear in love, so neither is there bondage therein; yet no chains are so mighty as its silken cords. The one obedient is accordingly blessed, not in his end only but in his ways — blessed in his doing. A real and great and vital truth it is, that Christ deigns to be our way by faith in a wilderness world where is no way. Only the eye single to Him can see that way; but God is as faithful in this as in all else to the soul that is true to Christ’s word and name.

Certainly the believer is not said to be blessed for his doing, but in it. The true light already shines; as it did perfectly in Christ when here, so now the Holy Spirit effects this in those begotten of God. He will have reality, now that the day of shadows and forms is past, grace and truth having come through Jesus Christ. If He is not here to maintain all, the Holy Spirit is sent forth

and abides for this express purpose to the glory of Christ. No doubt, it is a day of knowing what God has revealed, and He has revealed nothing more fully than Himself in His Son. But it is a day of obedience for the faithful, no less than of life and peace, and of fellowship with the Father and the Son. Knowledge without obedience is a sad and shameful reproach. “If ye know these things,” said the Saviour, “happy are ye if ye do them.”

But there is another way in which we may glorify God, or do Him great dishonour; not by our activity but by our speech. For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. As our Lord added, “The good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things; and the wicked man out of the wicked treasure bringeth forth wicked things. But I say unto you, that every idle word which men shall say, they shall render an account of it in judgment-day; for by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words shalt thou be condemned” (Matt. 12:35-37). On scarce anything are men, and even Christians, more distant practically from the mind of God than on the use and in the licence claimed for the tongue. On the other hand who does not know the dead and gloomy and resentful silence when the name of the Lord Jesus is brought into any general company? It matters not how reverent be the spirit in which it is uttered, or how apt the application, or how necessary and conclusive for the truth’s sake: man cannot forgive it. The name is inopportune save from a pulpit; it is an offence to the world, high or low, which cast Him out and crucified Him. Notwithstanding the desperate effort to make out that all is changed for so many ages, and that the adornment of the tomb, the

picture, or the sculptor, proves the heart's homage in our day, the implacable enmity underneath does not fail to betray itself; and God is not deceived by a vain show. With the heart it is believed unto righteousness, and with mouth confession is made unto salvation. God will have His Son honoured as Himself where He was rejected; and those who honour Him by hearing His words and believing Him Who sent Him have life eternal; while those who disbelieve Him must perish, their ways being as bad as their words to His dishonour.

The same principle applies all through "If anyone thinks he is religious, not bridling his tongue but deceiving his heart, this [man's] religion is vain" (ver. 26). The word "religious" here used refers to the manifestation. It is neither εὐσεβὴς, pious or godly; nor is it λατρεύων rendering a religious service or worship to God. It means religious practice outwardly paid. Compare Acts 26:5; Col. 2:18, 23.

Again, the form is hardly "seemeth" but "deemeth," or "thinketh himself." It is not what appears to others that is in question, but his thought of himself. Wiclif and the Rhemish are right, following the Vulgate; Tyndale misled Cranmer, the Geneva V. and the Authorised, The very fact that it is not deeds but only the indulgence of speech gives occasion to self-deception. But he who calls on the Lord's name is bound to follow His steps, and not to misrepresent Him, Who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth; Who, reviled, reviled not again, and, suffering, threatened not. On the contrary as He was fairer than the sons of men, so grace was poured into His lips: therefore God blessed Him for ever. But each of us has imperative need to "bridle his tongue "; for we have an old man which was wholly absent from Him. If

we do not, the evil of fallen nature finds a ready exit there; which, if we fail to judge, deceives the heart. And this man's religion is as vain as his is faithful who abides close to the perfect law of liberty.

The verse before us concludes this part of the Epistle. As the preceding one denied the weight or value of practical outward service, where an unbridled tongue betrayed a heart outside God's presence, here we have a sample set forth positively. It is in danger of being overlooked; yet this cannot be because the sight is infrequent in this world of sin and sorrow, of want and bereavement, where gracious sympathy does much to bind up and together wounded hearts. "Who is my neighbour?" said a lawyer who had no care to see one.

"A religious service pure and undefiled before him that is 1 God and Father is this, to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, to keep himself unspotted from the world" (ver. 27).

Wiclif has it thus: — "This is a clene religioun and unwemmyd anentis God and the fadir, for to visite pupilles, that is, fadirles or modirles, or bothe, and widewes in her tribulacioun, and for to kepe him silf undefoulid fro this world." The Wiclifite gives, "A clene religioun and an vnwemmed anentis God and the fadir, is this, to visite fadirles and modirles children, and widewis in her tribulacioun, and to kepe hym silf vndefoulid fro this world." "Pure devocion and vndefiled (says Tyndale) before God the father, is this: to vysit the frendlesse and widdowes in their adversite, and to kepe him silfe vnspotted of the worlde." Cranmer and the Genevese V. follow Tyndale save the latter in the word "religion" for "devocion," and for "frendlesse" both

giving “fatherlesse.” That of Rheims has, “Religion cleane and vnspotted with God and the Father, is this, to visite pupilles and vvidovves in their tribulation; and to keepe him self vnspotted from this vvorld.”

There is often an exaggeration lent to these wholesome words, as if such duties as are here enjoined, or even the first part without the second, constituted the substance of “religion.” The absence of the article here too is not without meaning, especially as it was prefixed to the same word only in the verse before. “The religion,” or the religious service, of the man there described is vain. Here its absence indicates that it is but a part of it, however weighty and becoming. For we have to do with God, not only as the patriarchs knew Him (an Almighty protector in their weakness), nor yet again as the Lord Jehovah of Israel (the moral governor of a people called to do His commandments), but as the Lord Jesus revealed Him, and as He alone perfectly enjoyed the relationship of Father. It is here that we find the richest display of love in the nearest way possible for the creature to know God. And this is quite in keeping with what the Epistle had already explained, the communication of a life to the believer capable of entering into His thoughts and affections, and of obeying His will as being begotten thereby.

It is a service then pure and undefiled before Him Who is God and Father, to look after the fatherless and widows. Compassionate love is thus drawn out. It is indeed in its measure the reflection of God’s own character.

So the Lord called him, who would give a dinner or supper, to ask not relatives nor the rich but the poor and

wretched, assured of blessing all the more because they could not recompense him; but this too will come in the resurrection of the righteous. Our Epistle pursues its given line of blessing now in the doing or practice.

But the latter clause benevolence cannot imitate; and one finds it generally drops. Yet is it an exhortation eminently christian, and essential to spiritual well-being, “to keep himself unspotted from the world.” Never do we hear any word quite as full in the O.T., though at all times God has in His own sought love, and piety, and holiness; and His children have walked in them all, because they walked in faith. It is the Lord Jesus Who has fully brought out what the world is. Its thankless departure from God, its ready forgetfulness of Him and His manifold and persevering goodness, its setting up of grand material objects, like the sun, moon, and stars, its adoption of departed heroes to adore, its degradation in worship by the invention of imaginary beings as bad as themselves, its bowing down to the most ordinary creatures of earth, air, or the waters, even to reptiles, did not constitute its worst guilt. Plato yearned after some superhuman being to come and enlighten and raise up the fallen race. But when the Father sent the Son, and (wondrous condescension!) in the reality of man while most truly God, hatred of good came out as it never did nor could before; and they rejected Him alike in His words and His works. It mattered not that these all were light and love, as He was. But they brought God in Christ’s person the Holy and the True; and man would have none of Him: neither religious man, nor philosophical, nor political; Jew, Greek, Roman, despised and abhorred Him. As it was written beforehand, they

hated Him without a cause, even those that had His law; they hated both the Son and the Father.

This is the world; and the great standing proof is the cross of Christ. Hence our Lord, looking on to it, declared His own not to be of the world, as He is not; not merely that they ought not to be, but that they are not. And the Epistles follow this up, when the Holy Spirit was given, with the utmost care for corresponding ways. Nor is there anything in which Christendom is more false and guilty than in seeking and courting it, and congratulating itself on possessing its countenance and its good things if it has them, or in coveting them when it has not. Popery is flagrant but not alone in this.

Yet there is the plain and holy call of God to every child of His, “to keep himself unspotted from the world.” This cuts very closely indeed; and we do well to suffer the word of exhortation if any can help us to steer clear; for its spirit may enter in subtle ways. But let us look to Him, Who loves us and discerns perfectly, to work in us by His all-searching word; that we may be strengthened to judge it unsparingly, and thus to keep ourselves unspotted from the world.

James 2

Our chapter opens with the distinct confession of Christ; so that we are in advance of the pious but general ground taken before, which, though quite compatible, to say the least, with faith in Him, does not expressly put His name forward, beyond the mention of it that was made in James 1:1. We shall see that there is good reason for this new step when it is duly weighed.

“My brethren, do not with respectings of persons have the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, [Lord] of glory” (ver. 1).

The tendency was strong to sever faith from practice, and this quite as much among Jewish professors, this chapter shows, as among Greeks. It is the levity and selfishness of human nature. But the preceding chapter took a distinct and positive step in asserting the blessedness of enduring trial; and yet more, that of His own will God the Father begot the believers by the word of truth. This is incomparably more than holding sound views. It is not orthodoxy alone but a communicated “divine nature” as 2 Peter 1:4 expressly calls it, and as 1 John throughout teaches with fulness and precision.

Here the warning is against the inconsistency of spirit and ways. The case first specified is “in respectings of persons.” For it might occur in many forms and in various degrees. But allowance in any shape is not to be indulged, as being an affront to “the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ,” emphasised as it is here too, by speaking of “the glory” that belongs to Himself.

No soul that believes in Christ can be ignorant of the death-blow He in His entire practice gives to such feelings or conduct. Mary of whom He deigned to be born was a Jewish maiden in the humblest position; so was Joseph the carpenter, His legal father through whose descent He derived His title to the throne of David and Solomon; and this was essential as a perfect claim to Messiahship. For Mary, daughter of Heli, was descended from David’s son Nathan who gave no such right. Again, when born, He was laid “in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.” So He

grew, advancing in wisdom and stature and in favour with God and man. One lovely episode excepted, He abides in entire obscurity, going down and dwelling with Mary and Joseph, in subjection to them and in despised Nazareth; yet was He King of kings and Lord of lords.

When His public service called Him to speak out, what so uncompromising! “Blessed ye poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed ye that hunger now, for ye shall be filled. Blessed ye that weep now, for ye shall laugh. Blessed are ye when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you, and shall reproach and cast out your name as wicked for the Son of man’s sake. Rejoice in that day and leap [for joy]; for, behold, your reward is great in the heavens, for in the same manner did their fathers to the prophets. But woe to you the rich! for ye have received your consolation; woe to you that are filled now! for ye shall hunger. Woe, ye that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep. Woe, when all men speak well of you! for in the same manner did their fathers to the false prophets” (Luke 6:20 26).

To a similar effect might one transcribe our Lord’s habitual teaching; and His ways were in unwavering accord with it. He and He alone, when asked, “Who art thou?” could truly answer, “Absolutely (in the principle of My being) that which I also speak to you” (John 8:25). His speech and His conduct — Himself — exactly tallied. He was in every way the truth: not a word to recall, nor a way to question. All was genuine — this always in Him Who was the Holy, the True, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God.

And what shall one say of that mighty work of His which in depth exceeded all that was possible even throughout

His days here below? Happily we have the Holy Spirit to pronounce unerringly. He, “subsisting in the form of God, counted it not a thing to be grasped to be on equality with God, but emptied Himself, taking a bondman’s form, becoming in likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death, yea, death of the cross” (Phil. 2:6-8). “For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich” (2 Cor. 8:9).

Such is “the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, [Lord] of glory.” Can any considerations, can any words, rise up to the simple overwhelming strength of what God thus tells us of Him? Has He not said (Luke 9:23, 26), “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me?” and “whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed when he cometh in his own glory, and of the Father, and of the holy angels?” Again, has He not laid down, “When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends nor thy brethren, nor thy kinsmen, nor thy rich neighbours; lest haply they also bid thee again, and a recompense be made thee? But when thou makest a feast, bid the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind; and thou shalt be blessed, because they have it not to recompense thee; for thou shalt be recompensed in the resurrection of the just” (Luke 14:12-14). What more withering of the world’s glory than “what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God” (Luke 16:15)? Do we truly believe it? And where was respect of persons then in His sighs? It never had a moment’s place; nor should it have with us, who believe in Him.

His glory may well and for ever eclipse every rival — that of the world especially which crucified Him.

Respect of persons is the instinct of self, and the reflex of the world; but it denies Christ in practice, and the reality of that intimate relationship which grace has formed between all that are His. The inspired writer singles out a particular case which he had probably witnessed, though put here hypothetically.

“For if there come into your meeting (lit. synagogue) a man gold-ringed in splendid clothing, and there come in also a poor one in vile clothing; and ye look upon him that weareth the splendid clothing, and say, Sit thou here well (or, in a good place); and ye say to the poor one, Stand thou there, or sit under my footstool, did you not make a difference among yourselves and become judges of evil thoughts” (vers 2-4)?

One can easily understand “synagogue” used by the writer to those addressed, not literally, but as applied by a ready transition to a Christian company. It is therefore here rendered “meeting” as perhaps the nearest analogue. No one could be surprised at so worldly a spirit in a literal synagogue; it was a grief if it passed to a Christian congregation. What was less congruous with Christ than a gold-ringed man in splendid clothing? Never was He bedizened save in the bitter mockery of those about to crucify Him. Yet could He have called in a moment all the wealth and grandeur of the world around Him, had it been seasonable either for Himself or for those that represent Him here below. On high He is crowned with glory and honour, as they will be at His coming. But faith recognises the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that, though He was rich, for our sakes He

became poor, that we through His poverty might be rich. Now, however, is the time to follow Him on earth, indifferent to all that flesh counts desirable, and counting all things loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord.

Suffering for righteousness' sake, yet more for Christ's sake, ought to be precious in our eyes as Christians; and we might appropriately honour such as have won a good degree in any spiritual way. But to slight one for the garb that bespeaks his penury, and to honour another because of his gorgeous raiment attesting his wealth, is a two-fold contradiction of Christ. Even the law taught far higher principles than those that the Jews had fallen into, and that govern the Gentiles who know not God. For in the days of law it was touching to read the solicitude of God for the poor and afflicted, and the earnestness with which He urges on His people to consider them. But how much more deeply His compassion was shown in Him Who was His image! And forgetfulness of His example was serious in the eyes of James for those who owe all to His grace, Himself the Lord of glory.

Not that the scripture warrants the spirit of disrespect to the noble or the exalted. Render, says the apostle Paul, to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute [is due]; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour; even as every soul is called to be subject to the higher authorities, being set up by God in His providence, a terror not to a good work but to an evil one. Thus is the Christian relation to the powers that be in the outside world. But love is due to one another among all who bear the Lord's name, and tender compassion to such as are in danger of snare through

their trials and poverty. Contempt to the poor Christian is as far from the mind that was in Christ as can be conceived.

Hence we see, before this uncomely offence is touched, how this Epistle in the very first chapter exhorted brethren to count it all joy when they fell into varied temptations; which to unbelievers are nothing but sorrow and disappointment to be got rid of by all means possible. Hence the brother of low degree was to glory in his elevation, and the rich in his humiliation, because as the flower of grass he was to pass away. More than this he who endures temptation (he declares from God) is blessed; for it is not only that grace works moral profit now, but, having here been proved, he shall receive the crown of life promised of the Lord to those that love Him. If we endure, we shall also reign with Him, as assuredly as if we died with Him, we shall also live with Him. The cross of Christ is correlative to heavenly glory; and so here His glory precedes this rebuke to the worldly spirit that despised the poor and cringed to the rich, unworthy anywhere, most of all where those showed it who professed the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, [the Lord] of glory.

Dr. Whitby and others labour to explain this of judicial assemblies which the Jews held in their synagogues; and they infer the probability that this was transferred by the converted Israelites to their meetings. This of course reduces the rebuke to partiality in case of trials between a poor man and a rich, instead of seeing that we have here a great principle universally applicable, and all the more necessary when ease and wealth and luxury began to flow in among professing Christians. So too Doddridge follows Beza in his lowering of ver. 4

(“judices male ratiocinantes”), as he also makes the opening words to mean, “and distinguish not in yourselves” according to the different characters of these two men, but only regard their outward appearance, “you even become judges who reason ill.” What is really intended is an evil moral state, out of all sympathy with our Lord, in making a difference among themselves, and becoming judges of evil thoughts, i.e., characterised by having evil thoughts, instead of weighing and feeling as in the light of God and His love by faith. It was a worldly mind.

Nor is it only that fawning on rich persons, even when believers are gathered together, is inconsistent with faith in Him Who in His grace became poor though Lord of glory. It is opposed to the law, and still more to the gospel and Christianity. It denies in effect relationship with Him as a secondary thing to the circumstances of the day and the lowest distinction in the world; and it is as far as possible from God’s mind, as His word shows and Christ impressively interpreted and livingly endorsed it. “The poor have the gospel preached to them.” What were they that received it in His eyes? To the pungent contrast already given we have an earnest appeal added.

“Hear, my beloved brethren; did not God choose the poor as to the world, rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those that love Him? But ye dishonoured the poor [man]. Do not the rich oppress you, and they drag you before tribunals? Do not they blaspheme the worthy name that was called on you” (vers. 5-7)?

Attention is drawn first to the plain and characteristic fact everywhere manifest in the church that not only is the gospel preached to the poor, but that the poor are those who as a class are chosen by God. So the apostle strongly set before the ease-loving intellectual Corinthians who liked to be on good terms with the world to the Lord's dishonour and their own loss and danger. How little they had read aright the word of the cross which is to those that perish foolishness, but to the saved God's power! For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and set aside the intelligence of the intelligent. Here it is the still more debased assumption of the rich. But in any case the foolishness of God, as they count Christ crucified, is wiser than men, and the weakness of God in the same cross is stronger than men. "For behold your calling, brethren, that [there are] not many wise according to flesh, not many mighty, not many high born. But God chose the foolish things of the world, that he might put to shame the wise; and God chose the weak things of the world, that he might put to shame the strong things; and the ignoble things of the world and the despised God chose, and things that are not, that he might bring to nought the things that are; so that no flesh should boast before God" (1 Cor. 1:26-29).

The humble estate of the poor is by grace made their decided advantage when they are called. For there is no bondage more imperious than that which "society" imposes on its votaries, nothing more at issue with the Lord of all Who judged it root and branch by being outside it all and ignoring its pretensions, and pursuing His path of holy goodness to all in unswerving obedience. This the poor believer sees, rich in faith, and escapes the will of his class to rise in the world by

religious means as by every other way. His insight may not be profound or extensive, but he accepts with joy the gospel which elevates him spiritually, and he seeks no other now, looking onward confidently for the kingdom not of this world, which He, Whose it is, promised to those that love Him.

The poor “of this world” of Tyndale, Cranmer, Geneva, and the Auth. V. supposes a text which extant MSS. do not warrant, unless it be the exaggerated rendering of the article, without the demonstrative pronoun. This “of the world” has considerable support of both uncials and cursives, as well as ancient versions, etc., and is the text of Griesbach, Matthaei (both edd.) and Scholz. They were probably misled by the Vulgate, followed by Wiclif who preceded them, and by the Rhemish that came after them, “in this world,” which has one cursive (29) to this effect with the venerable Bede. “In the world” has the support of three junior MSS. (27, 43, 64). The true reading adopted by the latest critics is that of the most ancient and best uncials, though neglected by the ancient versions save the later or Philoxenian Syriac. It is τῳ κόσμῳ, and appears to be the dative of reference, i.e. poor in respect of, or as to, the world — a not uncommon usage.

It may be remarked that “rich in faith” is the simple contrast by grace with their lowly circumstances here below, and qualifies them as a class without any question of different measure of comparison individually. Faith made them all rich if they had nothing otherwise; and faith as well as love would honour them accordingly now, as God surely will and before the universe in due time. Christ gave their confidence in Him, and love to

Him. His promise encourages and strengthens them along the road.

In open opposition is the haughty contempt which wealth naturally engenders. How strange and deplorable that the rich as a class should be of any account in Christian eyes? What is “the poor” man (whether in the case described in vers. 2-4 or in any other) but dishonoured by their unbelieving self-complacency? More unjust and selfish still is their attitude and habit. “Do not the rich oppress you? and [is it not] they [that] drag you into courts of justice? Do not they blaspheme the excellent name that was called on you?” As a class, and so it is our Epistle speaks, they were hostile to the name of the Lord, which was everything to the poor that believed and confessed Him; as they were heartless toward themselves whose poverty exposed them to all manner of evil surmise and detraction, and so to persecution.

In riches the enemy has a ready means of keeping up the spirit of the world against Christ and His poor. But what is here aimed at is the guilty tendency on the part of any Christian, and especially the poor, to honour “the unrighteous mammon,” and those who have nothing else to boast. Friendship with the world is enmity with God. Scripture is dead against coveting their goods, or yet more wronging themselves. Neither this Epistle nor any other countenances levelling. Faith gives the only exultation of value in the spiritual realm; and this the church surely is, or it is worse than nothing, even salt that has lost its savour, and proper neither for land nor for dung. He that hath ears to hear let him hear.

It is characteristic of this Epistle to employ the expression “royal law”; nor is it the only peculiar phrase that fell to it with striking propriety. We have already “the perfect law of liberty” in James 1:25, and we have “law of liberty” again in James 2:12.

“If however ye fulfil law royal according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well; but if ye have respect to persons, ye work sin, being convicted by the law as transgressors” (vers. 8, 9).

This is admirable. The feeble saints of the circumcision, most of them poor, had so forgotten early fervour of faith, as to cringe before the wealthy, and this even in their assemblies if a rich man entered therein. Yet were they not rich in faith, the poorest of them? Were they not heirs of the kingdom which He who chose them promised to those that love Him? What inconsistency to give themselves the air of valuing a little money, of closing the eye of faith to their own hopes of glory, though the least recollection of the Lord of glory dispelled those natural thoughts and brought back the promise which detects the false glitter of the world as it is.

The third book of Moses had from early days asserted that great moral principle as far as Israel were concerned; but where was the heart to prize it? where the nature capable of carrying it out unswervingly? Certainly it is not in the mind of the flesh, which is enmity against God and is no better really for man. “Love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not, knoweth not God; for God is love.” Nothing more true or trenchant. The fulness and the manifestation of it is in Christ sent

into the world that we might live through Him. This we cannot do till we receive Him from God, believing on His name. Then we live, and live to God; for he that believeth on Him hath life eternal. There is no other way. “He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself; he that believeth not God hath made him a liar, because he believeth not the witness that God gave of his Son. And this is the witness that God gave us life eternal, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.”

The believer then alone has this life, and loves according to Christ, Who, when challenged gave the first place to loving God, but also pressed in the next place loving one’s neighbour. Here in this world of need and misery even the law-teacher had not obeyed it, and asked, Who is my neighbour? To the Lord it was all plain enough. He came in love to seek and save the lost at all cost to Himself. Now that He is on high, His love is active in His own, and in them only. For as the apostle shows in Rom. 8 those that are in Christ walk according to the Spirit, not according to the flesh which is lawless and selfish, the very opposite of love or of any other good. The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus it is that freed the believer from the law of sin and death. Sin is no longer a law, the power of death was broken by Christ risen from among the dead; and He is our life. Such is one reason (ver. 2) why there is no condemnation for those in Christ. God cannot condemn that life which is now ours in Him. But then what of our evil nature, the flesh? The second (ver. 3) meets this. 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 (i.e. as a

sin-offering) condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteousness of the law, its righteous import, might be fulfilled in us who walk not after flesh but after Spirit. For it is only the believer who has the new life and the efficacy of Christ's death in annulling his evil nature that walks according to the Spirit, loving God supremely and loving man so as to suffer or even die for his good.

It is not that James brings out what was left for the apostle of uncircumcision. But he does characterise this grand moral claim of God as regards the neighbour as a "royal law." Before it respect to persons is sentenced to death. The command to love one's neighbour towers above any transient or artificial distinctions among men. Who or what are the rich to wish it set aside in their favour? And what mean any rich in faith among the poor by ignoring it? It is a royal law, says our Epistle. Those who fix the eyes of their heart on our Lord Jesus, will not fail to fulfil it. It were a sad descent to look away from Him in glory, as He is, to the gold-ringed man of wealth. Even Jacob before the Lord Jesus came did better when brought into the presence of Pharaoh, king of Egypt. He was not dazzled, any more than he petitioned for his family. But "Jacob blessed Pharaoh." "And without all contradiction," says Heb. 7:7, "the less is blessed of the better." May the poorest of the saints be strengthened to cherish undimmed the consciousness of his blessedness and the hope of the glory where the Lord is, and whither he himself is bound!

Respect of persons is a violation of love and a transgression of the law that insists on love, as is added in the verse that follows. If a believer be poor, there is no ground in this why he should pander to worldliness, despise his poor brethren, puff up the wealthy, and

dishonour the Lord of glory Who has shown us the clear contrary. “For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich” (2 Cor. 8:9). “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.” Weigh Phil. 2:5-9. As our Epistle declares, to have respect of persons is to work sin and to be convicted by the law as transgressors; as the Epistle says, Love worketh no ill to the neighbour; therefore love is the fulfilment of the law.

There is hardly a fact more characteristic of the natural man than condemning another for the evil to which one is not addicted, while extenuating one’s own sins by every excuse possible as a peccadillo. Truly man is not only fallen, but his nature is utterly unjust, and God is in none of his thoughts. One may plead the universal failure of mankind, and the inconsistency of the faithful. But Christ puts all such apologies to the rout, and shows us Man on earth in Whom was no sin and no guile in His mouth, now in glory, the Lord of glory. He, not Adam, nor Israel, is the standard here below as well as in heaven. Who can stand beside Him as He was, or be with Him as He is?

Here, however, it is the law which is used to crush self-righteousness; and the law, being of God, cannot but be inflexible and resents all the evasions of men. “For whoever shall keep the law as a whole but shall offend in one [point] is become guilty of all. For he that said, Thou shalt not commit adultery, said also, Thou shalt not kill. And if thou commit not adultery but killest, thou art become a transgressor of law. So speak, and so act, as about to be judged by a law of liberty”(vers. 10-12). Were there true obedience, one claim of God would be

as binding as another, violence as hateful to us as corruption. To offend in one point violates God's authority and brings us under the guilt of breaking all. The appeal reminds us of the apostle's reasoning in Rom. 2:17-29, where the Jew is convicted of folly in resting on law and boasting in God and teaching others as babes while failing to teach himself, and dishonouring God by the transgression of the law in which he professedly gloried. All attempt for sinful man (and a Jew made no difference) to acquire righteousness by the law, and stand on any such ground before God, is but fatal ignorance of self as well as of God. By deeds of law shall no flesh be justified in His sight.

On the other hand the believer in the Lord Jesus is begotten by His word of truth. It is not only an operation on conscience and heart, but a new nature is imparted, which is of God, as indeed those who thus believe are declared to be born of God, and His children. As the life of the Spirit is by the word of truth, so it is formed, and nourished, developed and exercised in that word, which has for him who is thus begotten a character of holy freedom in entire contrast with the action of the law on the natural man. In this case it is an instrument of bondage, because the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good; whereas the mind of the flesh, the natural man, is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be; only self-will is the law of its being. The law therefore, when truly applied, discovers to the sinner his essential alienation and can give no quarter but condemn and kill. It is no better in those born of God than in any other, as the latter half of Romans 7 elaborately shows. Flesh does

not change into spirit. That which is born of the flesh is flesh.

But as the word was used in God's will to beget the believer by the impartation of a nature akin to Himself and His word, so it remains valid and intended for the need and admonition, refreshment, direction, and strengthening of the new life all through. This it is which is called a "law of liberty." Its authority was recognized by the soul in hearing Christ's word and passing from death unto life. Then ensued repentance toward God as truly as faith toward the Lord Jesus Christ: self was judged as evil, grace and truth in Christ became most welcome. Then the word which communicated the knowledge of such a blessing is valued and confided in, to guide the soul through the mazes of a world departed from, and to lay bare the devices of the enemy to ensnare along the way. Light divine surrounds one's going. It is accordingly a "law of liberty" which we love; as indeed we now know the God Who gave it us first and last as our best and truest Friend, proved and manifested in the Lord Jesus.

It is of much interest to observe how the apostle Paul shows in Rom. 8:3, 4 the way in which he contrasts with the law that worketh wrath, and slew him who sought thus to establish his standing, what he calls "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ," which was characterised by emancipation, not bondage, and issued in a life of obedience pleasing to God. Each inspired writer has his points of difference; both agree in testifying to a similar blessed result.

Men easily satisfy themselves before a God who no longer manifests Himself visibly, Who does not act now

as when the law ruled, or government was displayed in immediate rewards and punishments. And the error of men is apt to be so much the greater when they regard the gospel as introducing a mitigation of legal severity. They fancy that a little sin here and there, now and then, will meet with mild dealing, so that there is no need of over-righteousness. The circumstances of those addressed in this Epistle would naturally expose souls to this snare, which is itself laid bare and torn to pieces in the verses already before us. No notion was more derogatory to His authority Who had spoken at Sinai, none more subversive of the law itself, which is necessarily inflexible. If broken in a single point, righteousness under it is gone, and the honour of the whole is compromised. If infraction in one respect were tolerated, licence would go on to expect more and more, till perhaps every point but one was surrendered, if indeed even one on such a principle could escape the encroaching will of man. But all such tolerance is unknown to the law, which demands nothing less than absolute, uncompromising, subjection.

Is it argued then that the condition of man under it, no matter what his privileges and helps, is and must be hopeless? The answer is that so it is assuredly, because man is a sinner. Evil is there since the fall in his very nature, a law in his members, warring in opposition to what is holy and just and good. The apostle Paul goes to the root, and shows that death to the old man is the sole divine deliverance, amelioration of ourselves gradual or sudden being alike human and vain, the nostrums of theological empiricism, and not the remedy proclaimed to faith in God’s word. Again, were it simply our death, it would be unavailable for us here below, and the blessed

fruit would only be after death when we should be with Christ; and thus the victory that God intends now through our Lord Jesus would be shorn of a great part of its lustre and power. But it is not so. The death and resurrection of Christ gives far more now than most Christians believe, to their own loss. For it is not only that He died for us — for our sins, which are therefore blotted out and forgiven — He died also to sin, He Himself wholly without it. He knew no sin; yet God made Him sin for us; and we who believe are associated with Him in that death of complete deliverance from sin in principle, root and not fruits merely, as the apostle so elaborately discusses in Rom. 5:12; 8. Our very baptism signifies, not only that we washed our sins away, but that we died to sin and are justified from sin as well as sins. Hence we are called to reckon ourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Our Epistle does not penetrate to such depths nor rise to such heights, as it was given to the great apostle of the uncircumcision, minister of the church no less than of the gospel, as he designates himself in Col. 1. But it is no less inspired of God, no less necessary to man, in order to test mere profession where it most abounded and was most dangerous, to maintain the true character of that law which must be a ministry of death and condemnation to the guilty, and to insist on “a law of liberty” which exactly suits the new nature of those whom God in His purpose or will begot by the word of truth. The law was not accompanied by the rainbow, the beautiful sign of divine mercy in the covenant with creation (Gen. 9), after Noah began the post-diluvian world with the burnt-offering, the sign of Christ’s sacrifice. Lightning and thunder, unearthly trumpet, and

God’s voice more terrible than all to sinful man, inaugurated the law. It is Christ here below Who first shows us the law of liberty in all its fulness and perfection.

This portion closes with the next two verses: “So speak and so act as about to be judged by a law of liberty; for the judgment [is] merciless to him that showed no mercy. Mercy glorieth over judgment” (vers. 12, 13). James as ever was led of the Spirit to press in practice the manifestation of God’s will on those that have or say they have, the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ; and he resents, as we ought, the shame which a lax and spurious profession puts on the Lord “of glory.” Can any appeal be more wholesome now as then? They are indeed to be pitied as well as blamed who think it beneath scripture; and it is to be feared, that, even if at bottom true believers, they find the edge of the sword, as James wields it, too sharp for their ways. Otherwise it seems incomprehensible that they should not welcome his words as of great and permanent value for themselves as for others.

Nor is it true that the Epistle is absorbed in the outward conduct. Speaking and doing are its exhortation as covering a very large part of our practical life; but it is carefully defined that both were to be of such a sort as was suited to those that are to be determined by a law of liberty: a principle of the inner man, and inscrutable to such as, having no faith, have no new life from God and no knowledge of His grace. As mercy is the spring of all we profess as God’s children, God is indignant at its absence in those that by grace claim kindred with Himself. They surely, of all mankind, are responsible to delight in mercy and to manifest it in word and deed, as

having to do and to be judged by a law, not of bondage, but, of liberty. For God is not mocked but sanctified in those that come nigh Him, as all do who are begotten of Him; and He will be glorified in the solemn judgment of those that set Him at nought. As we here read, “for the judgment [is] merciless to him that showed no mercy.” Is not this as it should be?

Say not in a depreciatory way, It is a sentiment suited to James the Just. Read on, and learn that God gives us much more through him: “Mercy glorieth over judgment.” Are not we who believe witnesses of it? Was not our Lord Jesus the proof of it, so exhaustively that there is no need, no room, for more? For all the vessels of mercy derive it through Him. Mercy is God’s habitual and congenial work; judgment is His strange work, yet most righteous, against those who, having the utmost need, despise His mercy and most of all in the Lord of glory. Yet He has shown and proved it in its richest resources and its most affecting form, emptying Himself, yea, the true God humbling Himself, to save His ungodly enemies. But how blessed for those that believe! Beyond doubt “mercy glorieth over judgment” in Jesus Christ and Him crucified. But are not we who bear His name responsible to have it bright within us, that our practical conversation may be filled with it and governed by it?

Thus the spirit of grace has been upheld, and a law of liberty which accompanies it, in contrast with a judicial spirit which avails itself of the law of bondage and ought to be as alien from an object of mercy as it displeases God. How solemn the warning of merciless judgment to him that showed no mercy! How sweet the assurance that mercy glories over judgment! Life, liberty, and grace go together for blessing.

Thence the transition is simple and intelligible to the snare of setting up a bare creed. Israelites were above all exposed to this danger; so that the dealing with such a case is peculiarly appropriate to this Epistle. In judgment they had been used to a brotherhood after the flesh, as the seed of Abraham. When professors of Christ, they were liable to regard their new brotherhood as founded on no more than their common recognition of the Lord of glory. But it as plain in fact as it is in scripture that such a recognition of Him might be no more than intellectual, having no root of divine life because it sprang from no work of conscience through the Holy Spirit's application of the truth in revealing Christ. For we are not brought to know God save through our wants and guilt, not as students of science, but as poor sinners in need of His mercy in Christ. A mental profession of faith was of no more value than the schools of differing thought, under different names as leaders to which Greek vanity was ever prone. It was even more fatal and in itself "natural," as their contentious zeal was "carnal," for so the apostle made the distinction.

"What [is] the profit my brethren, if one say he have faith, but have not works? can faith save him? If a brother or a sister be naked and destitute of daily food, and one from among you say to them, Go in peace, be warmed and filled, but ye give them not the things needful for the body, what [is] the profit? So also faith, if it have not works, is dead in (or by) itself" (vers. 14-17).

When the apostle Paul declared the gospel, he insisted on faith in Jesus Christ as justifying, apart from works of law; because it is God's righteousness, not man's, unto all, and upon all that believe, Jew and Greek being lost

sinners. It is a question of being justified freely by God's grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Now, for our Epistle, it is the quite different question of a practical life in accord with Christian profession. Indeed Paul insists on this moral reality in Rom. 2 as strenuously as James does here. It is a worthless faith which does not produce fruit of righteousness that is by Jesus Christ unto God's glory and praise. The scripture before us does not answer the question how a sinner is to be cleansed before God, but what conduct befits those that have the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ.

To this end of necessary consistency are the questions. What is the profit for a man to profess faith and have no works as its witness? Can faith save him? This is illustrated by the heartlessness of dismissing a naked and hungry brother or sister with the words, Be warmed and filled, without any corresponding gift to help them. Does Christ own a faith that does not work through love? Here again we may observe how the apostle Paul's words in Gal. 5:6 energetically express the practical aim of James. The tongue may be active, the heart cold, the walk selfish as before; but are these the ways of a nature begotten to the Father of lights by truth's word? Are such unreal talkers a kind of first-fruits of His own creatures?

There is no need, however, to give the Greek article with Wakefield the force of "this," nor with Bede and the Revisers the emphasis of "that," nor yet the more legitimate possessive sense of "his." Faith is entitled, even apart from previous mention, to the article in Greek as an ideal object, the thing faith, or as we in English say "faith," as much as if it expressed the different sense of "the faith" required in many

scriptures. The context can alone decide in which shade it is employed. Hence also we may observe that in ver. 17 scarce any person thinks of translating the same words, ἡ πίστις, save as “faith”; and rightly so, for it is still used in the same general sense. This is not at all invalidated by the anarthrous form in ver. 14, where the insertion of the article would be improper. For in such cases the accusative is complementary to the transitive verb, and expresses the character of the action that resulted, unless it be intended to denote that which through some reason becomes a specific object before the mind; both of which cases may be seen again in ver. 18.

The principle is stated concisely in ver. 17: “faith, if it have no works, is dead in itself.” If it were divinely given (Eph. 2:8: Phil. 1:29), it would manifest its mighty and gracious effects. For Christ is its object, and His love above all thought of man, but influential beyond anything in us or around us to raise the soul accordingly. He is not only an example that powerfully acts on all He loves and loving Him, but a motive and a source, to form the affections and the walk of His own here below. It is easy for those who are no better than James describes in their human faith to decry its energy where the Holy Spirit has wrought livingly. In fact they know nothing of its divine reality. Their faith is dead in itself; and any works so wrought are no less intrinsically dead.

We have now another saying in order to bring out the reality, as we had in vers. 14 and 16. In the First Epistle of John we may see the contrast pursued more deeply. “But some one will say, Thou hast faith, and I have works. Show me thy faith apart from works, and out of (or, by) my works I will show thee my faith Thou

believest that God is one, thou doest well: the demons also believe and shudder (vers. 18, 19).

The fact in the spiritual realm, which lies under the question here discussed, we have seen to be laid down with the utmost simplicity and clearness in chap. 1:18. It is the possession of a new life, which is given to all who are begotten by the word of truth. No intellectual process can amount to such a boon, though a spiritual understanding never in operation before accompanies it, as there are also new affections proper to it. We can readily apprehend how unpalatable such teaching must be to those that were attached to the ancient system of ritual and law for a nation chosen as a whole, as well as to the still wider snare of crying up human powers, with no adequate sense of God or His kingdom on the one hand, or of man's sin and ruin on the other. It was therefore urgently requisite that all should learn on divine authority that in christianity a mere action however powerful on a man's faculties is altogether short of the truth. For there is communication of a life in Christ which he never possessed before, as well as the Holy Spirit thenceforward dwelling in him in power, the gift of God's grace; so that he might know the things of God and the revealed objects, as the old nature was capable of knowing the things of man and of the old creation subjected to him.

This new nature, attaching to the family of God, and of course to every member of it, involves with such a relationship the responsibility of a corresponding walk as well as inward communion with the source and giver of its blessedness. It was the allotted and appropriate work of James to charge home this all-important truth and its practical consequences on those he addresses,

and indirectly but none the less really on all that have the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ. Here he is resisting an abuse easily understood, and as dangerous as evil. He censures and repudiates a mere doctrinal scheme without life, and hence destitute of the works which attest a new nature from God. John, who was given to set forth the glory of Christ's person beyond all others of the inspired, shows us life in Christ which the believer even now has, and the gift of the Spirit, the other Advocate. But here the same truth of the divine nature whereof we become partakers is no less truly revealed, the basis of all works acceptable to God, of all godly practice in word, deed, or feeling.

"But some will say, Thou hast faith, and I have works:" a supposition that divorces what God joins inseparably, an evident fighting against His word and nature, as also His will. For had he not affirmed in the Spirit, that God, the Father of lights, of His purpose begat us by the word of truth? To be doers of the word, not hearers only who are not so begotten, is our consistent and blessed place, a perfect law of liberty in which we by grace continue because our new nature loves Him and His word. Those who sever work from faith have no living association with God and simply deceive themselves.

Hence the refutation in the next words: — "Show me thy faith apart from works, and out of my works I will show thee my faith." It is an answer in both its parts conclusive. Faith is as it were the soul, and needs works as its body to be shown. To "show" faith separate from works is therefore an impossibility. He who believes by the Holy Spirit shows his faith by his works, as the rebuker rejoins.

This very word “show,” as it falls in with the great aim of the Epistle is the key to the difficulty, which from of old till now so many uninstructed and unestablished souls have found in comparing the teaching of Paul and of James.

Inasmuch as both were inspired, there can be no ground for it. The appearance is due solely to the ignorance of unbelief. The one is occupied with the root, with what is “before God” (Rom. 4:2); the other, with the fruit, and therefore “show me” before men. Both agree that, where faith is divinely given and souls are begotten by the word of truth, good works are the fruit and the outward witness of faith. There is nothing in fact to reconcile, because there is no real variance. The one insists that a man is justified by faith apart from works of law; the other, that he who claims to have faith is bound to show it by his works. In the one, the question is how a sinner can be justified by grace; in the other, what God looks for from him who professes faith.

But the refutation goes farther. “Thou believest that God is one; thou believest well: the demons also believe and shudder.” It was well to own the unity of God, and wicked to hold a multiplicity of gods, which were no better than demons. Even these were not so insensible as those who boasted of their faith but had no works corresponding to show. For the demons shudder, as we see in the Synoptic Gospels. The mere professor of faith may not have as much feeling, though God’s word solemnly warns that such as he have no inheritance in the kingdom of the Christ and God.

The allusion to the demons is a powerful illustration of the point in hand. None believe more decidedly than

they; none anticipate their doom more surely or keenly. But such faith has no link with a new nature from God, nor does it issue in works that please Him. The demons ere subject to the evil will of their chief, the devil. Man alas! plays his part in a way most offensive to God, boasting of a faith with even less feeling than the demons, and without the works testifying to a life received from Him. There is nothing to "show," as there ought to be and must be if the gospel were accepted as it is truly, not men's but God's word, which is also energetic in those that believe.

"But art thou willing to learn, O vain man, that faith apart from works is dead (or, idle)? Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when (or, in that) he offered Isaac his son upon the altar?" (vers. 20, 21).

As to the difference of reading in the first of these verses, the great majority of MSS. gives "dead"; but the witness for "idle" is, ancient and excellent. The shade is but slight, the substantial sense remains as before. Only there was here as elsewhere the danger of assimilation, for the chapter ends with the conclusion that faith apart from works is "dead." If "idle" were the true text in ver. 20, the language of ver. 26 would not be a repetition but a striking and effective climax. Hence Alford, Lachmann, Tischendorf, Tregelles, with Westcott and Hort, prefer it.

Then we are confronted with an appeal to Abraham's case, always of the greatest weight with his descendants, and in the present instance an overwhelming disproof of the evil that is combated, "Was not Abraham our father justified by (or, out of) works when he offered Isaac his son upon the altar?"

It is the more decisive, because the work of Abraham here adduced had nothing in common with the benevolent or philanthropic works which men mean by "good," and boast of as sure to weigh with God. To be willing to slay his son Isaac, on the contrary, this class of men would consider atrocious in Abraham, and only worthy of Moloch as they blasphemously add. They do not believe that God ever put Abraham to such a test, and become more and more bold in treating it as the Syrian legend of a barbarous age and of a heathen superstition.

Our Epistle, and it is not alone in this (for the Epistle to the Hebrews, wholly distinct as it is in character, is emphatically in accord), cites it as a deed of the highest moral excellence, and proving Abraham to be justified by works. It was characteristically an act contrary to every instinct of a father. It was enhanced by the fact that Isaac was "thine only son, whom thou lovest," as God said in putting Abraham to this extreme proof. There was, on the face of the demand, the apparent frustration of those blessed hopes of blessing, long promised by God, "In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed," to say nothing of making of him a great nation, and making his name great. How could this be if Isaac must now die, and this so unaccountably by his father's hand, as an offering to the God Who had wrought wondrously in giving him, and now strangely required his sacrifice? Doubtless God could give another son, and by Sarah if it so pleased Him; but this would not meet the case. For had not God said in calling his wife not Sarai but Sarah (Gen. 17) that the son of her, to make her mother of nations and of kings of peoples, would be this very Isaac, with whom He would establish

His covenant for an everlasting covenant for his seed after him? There in fact it was Abraham's faith rested. He laughed, we may say, at impossibilities, in contrast with Sarah's laughter incredulous at first. The real impossibility was for God to lie. He was sure therefore that if Isaac had now to die, God would raise him up from the dead in order to make the promise good. Abraham's faith was now, not as before, that God would give him a son of Sarah, but that He could not fail to raise this son from the death now required, in order to fulfil all He had promised. Never such a trial of faith; never such a triumph by grace.

Long before this event, if late in Abraham's fruitful course, it is written that he believed in Jehovah, and He counted it to him for righteousness (Gen. 15:16). This is the most express acknowledgment of him as justified by faith. And scripture uses it beyond controversy in this way and to this end, as in Rom. 4. But in Gen. 22, as referred to in our Epistle, we behold the believing man "showing" his works and thereby justified. Nor can any thing be more certain than that Abraham's work in offering Isaac his son on the altar derived all its value from his faith in God's call; so much so that without this it would have been heinously evil.

But the reasoning goes farther, and the weight of Abraham's example is urged yet more in a way as telling as simple. So did our Lord Himself when here below in divine wisdom and grace dealing with the Jews; so did the great apostle of the Gentiles repeatedly and in the power of the Spirit.

"And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him for

righteousness, and he was called Friend of God. Ye see that a man is justified by works and not by faith only" (vers. 23, 24).

It is a striking arrangement that the offering up of Isaac is introduced before the statement of Abraham's believing God. This departure from the order of fact and of the inspired history was of course not only intentional, but essential to the question in hand. For it is asked in the first place if Abraham our father was not justified when he offered Isaac his son upon the altar.

Greater trial than such a demand never was laid by God on a believing father. For many years had passed after the promise to make of him a great nation, to bless him, and to bless in him all the families of the earth (Gen. 12). This was ere long enlarged by defining the land or visible scene of the blessing with a promise also of his seed made as the dust of the earth beyond number (Gen. 13). Later on, when there appeared to the childless man no possessor of his house but Eliezer of Damascus, Jehovah assured him that one to come forth from his own bowels should be his heir, and that as the stars (for He bade him look up) should his seed be. And he believed Jehovah, Who counted it to him for righteousness. Long years after this was the son born, at the set time of which God had spoken to him. And not a few years elapsed during which Isaac grew up, the object not only of the tenderest love but of hopes far deeper and higher than filled any other heart on earth. God then proved Abraham. It was not to resign him in death, as many a father has sorrowfully known. It was not to have another son as a substitute for Isaac. For, in the bitter trial of Ishmael sent away with his bondwoman mother, Abraham knew from God that in

Isaac should his seed be called. In him only was the line of promise. Yet God, in no way softening the blow, “after these things” said, “Take now thy son, thine only one, Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of” (Gen. 22:2).

What! God, the true God, the God of grace, lay such a claim on His Friend — the demand on such a father of such a son, the surely and solely expected channel of blessing so immense and hopes so glorious! And not this only, but in a way so unexpected and so terrible, as a burnt offering to Himself, and from his father’s hand as the slaughterer! Yes, it was a trial beyond example, heightened by all that nature could feel, by the very faith that received the word of Jehovah so implicitly, and by the hope so fed by promise, and matured by experience of divine mercy beyond all he dared to ask when interceding. It was just to prove the faith unqualified which His grace had given to Abraham, and this not in word only but in deed and truth. Truly it was faith perfected by works. This could not be deduced from Gen. 15. It was manifest to the highest degree in Gen. 22. And hence we see the ground which requires that this should take here the first place.

But it is carefully added, “And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him for righteousness,” as the earlier chapter has. For this was the joint result of a faith proved to be of God. The works had nothing in common with those activities of benevolence which fill the horizon of man and are the boast of such as make the creature all, but God nothing. Here it was one who looked death in the face and in a

form incomparably harder to bear than if he had been called to die for his son, — to smite with the knife at God's word his only and well-beloved son on whose life hung the promises of blessing for all mankind! It was not only to trust God for his own character who would seem the worst of murderers, but for raising from the dead him who must live again to make good the promised blessings for Israel and for man.

Yet, however differently applied at the last, it was the same divinely-given faith on which God at the first had pronounced. "The scripture was fulfilled." No wonder he was called God's Friend. So Jehovah treated him in Gen. 18 when He disclosed His secret intentions. "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing?" So Jehovah treated him when drawing out his heart there in intercession. Hence in due time the pious king of Judah (2 Chr. 20:7) and the prophet friend of another pious king (Isa 41:8) called Abraham Jehovah's friend.

But it was a work that man would never have thought of, a work deriving all its virtue from absolute trust in the God Who demanded what He alone was entitled to ask, as He alone could have availed by resurrection power to conciliate it with His love, His truth, His character, and His purposes, turning it too, spite of appearances, to such experimental blessing as Abraham had never yet enjoyed, and to like blessing for the family of faith in their turn. We see from such a case how far Abraham was from a bare faith of the mind, when justified out of his works, and not out of the empty assent there denounced. How could it justify any one? Surely we may here apply the Lord's word, Wisdom is justified of all her children.

Another example is cited from the O.T. in support of faith not bare but working by love, so needful to impress on the Jewish mind. Rahab's case is in its circumstances as different as can be conceived from that of the father of the faithful; for it is a woman a Gentile, of the accursed race, and of previously bad character; yet after believing she entered the line of great David, and hence became an ancestor of David's greater Son. It was, therefore, no less pertinent and powerful.

"And likewise was not also Rahab the harlot justified by (out of) works, in that she received the messengers and sent [them] out another way?" (ver. 25).

Apart from faith the work of Rahab was no better than Abraham's trial. If done without God as the object and spring and authority, both were not only of no value but abominable. Viewed humanly, one was willing to kill his own son and heir, the other to betray her king and country to their destroyers. As faith wholly changed the character of their respective acts, so those acts proved the divine principle and the living power of their faith. This has been pointed out in the former instance. Wherein did it consist in the latter?

Rahab believed the two men to be the messengers of Jehovah's people. "I know," said she, "that Jehovah hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you." How did she know this? Not a city was taken in Canaan, not an inch of its territory was annexed, not even a blow had yet been struck. Jordan ran its barrier against Israel on the other side, and it was at that time overflowing all its banks. How did Rahab know what neither king nor people of Jericho

knew? It was by faith. “For we have heard [and faith comes by hearing] how Jehovah dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when ye came out of Egypt; and what ye did to the two kings of the Amorites that were beyond Jordan, to Sihon and to Og, whom ye utterly destroyed. We heard and our hearts melted, and there remained no more spirit in any man because of you; for Jehovah your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath” (Joshua 2).

The rest of the inhabitants had heard no less than Rahab; but the word of the report did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those that heard. It reached Rahab’s conscience, and she bowed to God in the face of every natural reason and feeling. She rightly judged the folly and the sin and the ruin of fighting against the God who had delivered His people from the power of Egypt, and crushed irretrievably their Amorite foes. His purpose to give Israel Canaan was notorious; and therefore she hid the two spies as the representatives of the people to whom God gave the land by promise and oath: two immutable things in which it was impossible that God should lie. Her faith lay thereon. Could any anchor be more secure or firm?

Yet Rahab did not despair for herself or others; she counted on mercy in Jehovah’s name, as true faith does. “And now, I pray you, swear to me by Jehovah, since I have dealt kindly with you, that ye will also deal kindly with my father’s house, and give me a sure sign, that ye will save alive my father and my mother and my brothers and my sisters, and all that they have, and deliver our souls from death.” The sign was given as solemnly as it was kept. As she received the messengers

in faith, she sent them out by another way in the same faith.

Thus Rahab's faith, was self-evidently fruitful. She had swamped all patriotism in her fear of Jehovah. As she believed in the bond that attached Him to His people, she looked, and not in vain, that assuredly as He should destroy Jericho, He would rescue her and hers. In spite of her habits hitherto impure, notwithstanding her unscrupulous readiness to deceive and baffle where her heart was engaged, faith was energetically at work; and the heart-knowing God bore her witness. "And likewise was not also Rahab the harlot justified by works?"

For her it was no barren acquiescence that Jehovah was the God of Israel. It was the living active faith that He would work on their behalf in Canaan as in Egypt, in the wilderness, and in the borders of the promised land. Hence she acted in a faith which issued in works exactly and highly suited to His purpose for His people. Unbelief might suggest failure for herself as well as for them. But her faith overcame all fears and rose above all difficulties. It was easy to conceive hitches, and to apprehend the indignant and cruel destruction which must follow their discovery of her treason. But her faith was simple and strong in what Jehovah was to His people; and it expressed itself not in words only but in deeds which she well knew exposed her naturally to the most suffering and ignominious death. Her faith laid hold of the sound principle that the highest of all rights is that God should have His rights. Therefore she dreaded not the wrath of king or people, gave to the wind her fears, and endured, as seeing Him Who is invisible. Was not she too justified by works?

The witnesses of faith and works here adduced are the most powerful that the O.T. affords; and from it this Epistle in God's wisdom cites them as the weightiest and most conclusive for the purpose. Those of Israel who had the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ were as responsible as all others to manifest righteousness practically. It was the more relevant to press the godly walk which becomes faith, because, being brought out of a system of letter, they needed to be especially cautioned against relapse into what they had left behind. If they lived in the Spirit, they should the more seek to walk in the Spirit. For so is the will of God that with well-doing we may put to silence the ignorance of senseless men, as well as guard against our own tendencies. But there was more still in the cases before us; for even where works are most insisted on as evidence and proof of divine reality, these works owe all their value to the faith which gave them being. Without faith they would have been detestable, instead of being as they are the most solid testimony to their faith in God at all cost.

"For as the body without a spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead" (ver. 26).

In ver. 17 it was said that faith, if it have not works, is "dead by itself"; in ver. 20 faith without works is "barren"; here at the end of the discussion faith without works is pronounced absolutely "dead," and so it surely is. Where the manifestation of living reality is sought, what can be more offensive than a dead body? Emphatically it is so under the gospel, where the Lord Himself declares that He who believes has life eternal. To lack holy vitality is fatal. It is not to have the Son of God, Who is the sole spring of all that glorifies God. For what else is the believer left here below but to walk and

serve and suffer and worship, while waiting for the Lord? For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works which God before prepared that we should walk in them.

Even in writing to the Thessalonian saints, recently brought to God from heathenism, the apostle remembers without ceasing their work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope. With them the gospel was not in word only but also in power. The very world outside was telling the effect of the truth shown in their turning to God from idols to serve a living and true God, and to await His Son from the heavens, Whom He raised from the dead, Jesus our deliverer from the coming wrath. Israelitish confessors yet more required to be warned against a lifeless formalism. And here this is fully given.

James 3

We are here directed to a weighty matter in the believer's practical life, already but briefly noticed in James 1:19, 26, now treated in full. It is opened with remarkable exhortation about "teachers," as it unequivocally ought to be. The connection with speaking confirms the required meaning, independent of philology though this of course admits of nothing else It would seem however that, in stages of our tongue now obsolete, "master" had not only the general sense of "superior" which is here quite out of place, but the special force of "teacher." So it was used in the English versions of the Gospels as the counterpart of the Hebrew "Rabbi." And so it is rendered here by Wiclif and a Wiclifite (Oxford, iv. 599), Tyndale, Cranmer, Geneva, Rheims, as well as the A.V. It was as natural for Jews to claim external honour in that position, as it

became Christian teachers to follow their Master in the lowly love which led Him to serve and to give His life a ransom for many. Nor did our Lord leave this to spiritual inference from such words as these; He enjoined it explicitly on the most honoured of His disciples. “Ye know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and the great ones exercise authority over them. Not so shall it be among you; but whosoever would become great among you shall be your servant (or, minister), and whosoever would be first among you shall be your bondman” (Matt. 20:25-27).

“Be not many teachers, my brethren, knowing that we shall receive greater judgment” (James 3:1).

No Epistle in the N.T. is less ecclesiastical than this; no one has less before it the gifts of the Lord for the perfecting of the saints. The task which the inspiring Spirit enabled the writer to perform was to warn against empty profession and to insist on holy practice in speech, walk, and affections, conformable with the new life begotten by the word of truth. This makes it all the more striking, that he, like the great apostle of the circumcision, should in this hortatory preface use language which implies that liberty of ministry among the confessors of Christ, which fell to the greater apostle of the uncircumcision to develop with certainty, precision, and fulness. The Acts of the Apostles historically presents the unspeakably momentous fact which accounts for and explains that liberty.

Again the Epistles make plain that it was also a question of responsibility to the Lord Who gave to His own bondmen His goods, to each according to his several ability; as He will, when He comes, reckon with them on

the use they made of His trust; and woe shall be to the wicked and slothful servant who traded not with the talent given, because he was afraid and distrusted the grace of the Master.

Here the openness of the church in apostolic times to receive instruction from all competent to impart it is beyond controversy. As gifted men were by that privilege bound to give it out, so were the saints bound to profit thereby. Thus we are taught in the capital seat of this fundamental truth for the assembly, 1 Cor. 12 - 14. There Paul lays down, in that great epistle of ecclesiastical order, the correction of their abuses about women's place, the Lord's Supper, and the assembly also. "If any one seemeth to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God." Human societies naturally fall into the inventions of men; not so those that believe God has revealed His mind for the church as authoritatively as for every other thing on which He has spoken.

If the Holy Spirit abide no longer with and in us, we are left orphans indeed. But it is not so. The Father, who in answer to the Son's request sent another Paraclete or Advocate, gave Him to abide with us forever. So abides the one body like the one Spirit. In 1 Cor. 12 we have this power shown in His varied activity in the members, as His presence is their uniting energy. Not of course that all is given which once abounded as signs of Christ's victory. Tongues and interpretations, powers and gifts of healings, did follow those that believed, as the Lord promised. But He never intimated that these were to continue "till the end of the age," or in any equivalent phrase elsewhere. But the gifts needful to complete what the apostles and prophets began. as the

foundation, are guaranteed in Eph. 4:12. In 1 Cor. 13 divine love is notably introduced, as requisite for the right exercise of this new relationship, and having its blessed scope there pre-eminently. And 1 Cor. 14 closes the teaching by the authority of the Lord in His word, directing and controlling the action of gifts in the assembly; so that an unbeliever might report that God was indeed among those gathered, and the believers be responsible that all should be done to edification, comelily and in order. Nor is there any other order for the church as such sanctioned of God. Can the church change it or correct Him?

But 1 Peter 4:10, 11 also furnishes a word of great price. “Each according as he received a gift, ministering the same one to another as good stewards of God’s manifold grace: if any one speaketh, as God’s oracles; if any one ministereth, as of strength which God supplieth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom is the glory and the might unto the ages of ages. Amen.” Here is the same liberty and the same responsibility as elsewhere. Each gifted one is bound to act as a good steward of God’s various free-gift. But the speaker is to speak as God’s mouthpiece, as God gives then and there; and service of another kind is to be full of strength which He supplies, that (not man but) God be glorified through Christ Jesus Only the power of the Spirit could make either good. No creature ability could avail. It is alone through Christ to His glory.

Our text adds another and characteristic lesson. Though the door be open, the solemn caution is heard: “Be not many teachers, my brethren, knowing that we shall receive greater judgment.” Conscience is appealed to here, as faith by Peter. Let there be no haste, no levity,

no self-confidence, no vanity in seizing the opportunity; but there lay danger, the capability of ready abuse. The guard however is no official restraint, as in Christendom generally, to shut out liberty, but the counsel in this case unmeaning, against many teachers, knowing as we do that we shall incur greater judgment Our Lord, denouncing every idle word and the account thereof to be rendered in the day of judgment, said “By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned;” so His servant here reminds us, that by thus speaking responsibility is increased. God is not mocked and remembers words lightly said, which might be urged on others, with little or no thought of our need. “Thou then that teachest another, teachest thou not thyself?” In every way judgment becomes heavier if teaching flow not from love and in the fear of God. But the inspired writer never thinks of closing the open door as a divine remedy.

From the over-eagerness to teach, gift or no gift, we come in the next verse to a far wider range of caution, which is illustrated in the usual practical way, but with singular aptitude and force.

“For in many things [or, often] we all offend. If any one offendeth not in word, he [is] a perfect man able to bridle the whole body also” (ver. 2).

Thus the Spirit of God turns from the vain readiness to teach in public to the irrepressibility of speech in general. “For in many things we all offend.” The word translated “offend” passes from physical stumbling to moral failure, as in James 2:10, the transition already being marked in Rom. 11:11. Compare also 2 Peter 1:10 with the double occurrence in our verse.

Without doubt each saint is responsible in all humility as regards himself, to speak for the Lord where His glory and will, grace and truth, are plainly revealed. Alas, how much is said that has no higher source than self, however veiled it may be! But self when opposed is apt to break out into strife and party-work, with all their deadly accompaniments and results. Nor are any souls more deceived than those who accredit themselves with the best motives, and fear not to assail with odious imputations those who reprove them. It is clear that James knew this deplorable evil but too well, as indeed the other inspired writers; nor did anyone perhaps suffer from bitter experience of the evil so much as the apostle Paul. It could not be otherwise, when we read of the state of the Galatians on the one hand and of the Corinthians on the other, and of his own responsibility to pronounce on such early departure from both divine truth and the ways of the Lord. For they are ordinarily associated with a self-exalting and rebellious spirit.

But these servants of the Lord did not refrain from the most trenchant denunciation of both errors and moral condition, any more than He Himself when here in perfect love, and because it was perfect. Who but He called Peter “Satan”? For he was an offence to Christ, because in the most amiable way he was minding the things of men, not those of God. How often too He had to mark and rebuke the rivalry of men, whom grace alone caused to differ from others, craving after their own honour, where He pointed the way to shame and suffering now (Himself alone entering its unfathomable depths), but to heavenly glory with Him shortly! Even after He rose, what could He say to the sorrow-stricken

doubters, but “O senseless and slow of heart to believe in all the prophets spoke?”

Not less cuttingly does Paul remonstrate with the Corinthians as carnal and walking as men, to whom he gave milk, not meat as being not yet able to bear it. These were the men ready to sit in judgment on the apostle’s authority and practice! Were not the signs of an apostle wrought out among them in all patience? The humbling thing to his heart was that he should have one word to say about it to saints so deeply indebted to him. But he does not fail to speak with severity, whatever the anguish it might be to himself. How little they knew what it cost him, when they winced under the reproof! How far from feeling the love according to God that lay beneath the truth, which did not flatter them but laid bare their lofty thoughts and low ways!

Just so the apostle reproaches other children of his in the faith, “O senseless Galatians, who bewitched you?... I am afraid of you, lest indeed I laboured in vain as to you.... of whom I again travail in birth, until Christ be formed in you.... The persuasion is not of him that calleth you.”

Let us not forget what spirit it was that resisted of old such faithful men as Moses and Aaron, or taxed them with taking too much on them, “seeing all the congregation are holy, everyone of them, and Jehovah among them.” It was their own self-sufficiency that left out His will and word in their eagerness to lift themselves up. And such gain-saying is not obsolete. It is the spirit of the age increasingly, and displays itself religiously yet more than in the profane world.

Yet even the most spiritual have to watch habitually and to judge self in this respect at least as much as in any other. “For in many things we all offend. If any one offendeth not in word, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body also.” It is trying to hear men talk of matters which they are incompetent to judge. And it is easy enough to overshoot the mark of a true and deserved horror of what no godly mind should tolerate; and all the more because true discernment is rare. Christ is the pattern. A perfect man is he who offends not in word, able to bridle the whole body also. May our word as the rule be always with grace, seasoned with salt. May we also, if by God called to the duty, be brave to overthrow reasonings and every high thing that lifts itself up against the knowledge of God, and to lead every thought into the obedience of Christ.

The figure of “bridling” in verse 2 suggests the illustration in verse 3, which again is strengthened once more in the verse that follows In the received text we appear to have an error exceedingly frequent among the copyists, who are apt to confound εἰ and ἰ where it does not affect the sense, and where here it does. Probably ἰδοὺ in the beginning of verse 4 led to the idea of commencing verse 3 with ἴδε; but it ought rather to have induced hesitation, for why then vary the adverb? It would seem that εἰ δὲ was thus mistaken, and the more because the apodosis might easily be overlooked by being made part of the conditional protasis.

“Now if we put the horses’ bridles (or, bits) in their mouths, that they may obey us, we turn about their whole body also. Behold, the ships also, though they are so great and are driven by rough winds, are turned

about by a very small rudder, where the impulse of the helmsman may purpose" (vers. 3, 4).

The instances chosen energetically tell for the purpose in hand, being homely and familiar. It would be a palpable mistake to doubt the power of a given object, because its size is diminutive. Such are the bits we insert into the horses' mouths. Impetuous the animal may be; but thereby as the rule it is reduced to obedience. Nor is it only the mouth or head that is governed, but "we turn about the whole body also." Thus is complete contrast secured.

It is true that we ought not to be as the horse or as the mule which have no understanding, whose trappings must be bit and bridle for restraint, or they will not come near unto thee (Psalm 32). But this is restraint, and our shame where it is needed, as in the case supposed; for it is our joy, when walking in the spirit of obedience, to know God's guidance in the way we should go, counselled with His eye upon us. But if it be needed, He knows and fails not to restrain and to chastise.

In another form is pointed out a like principle on the sea, as we have had on the land, and in an inanimate object of immensely greater proportions. Let the ship be of ever so vast bulk and driven sometimes by a wind however rough, yet is it turned about by a very small rudder, whither the steersman's impulse may direct. The steering, if it could be questioned, is made evident in the sequel.

We may notice by the way how little avails either a powerful mind or ponderous learning for the just interpretation of scripture, when such a commentator as Grotius could understand "the body" in these verses as

said of the church. No inspired writer but the apostle Paul ever employs that figure. James means simply the outer man. He is still dealing with the extreme liability to fail with the tongue. If one does not fail in word, this is a perfect man; for he had owned that we all do fail. This he follows up by two illustrations, which show the influence of a small thing in controlling a great even in the most difficult circumstances, to impress the importance and the duty of governing our speech. Blessed indeed is it, when the tongue, under the guidance of God, testifies to the whole body under His control! He who more than any other urges works, in evidence of reality in those who profess faith in the Lord Jesus, warns us of licence in our words, so influential for evil if not for good; and all the more seriously as indicative of the inner man and involving the outer.

Many there are in all ages disposed to take account of nothing but deeds. Freedom in speech seems a necessary prerogative of a man, and its excess of all things most venial. Far different was our Lord's estimate of words (Matt. 12), which yet more than deeds express the feelings and bent of the inner man And similar is the language of His servant here, couched in terse, severe, highly figurative, but all the more unsparing, terms. "So also the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. See how large a wood how little a fire kindleth! And the tongue is fire, the world of iniquity; the tongue cometh to be in our members that which defileth the whole body, and setteth in a blaze the course [lit. wheel] of nature, and is set in a blaze by gehenna" (vers. 5, 6).

That the tongue should be physically diminutive only gives the more vividness to its capacity for mischief beyond reckoning or measure. Who can conceive the

destructive effects of an evil word? Yet the tongue, little as it is, boasts habitually and also great things and is so much the more readily enticed to persevere and grow bolder, if sin is limited to deeds of the body. It may be observed that the word ὕλη (here, as generally, translated “wood” or “forest”) is often in philosophical writings used to express “matter,” and by historians or others, like “materia” in Latin authors, the stuff or material of anything, timber, etc. The A.V. had ground for its rendering, even if the preponderance lean to that view which is presented here.

How energetic is the opening of ver. 6! “The tongue is fire.” It is not only that a mighty conflagration ensues from an apparently trivial spark; but the tongue itself is “fire” morally. However free from open acts of unrighteousness he may be who gives it loose rein without God before his eyes, it is, without going farther, “a world of iniquity.” He Whose ears are open to the cry of the righteous does not fail to mark unbridled licence of speech, which shrinks not from any imputation, however unjust, that ill-will can dictate.

The best witnesses, both MSS. and Vv., omit the “so” which smooths the way for the second time “the tongue” is introduced. It is most forcible as it stands simply. “The tongue cometh to be in our members that which defileth the whole body,” and this is a sense which, prevailing in the best authors so that no detailed justification is necessary, seems to suit the clause, better than the bare “is” of the A.V. or “is constituted” as it frequently means. Here it is liable to give the erroneous notion of being divinely arranged to so evil an end; which is a thought impossible to a good conscience and wholly opposed to the truth. It is through the fall, and the self-will or

lawlessness which characterises sin, that the tongue comes thus to be such a burning power of evil in the members. It is the defiler of the whole body, for there is no limit to its unrighteousness; “the world of iniquity,” deeming itself to have immunity as long as it only injures in word.

But the latter clauses both enlarge the sphere of the evil, and deepen our sense of its source to the highest degree. For we are next told that “it setteth in a blaze the course of nature, and is set on a blaze by hell.” The wheel or course of nature extends far beyond the whole body; and such is the inflammatory range for the malignant tongue. What then must be the spring? It is, as we lastly hear, “set on a blaze by hell.” The evil one is a murderer as well as a liar; and unceasing antagonism to Christ in both respects is its flagrant proof.

Another consideration is now urged, and not a little humiliating to set souls on their guard in the allowance of the tongue, and to hinder surprise at the extravagance of its outbreaks.

“For every nature of both wild beasts and birds, of both things that creep and things in the sea, is tamed and hath been tamed by the nature of man; but the tongue is none of men able to tame: an unsettled evil, full of deadly poison” (vers. 7, 8).

Here the inspired writer alleges an indisputable fact. What savage brute has not yielded to the dominion of man? What has not been subdued and become his pet or playmate? What bird of the air fierce or timorous has not bowed to his superiority and obeyed his will? Serpents even, however wily, powerful, or venomous, have been often taught harmless familiarity; while creatures of the

sea have made friends and rendered homage or service to him.

But where is the man that has truly tamed either his own tongue or another's? Here one can appeal to universal observation, though not less forcibly and painfully to personal experience. It may and ought to be a heart-breaking confession; but is it not most true? Who does not know how rapid and ready is the tongue to break bounds; how slow to seek or keep the peace? How vehement its invective, how irritating its insinuations, how bitter and unmeasured its revilings! Is any one too obscure or feeble to escape its assault? Is any so venerable or exalted as to overawe its audacity? What piety or godliness can suffice to shame its insolence, or to silence its malice?

It is indeed, as it is here called, "an unsettled" or unstable "evil, full of deadly poison." Nor is the poison ever more attractive and dangerous than when administered in a gilded pill. Good words and fair speeches to make the worse appear the better reason is a favourite device of the enemy, and peculiarly fitted to deceive the hearts of the guileless.

Does this seem a too highly coloured picture of the tongue? It is from One Who knew what is in man, and needed none therefore to bear witness of him. And He Whom James served in this Epistle as in his life-ministry knew what it was to have a human heart and tongue, both bearing good and sweet fruits continually to His God and Father. It is to Him that the believer looks and on Whose grace he counts. For underneath the gloomy description of a still gloomier reality, there is a streak of light divine. Is it written that absolutely none is able to

tame the tongue? By no means. None “of men” can tame it. Ah! we can thank God. He is our desire, our expectation, and our strength. It were a wholly unchristian thought to subjugate our own tongue. It is our confidence to look up to God for that which is altogether beyond our capacity. And He works His wonders in every thing through Christ our Lord. If all the rude men of Nazareth bore Him witness and wondered at the words of grace which proceeded out of His lips, does not our God and Father use these to humble and to transform and to invigorate, so that the tongue, that once was our shame, should be by His grace truly our “glory,” according to the Hebrew phrase? Christ indeed was here perfect. “Never man spoke like this man,” said the officials who were no friends, to their superiors who were His foes. But we are His; and as He is our life, may we learn of Him in this respect as in every other.

From this point our Epistle takes up the ground of manifest and gross inconsistency. None but the most heedless can regard lightly a fault so self-condemnatory; nor can God either originate or sanction so plain a disorder and misuse of that excellent possession, the speech, conferred on man by His Creator. Least excusable is the inconsistency in such as own their relationship with God and the Lord.

“Therewith we bless the Lord and [the] Father, and therewith we curse men that are made according to God’s likeness. Out of the same mouth cometh blessing and cursing. Not so, my brethren, ought these things to be” (vers. 9, 10).

There is the article, and but one, to “Lord and Father.” Grammatically therefore the phrase admits of meaning “Him Who is Lord and Father,” no less than “the Lord and (the) Father” brought together under that link of objects united here expressly though in themselves distinct. This they could not be fittingly unless there were a common nature and glory. So we may see in such a phrase as “the kingdom of Christ and God.” Far be it from the heart or mouth to question in the least that Christ is God, which is declared comparatively so often. But ask for instance if we must, whether Eph. 5:5 means this, though the single article brackets together both terms. So we may see in “the apostles and prophets” of Eph. 2:20, combined for the foundation, but given separately in Eph. 4:11.

The idiom is common enough even with proper names, as when the man in Acts 3:11 held fast “Peter and John” thus united, though in vers. 1 and 3 both names are presented historically without the article to either. Such is the reading of ample and good authority. But the Sinai, the Vatican, and the Alexandrine with half-a-dozen cursives insert the article before John, which if right would individualise, instead of combining in a special way, the two apostles. In Acts 4:13, 19, there can hardly be a doubt that they are thus joined together. Both cases occur with Paul and Barnabas in Acts 13, 14. Acts 15 is instructive from varieties of form, each employed with exquisite propriety. Ver. 2 presents Paul and Barnabas, first severed, and then without emphasis as simple fact, as also in ver. 12. But in ver. 22 they are expressly combined in unity as in 25 (the order changed), as in ver. 35 the fact is merely stated historically.

There seems no sufficient ground then for doubting that "the Lord" in the usual acceptation of the term is here combined with "the Father" as objects united in our praise. That it is unusual, all admit; but so it is in many a phrase of holy writ, that our narrowness of thought may be corrected and enlarged out of the fulness of divine truth. On the other hand no one should stumble at predicating "Lord" of the Father, if such were the aim of the inspiring Spirit here. For though the crucified Jesus was made by God both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36), and He is in distinctive office one sole Lord, as the Father is simply in His nature one sole God (1 Cor. 8:6), it does not follow that "Lord" may not be applied to the other Persons in the Godhead. Thus in 2 Cor. 3 it is predicated of the Spirit in the last clause of the last verse; as it is of God rather than of Christ (Who is distinguished as His Anointed) in Rev. 11:15. It was the rarity of the combination, however taken, which no doubt led to substituting "God" (as in the common text, following the more modern MSS.) for "the Lord." But if we accept the ancient reading, our language, we must bear in mind, does not, like the Greek, admit but one article.

The grand principle is plain beyond all question, that no inconsistency can be more gross than to employ the tongue, now in blessing the Supreme, now in cursing men that are made according to God's likeness. We are objects of His loving counsels, begotten of Him by the word of truth, and should be the last to curse any, as being blessed ourselves of mere mercy. It is not that fallen men have any intrinsic moral worth, as we above all should know from our own humbling experience. So we at least should never forget how they were brought into being as in God's likeness. How unbecoming in

man, how shameless in us who bless the Lord and the Father, to curse men so made! Time was, beyond doubt, when we lived in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another; but the kindness and love of God our Saviour broke down our pride and purified our souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, and gave us a heart touched with divine grace toward all mankind. Instead then of cursing others, we want them to obey the truth, share the blessing, and join us in blessing Him Who is the source and giver of it all.

The incongruity is heightened by the figure of the next verse (10), “Out of the same mouth cometh forth blessing and cursing;” and by the quiet but pungent appeal, “Not so, my brethren, ought these things to be.” The consistency of the Christian in its perfection is ever and only in Christ; and He is the sole and constant standard for us. What love in Him even for the vilest and bitterest of His foes! Called to inherit a blessing, may we not render evil for evil, or railing for railing, but contrariwise blessing, knowing that we are thereunto called. This is surely, dear brethren, what it ought to be.

Now we have, following, fresh illustrations to impress on the readers the incongruity and the enormity of injurious speech, all the worse for utterances of piety and propriety interchanged with it, and beyond just question condemnatory of it, as indicating the lack of the fear of God and of regard for man. The inspired writer’s sense of its evil kindles into glowingly indignant questions, to which expostulation he himself supplies the answer in a few pregnant words.

“Doth the fountain out of the same opening pour forth the sweet and the bitter? Can my brethren, a figtree

produce olives, or a vine figs? Neither [can] salt water produce sweet" (vers. 11, 12).

Here as elsewhere, the homeliness of the examples lends the more force to the reproof. To take the first instance; who ever heard of the fountain from the same slit emitting sweet water and bitter? Nature itself rebukes so shameless a mixture, and issues so contradictory, in those who praise the Lord and the Father; The great apostle of the Gentiles drew weapons from the same armoury in 1 Cor. 11:14, 16 for divine order, and in 2 Thess. 3:10 also; as he did repeatedly to his confidential fellow-labourer Timothy in his First Epistle (1 Tim. 2:12-15; 1 Tim. 4:3-5; 1 Tim. 6:6-8). But nowhere have we more telling thrusts of this kind than in the Epistle before us; where the impossible in nature is made to expose and castigate the ethically inconsistent, especially aggravated as it was by the profession of relationship to God and by the claim to enjoyment of His favour. Is the new nature to be disgraced by that which the old universal nature repudiates even though fallen?

In the second the demand is still more peremptory. It is not, Does, but "Can a figtree produce olives, or a vine figs?" And we have the repetition of "my brethren" in this second case, though so soon after its dignified affectionate introduction just before in verse 10, in order to send the appeal home to their bosoms. One of the learned men who, setting up to interpret the words, set at nought its spirit, dares to compare the figure with our Lord's in Matt. 7:16-20 in order to disparage His servant here. But it is only another sample of ill-willed ignorance which so constantly appears where erudition is not subservient to faith; that is where man assumes to judge

God, instead of seeking to profit by His word. For the Lord was there laying down the error of expecting good fruit from a bad tree; whereas His servant in order to rebuke the glaring inconsistency of calling on the Lord of glory and indulging evil speech confronts it with the natural impossibility of a tree producing any but its own proper fruit. Both are plainly true, and each exquisitely adapted to its purpose. Unbelief blindly errs, but only betrays its sinful presumption to those that know God and bow to His word.

It is possible that the first word of the last clause (οὔτε, neither) may have through hasty misapprehension given rise to the added οὕτως ("so") of the Text Rec. Then came an effort to make the phrase more pointed by reading οὐδεμία πηγή (no fountain). The Sinaitic Uncial has οὔτως οὐδέ. But even Tischendorf, and Westcott and Hort decline to follow; for they with Alford, Lachmann, Tregelles, and Wordsworth read the text which yields the translation given above. There is, it would seem, a certain strangeness in reading οὔτε rather than οὐδέ. But this appears to be explicable by the writer's carrying on in his mind the preceding clause. The insertion of the conjunction (καὶ, "and") in the last clause is opposed to the weightiest of the ancient witnesses, both MSS. and Vv. and loses the point of the true text, which varies the figure by a negation which is indisputable.

From the preceding illustrations, so pungent and powerful, against the inconsistency and unnaturalness of unloving and unworthy language in lips which were avowedly consecrated to the glory of Jesus according to the character of a new nature, the Epistle turns to and

raises the question of the wisdom and understanding which becomes His followers.

“Who [is] wise and understanding among you? Let him show out of his good conduct his works in meekness of wisdom” (ver. 13).

It is the opening of a new paragraph which continues to the end of this chapter, and passes indeed into the following one by way of contrast. The appeal here is searching. For assuredly those who set up so zealously to teach others did not doubt their own wisdom and understanding. Yet are they not rare and precious qualities?

1 Cor. 12 speaks of the “word of wisdom” and the “word of knowledge” as given through the Spirit, and presents them in the front place when he particularises the forms which “the manifestation of the Spirit” takes, as given to each for the common profit. On the other hand he puts in the last place “kinds of tongues” and “interpretation of tongues,” of which the light-minded and unspiritual Corinthians had shown themselves vain and had made a disorderly use. He is far from denying the divine source and character of either; on the contrary he declares that “all these things” (after giving a considerable list of powers then in action) “worketh the one and the same Spirit, dividing to each in particular as He will (or, pleaseth).” For He is sovereign as a divine Person. But they had not all the same spiritual value. Some gifts edified the assembly by revealing God’s mind and counsels; others nourished and directed the new life of individuals in His will; some strengthened for service, others issued in praise and thanksgiving. Again, some were for a sign to the unbelievers, while others were

directed distinctly to the believers. And as prophesying had this latter character peculiarly, so tongues and the former had a lower place, though to outward appearance far the more extraordinary of the two. But here we may notice, as in 1 Cor. 12:28 too, the apostle's uniform guard against an estimate altogether human and erroneous. Why not desire earnestly the greater but less showy gifts? "Brethren, be not children in mind, but in malice be babes, but in mind be of full age" (1 Cor. 14:20).

In our Epistle however there is no development of that which is so prominent in the First Epistle to the Corinthians, but a moral dealing with the danger there and then prevalent among those addressed. The aim is to correct the haste and the character of speech generally, and the readiness to teach in particular. From the beginning, not only of the Christian confession, but of Israel's history, we may observe what importance was given to wisdom and understanding. Weigh such plain instances as Deut. 1:13, 15, and Deut. 4:5, 6. "Take you wise men, and understanding, and known, according to your tribes, and I will make them heads over you." "So I took the heads of your tribes, wise men, and known, and made them heads over you, captains of thousands, and captains of hundreds, and captains of fifties, and captains of tens, and officers, according to your tribes." "Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as Jehovah my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the midst of the land whither ye go in to possess it. Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people." Indeed the

spirit of it runs through that remarkable book, as obedient heed to the word of God forms it. What else can be the condition of blessing for all in relationship with God, be it for earth or for heaven?

Here a similar object appears in the enquiry, “Who is wise and understanding among you?” and in the counsel that follows, “Let him show out of his good course of conduct (that becomes such a man, in deed and in truth) his works (not self-complacently or ostentatiously, but) in meekness of wisdom.” What more holy, sober, or pertinent? What more sad than when wisdom seems assuming or harsh? It is abiding in Christ that produces fruit acceptable to our God and Father. But we need His words too, and prayer.

Having exhorted him who was reported wise and understanding to show in the reality of comely works, not mere words, his good conduct or practical life in meekness of wisdom, not in superstitious criticism or self-conceit, the Epistle turns to warn of the dark side.

“But if ye have bitter emulation and faction in your heart, do not boast and lie against the truth” (ver. 14).

Such is man: self is his idol, self-will his way. The profession of Christ in no way eradicates it, but makes it all the more sad and inconsistent, in Jew even more than Greek. As we see in 1 Cor. 1, 3, so we read here. “Bitter emulation” in the disciple of the crucified Lord of glory! Alas! it was no hypothetical case, but a fact. “But if ye have”; and this not in the hasty speech, but “in your heart.” So early and everywhere did the Christian confessors slip away from the reason of their being, and rival the failure of Israel. So quickly did they forget that Christianity, while emphatically “faith” (Gal. 3:25), in

contrast with the law (the previous tutor), depends on life from God, or a divine nature partaken of, as we have noticed in this Epistle and may in every other. Now what room is there in that new life for “bitter emulation”? Christ condemns it, root and fruit. In Him was none of it, but meekness of wisdom, and zeal for God. First and last the zeal of His Father’s house ate Him up. When or where else do we hear of His taking disciplinary work in hand, expelling outrageous offenders, and pouring contempt on their profane trade? Though the Holy and the High, when does He contend for His own glory, when and where does He resent the slight and scorn of guilty man?

If Christ be, as indeed He is, the Christian’s life, what is it for him to have “bitter emulation” in his heart? Is it not the indulgence in an evil work of the old man, and the dishonour of the Master by the servant? This was bad, but “faction” is worse; because it is not only the individual gratifying the vanity of an evil nature, but its spread to others too ready to exalt self and depreciate such as ought to be loved and honoured. For is it not to this we are called here below? “Let nothing be (said the great apostle) according to faction or vain-glory, but in lowly-mindedness each esteeming one another more excellent than themselves” (Phil. 2:3). We are entitled to regard them as saints beloved of God; though by grace the same, we cannot but feel our own unworthiness. What do we know of them as we know of ourselves? On every ground bitter emulation and faction be far from our heart. So pleads meekness of wisdom, that we may show out of our good conduct the works that now become that excellent Name by which we are called.

But if we have in our heart these unclean things, bitter emulation and faction, “do not boast and lie against the truth.” Love, we know, is not emulous, nor does it rejoice at iniquity, but rejoices with the truth. But the vaunting, which accompanies emulation and faction, is against the truth; for the truth wholly exposes and condemns it as of the carnal mind which is enmity against God. He was the truth, Who was meek and lowly in heart, and bids us take His yoke upon us and learn of Him, and we shall find rest to our souls. For His yoke is easy and His burden is light.

If we cherish these evils so contradictory of Christ, while called by His name, what is it but “lying against the truth”? So trenchantly does the Epistle denounce what the enemy ever seeks to introduce under cover of zeal for the truth.

Wisdom, like faith, shows its character by the spirit and conduct that accompanies and reflects it. Every good gift and every perfect giving cometh down from above, from the Father of lights, Who of His own will begot us by the word of truth. What is the source and character of any wisdom, however pretentious, that coalesces with bitter emulation and faction? Is it not a lie against the truth? Does it flow from anything higher than hearts governed by self-will, instead of being purified by faith?

“This wisdom is not descending from above, but earthly, natural, demoniacal. For where envying and faction [are], there disorder [is] and every bad deed” (vers. 15, 16).

To describe it thus was to brand it as thoroughly evil and of the enemy. The tone of James differs from that of John and Jude, of Paul and of Peter; but all agree in testifying

that Christ alone is, and shows us, the wisdom acceptable in God's eyes and suitable for His children. Man's wisdom is in truth his folly, for it is in disobedience of His word, and seeks independence of His will. The Lord of glory was the obedient man and gave the pattern of One on earth Who did not merely live through or by the Father but on account or by reason of Him. So perfectly was He the servant (and this is the perfection of man Godward) that He had no other motive in His living; and He lays this down for him that feeds on Himself — even he shall leave on account of Me (John 6:57). He is the Bread that came down from heaven and gives life to the world; but more than this, He gives His flesh for the life of the world. Less than this would not suffice to meet its ruin and accomplish the blessing God had in His heart for the believer. To eat His flesh and drink His blood is indispensable, if we are to have life in ourselves, as was His purpose of grace about us. He that thus eats and drinks has the communion of His death, and has life eternal, with the assurance of being raised by Him at the last day, yea more — of abiding in Him, and of His abiding in him, this day.

No other wisdom therefore suits the believer. The wisdom of the first man, and of the world, has no link with heaven. It is at best earthly, and either seeks glory from men or yet more proudly tramples on other men as unworthy of a thought. The sage thinks he is the king, and will have not fellows but slaves, in the fulness of his self-complacency and disdain. The most offensive condition to his mind is to be a servant, to be God's bondman This is love's place, and Christ took end filled it unfailingly; and by His redemption we can follow in His path, having Him as our life, which He truly is, and

are free to cultivate this wisdom coming down from above. For we too can love one another, because love is of God; and as every one that loves has been begotten of God, and knows God, so he that does not love never learnt God, because God is love.

Further too, it is not only “earthly” wisdom, but “natural.” It has no true sense of God’s mind any more than of His love. As the apostle tells us in 1 Cor. 2, a natural or soulish man receives not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot gain knowledge of them, because they are spiritually discerned; whereas the spiritual man discerns them all, while himself is discerned by none.

Another word completes the sad picture of wisdom outside Christ; it is “demoniacal.” It is quite enough to render it accurately; for though demons may be distinguished from their prince, yet they are the emissaries of Satan and the instruments of his malicious power. How little do men believe that the wisdom of self, so coveted of mankind, is “demoniacal”! How little do the children of God seek that which is of Christ, the best proof that it is of God’s Spirit! For He is here to glorify Christ; and this He does by receiving of Christ’s, and announcing it to us.

But are not God’s children exposed in their weakness to danger and evil? They are not in the flesh, but the flesh is in them; they are in the world with all its snares; they are the object of the evil one’s incessant and subtle seductions. But greater is He that is in them than he that is in the world. Have they not Christ? And Christ is God’s wisdom no less than His power. Far from them to boast of wisdom or aught else in themselves. Indeed God

chose the foolish things of the world to put to shame the sages. And of Him are they in Christ Jesus, “Who was made to us wisdom from God, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.”

Yet God does not fail to set even the weakest on their guard against the assumption of a wisdom that is not of Him. Its moral character betrays its evil source, when smooth language and fair speaking might easily ensnare the unwary. The least intelligent of saints who keeps the Lord Jesus before him can discern “envying and faction”; and these allowed bring in speedily “confusion and every bad work.” By their fruits therefore the earthly wise become manifest ere long to those who are neither intelligent nor spiritual enough to discern otherwise. They are thus warned and kept by divine grace.

In the next verse we have the qualities of divine wisdom drawn out for our cheer and profit; as in James 1:5 we were exhorted to ask it of God that gives to all liberally and without a reproach, though indeed even His own deserve blame.

“But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, uncontentious, impartial (or, unfeigned)” (ver. 17): few words but sound and deep, pregnant and penetrating, inspired of God as they really are.

Now that grace has given us Christ, that we are begotten of God and have His Spirit, how suitable to look unto the same source for wisdom that springs not up from the earth or from man! But we are encouraged already, by the goodness proved when we deserved judgment and everlasting shame, to ask for all we need

in our new responsibility because of our new relationship. Earthly as we once were, our hearts rose not then above it; alas we were prone to sink below it through the wiles of the enemy. Now that we are "heavenly" as the apostle Paul intimates (1 Cor. 15:48) we constantly want a wisdom that is from above. Nor is there any other good gift from the Father of lights of deeper moment for His children. Will He not give it liberally to all that wait on Him in faith, and refuse all doubt? The love He has shown us, and the assuring word He has written for us, rebuke every such questioning. If we have not, it is because we ask not. If we ask and receive not, it is because we ask amiss, that we may spend it on our pleasures. How could God consistently impart heavenly wisdom to those who mind earthly things? He gives in honour of Christ for His own glory.

What then is the Spirit's delineation of this wisdom? It is "first pure." How worthy of God and of the Lord Jesus by Whom we know what He is! Let God's child advance as he may, he cannot claim this. How much there is always to mortify in our members on the earth! Assuredly "whosoever is born of God doth not practise sin, for his seed remaineth in him; and he cannot sin (ἁμαρτάνειν, the course and character of our fallen nature), because he is born of God" (1 John 3:9). Hatred of sin and living to God characterise all His family. But it is only when Christ shall be manifested, that we shall be seen to be like Him. We shall see Him as He is; then and thus shall we be conformed to His image. We shall bear the image of the earthly; not till then shall we bear that of the Heavenly. But everyone that has this hope founded on Him purifies himself, even as He is pure. We, though bathed all over, need the habitual washing of the word

to wash our feet. We have to purify ourselves, because we contract defilement, and are not pure as He was and is.

The wisdom from above savours of Him to meet our wants. It is first pure, “then peaceable,” an order much to be borne in mind. Even saints are apt to make peaceableness their prime object. But this would compromise the character and glory of God, Who will have the exclusion of all that defiles. Sanctified to Jesus’ obedience and the sprinkling of His blood, we are bound to see first that His will be our aim and purpose of heart, however important it is also and next to promote peace. Such certainly is the spirit and working of the wisdom from above. So in the Gospels we see invariably in the words and ways of the Lord; and not otherwise do we read the Holy Spirit’s teaching in the Epistles.

Again, it is “gentle,” and “easy to be entreated.” What a contrast with human wisdom, so apt to be stern and proud, so impatient of question or difference! Where was its perfection ever seen, ever maintained without a flaw, but in our Lord Jesus? Therefore could He say, even at the close, “I am among you as he that serveth.” So He called on the greatest of His followers to be as the younger, and the leader to be as the servant. Heavenly wisdom feeds and fosters this gracious lowliness and waiting on others.

Next, it is said to be “full of mercy and of good fruits,” a precious help in the midst of faulty souls, and their evil ways. For of all men those who feel and act with divine compassion toward wrong-doers require themselves to walk in communion with Him Who is good to the ungrateful and the evil. There must be no real ground

for insinuating that they are soft toward other offenders, because they would smooth over their own inconsistencies.

Lastly, it is “uncontentious, impartial” (or, it may be, “unfeigned”): eminently called for in their place. For if children of God, are we not to walk as children of light, not only personally but in our bearing toward others and our converse with them? How is not the light dimmed by yielding to contention and indulgence in party work! How contrary to Christ when we give occasion to any just charge of insincerity or hypocrisy in our spirit! Heavenly wisdom eschews all such tendencies, earthly wisdom lives in and avails itself of such ways. The spirit of strife is apt to draw even an upright soul into feelings and conduct altogether unworthy of the new life and relationship.

The beautiful description of the heavenly wisdom which the Epistle commends to the saints closes with its result in peace along the way, “And righteousness’ fruit in peace is being sown for those that make peace” (ver. 18).

In the practical walk of the believer the fruit of righteousness is the prime requisite, but “in peace”; as we have seen the wisdom from above is “first pure, then peaceable.” In the natural man, as in the world, self-will reigns, the enemy of all righteousness, in an overbearing spirit, the seed of an ever-growing harvest of contention, as the beginning of the next chapter clearly indicates.

Even in the Lord Jesus we find the same order, as in Heb. 7:2, “first being by interpretation king of righteousness, and after that also king of Salem, which is king of peace.” Such is the application of

Melchizedek, king-priest of Salem. It is indeed a type more than fulfilled in the order of Christ's priesthood even now, about to be fulfilled by-and-by in its exercise, when the battle is won over the Beast and the kings of the earth and their armies at the end of the age.

When we look at redemption, if grace reigns as it does, it is through righteousness unto life eternal through Jesus Christ our Lord. Only then, through Him dead and risen, could we, justified by faith, have peace with God. Therefore are the saints everywhere called on, walking righteously, to be in peace (if possible, as much as hangs on them) with all men. Nor do the Epistles to the Corinthians differ from that to the Romans: God hath called us in peace, says the First; rejoice, be adjusted, be encouraged, be of one mind, be in peace; and the God of love and peace would be with them. Such is the exhortation and promise in the Second. So to the Galatians the apostle writes for as many as walk according to the rule of the new creation, peace be on them and mercy; as to the Ephesians, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, he would have their feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace. What a place peace has in the Philippian Epistle every reader ought to see; nor is it less deep in that to the Colossians where he would have Christ's peace rule in their hearts; as he prays for the Thessalonians in the First that the God of peace would sanctify them wholly, and in the Second that the Lord of peace Himself would give them peace continually in every way. And the Epistle to the Hebrews exhorts to pursue peace with all, and holiness, giving this however the primary and peremptory place in accordance with the doctrine elsewhere.

But the fruit of righteousness in peace, though acceptable to God, a blessing in itself, and a comfort to fellow-believers, is far from welcome to men in general, who know not God and do not obey the gospel but unrighteousness, living in malice and envy, hateful, hating each other. It is sown, as we are here told, “for those that make peace.” The will of man, any more than the wrath of man, works not God’s righteousness. Discord and every evil issue are the sad effect. “Blessed,” says the Lord, “are the peace-makers; for they shall be called God’s sons.” But in that wondrous outpouring of blessing from His lips on the mount (Matt. 5), we may notice that the four descriptions of the blessed are of the righteous class (vers. 3-6), before the three of the gracious sort (vers. 7-9); with a blessing super-numerary on the persecuted for righteousness’ sake, and another yet richer on those persecuted for His own sake. Righteousness necessarily precedes. For it is vain to think or speak of walking in grace, where we fail in consistency with our relationship. The fruit of righteousness in peace is being sown for those that make peace. Such are evidently walking in a spirit which grace produces; but the fruit of righteousness in peace is sown for them. Some contend strongly that we should understand “by” rather than “for.” Grammatically the clause is susceptible of either sense; but the former seems hardly so suitable to the bearing of the context. Let the Christian reader judge for himself.

James 4

The new chapter turns to the source of the bitter contention against which from the first its warning lay — “slow to wrath,” to its disastrous result.

“Whence [are] wars and whence fightings among you? [Are they] not hence, from your pleasures that combat in your members? Ye lust and have not: ye kill and are jealous and cannot obtain: ye fight and war: ye have not because ye ask not: ye ask and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may spend [it] in your pleasures” (vers. 1-3).

These violent workings sprang from self unjudged. If deliberate and continuous they are called “wars”; if passing outbreaks, they are called “fightings” or “battles”; but they describe not effects of violence in the world, but among those addressed. The humiliating fact remains, that terms to describe them are drawn from the uncontrolled ways of men who knew not God. What a contrast with Him Who says, “Take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matt. 11:29, 30). “Blessed” He pronounces “the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of the heavens. Blessed they that mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed they which hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled. Blessed the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed the peace-makers, for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed the persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of the heavens. Blessed are ye when they shall revile and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake” (Matt. 5:3-11).

Next the proximate cause is stated. “[Are they] not hence, from your pleasures that combat in your members?” It was the gratification of fallen nature. The

members of the body in this case play their part, unchecked by the will or fear of God: the throat, an open sepulchre; the tongue, deceitful; the lips, with poison underneath; the mouth, full of bitterness; the eyes, full of adultery; the hands, ready for rapine; the heart, prone to covetousness; the feet, swift to shed blood. How hopelessly evil, if grace had not given another nature through and according to the word of truth (which is indeed, as the apostle calls it, Christ our life)! And the new has its pleasures after its source, hating what God hates, and delighting in what pleases' Him. His word is then the law of liberty.

But where Christ is not before the eye of faith working by love, how mournful the issue! "Ye lust and have not; ye kill, and are jealous, and cannot obtain; ye fight and war; ye have not, because ye ask not; ye ask and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may spend [it] in your pleasures." Here the evil is traced to that unhallowed desire that is called "lust," whatever may be its object, and whether corrupt or violent. It is wholly in contrast with subjection to God and His word. It is therefore antagonistic to the affection and mind of the Holy Spirit, as is said in Gal. 5:17, "For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these things are opposed one to the other, that ye should not do the things that ye would."

Here therefore we have, traced in unerring lines, the inevitable failure of such a course. There are desires which come to nothing; there is violence to an extreme, and envy or jealousy to the full, yet still dissatisfaction; there is contention ever growing worse; there is no asking, and no answer of peace. If there be asking

apparently, there is the reserve of selfishness; it is evilly done to squander on their pleasures.

Violence was denounced in the opening of the chapter. Hence we have corruption indignantly rebuked to the face.

“Adulteresses,2 know ye not that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore shall be minded to be friend of the world is constituted enemy of God. Or think ye that the scripture saith in vain? 3 Doth the Spirit that took his dwelling in us long unto envy? But he giveth more grace; wherefore he saith, God setteth himself against haughty [men], but giveth grace to lowly” (vers. 4-6).

The shorter text as given here is attested by the great witnesses, both manuscripts and versions. The addition in later copies we can understand from the temptation to round the phrase and comprehend men and women; and this has tended to a literal sense instead of understanding it as a forcible and solemn appeal, the gender being easily apprehended from the nature of the offence. For the first duty of every Christian is fidelity to Christ; and assuredly there is no question of failure on His part. With the saints it is far otherwise.

Thus wrote the apostle to the Corinthians, “I espoused you to one husband that I might present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.” Here each individual is more in view; but the principle is the same, and the figure of departure quite intelligible. The world corrupts from simplicity as to Christ many who would turn from immoral ways at once. For it looks fair enough, and offers a variety of attractions suited to our nature. And the question is often raised, What is the harm of this? Is there any

wrong in that? But this Epistle lays bare the character of the enticement. Are we seeking or accepting the world? Now friendship with the world is enmity with God. Did not the world crucify the Lord of glory? Is it Christian then to value its approbation, or to court its honour? Is it loyal to the Lord to walk in familiar ease with the system which shed His blood and put Him to the vilest ignominy? No one clears himself of that guilt save he who believing is washed, sanctified, and justified in the name of our Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God. Those who profess the name without the power are sure to weary of separateness to Christ and to hanker after earthly things. But the word is plain: “Whosoever therefore shall be minded to be friend of the world is constituted enemy of God.”

The written word of God is as distinctly opposed to such unholy commerce as the Spirit Who dwells in us revolts from its spirit. “Or think ye that the scripture saith [it] in vain? Doth the Spirit that took His dwelling in us long unto envy?” What did our Lord teach on the mount or in His discourses habitually, and in His answers to men? Separation from the world is everywhere enjoined, or presumed. And what can be more adverse to the envy which characterises the world than the mind of the indwelling Spirit of God? Subjectively therefore as well as objectively what God gives in no way countenances friendship with the world.

No doubt the difficulties and the dangers are great for the saint here below. “But he giveth more grace”; and all need it. Not content with imparting settled “access by faith into this grace wherein we stand” (Rom. 5:2), where is the Epistle, speaking ordinarily, which does not begin with “grace to you and peace from God our Father,

and from our Lord Jesus Christ? “This is general, of course; and so much the better for its purpose that so it should be. Here it is suited to the trial, and therefore appropriate to need. “But he giveth greater grace.” The more severe the strain, the greater is His outflow of goodness for seasonable help. “Wherefore he saith, God setteth himself against haughty [men], but giveth grace to lowly.” Not only 1 Sam. 2 and Luke 10, but the Psalms and Proverbs furnish abundant testimony to both its parts.

The assurance that God giveth grace to the lowly leads to the next exhortation.

“Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse hands, sinners, and purify hearts, ye double-minded. Sorrow, and mourn, and weep; let your laughter be turned unto mourning, and your joy unto heaviness. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you” (vers. 7-10).

There is much that helps the soul, as it is due to God, that we submit ourselves to Him. Undoubtedly it becomes one that knows Him to cherish obedient lowliness in His sight; and were we ever in our watchtower, we should be habitually thus submissive. But in fact a little thing is apt to excite, and the uprising of another too often rouses our own pride, instead of being only a grief to our souls as it should be. Hence the need of subjection to God which quiets the spirit and leads to gracious affections.

But there is an adversary ever at work with whom we are called to have no terms, no compromises, even where appearances are put forward ever so plausibly.

“Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” Christ is the test: the devil always works to thwart and defame the Lord Jesus. He may preach righteousness, he may stimulate zeal; but he never exalts Christ’s name in truth, any more than leads to suffering for His sake. Detested and resisted he will flee from us. To gratify flesh and the world are his ordinary snares. Let us never forget that to faith he is a vanquished enemy. Let us resist him in dependence on the Lord. On the other hand, we are called to “draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you.”

The new and living way is now open to Him Who sent His Son that all obstacles might be removed in the love that wrought and gave us a redemption worthy of Himself and of His Son. His written word now imparts the revealed certainty of His will in thus putting us in relationship with Himself, as we were shown early in this Epistle. As He speaks freely to us in His love, so does He encourage us, “always confident,” to draw nigh to Him. Our asking of Him, whatever the need, the danger, or the difficulty, is grounded on His having addressed Himself to us in grace. And Christ, as He was “the faithful witness” of Him to us, is no less of us to Him, so as to keep up faith’s assurance alike when we draw nigh to God and when we resist the devil.

But the thought in the next words seems an example of the peculiarity of an Epistle addressed to the twelve tribes of the Dispersion. “Sinners” and “double-minded” persons are appealed to as such. Such appeals are nowhere found in the Epistles addressed to the saints in the N.T. Here the scope is so wide as to include souls not yet converted, though we have also seen a great deal in the Epistle which supposes the faith of our Lord Jesus

Christ. But there is more here and to come in accordance with its being written to the ancient people of God as a whole, in whatever degree each believer may draw profit from all. The difficulty of the exhortation is thus accounted for, and the authority of the word maintained, without yielding to any strained interpretation. Nevertheless it is a call to faith in all these verses, and not to the slow process of human effort; for cleansing of hands and purifying of hearts, no less than for submission to God and drawing nigh to Him before, or for sorrowings that follow. The verbs are all in what is called the aorist, and therefore imply that God calls for each and all of these calls to be done once for all as a settled thing for the soul. This grace alone could effect. Man otherwise must labour in vain. God gives to faith what He demands.

Still where faith is, there is repentance also; and God will have evil felt and judged in those who are blessed of Him. Hence the summons, “Sorrow, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned unto mourning, and your joy unto heaviness.” As the Lord said, “Blessed they that mourn; for they shall be comforted.” The Epistle of James will no more allow the moral side to be forgotten than the apostle Paul in showing us the characteristics of genuine repentance. How could it be otherwise, if we stand in faith before God confessing our sins? To make repentance only a change of mind is a serious dereliction from the truth. Sin is ignored as it is in God’s sight, and any divinely-given sense of our ruin.

But a larger call follows, and of deep practical moment, “Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.” This too is a call to have it done once for all, like the rest — an accomplished act, and not a mere process

going on. But as in the other cases, so in this, the believer is bound ever after to watch against every inconsistency with what is so done.

The next admonition is on evil speaking and the judicial spirit which is so often its root.

“Speak not against one another, brethren. He that speaketh against a brother, or judgeth his brother, speaketh against law and judgeth law; but if thou judgest law, thou art not a doer of law but a judge. One is the law-giver and judge that is able to save and destroy; but who art thou that judgest thy neighbour” (vers. 11, 12)?

Here was the suited place to apply particularly what the Epistle had guarded against in a general way in James 2, when on all it impressed slowness in speaking as well as in wrath. This was pursued again in James 3 to the strict government of the tongue from over-readiness to teach; seeing that fair words and foul from the same lips ought not so to be, and may easily prove occasion of stumbling. Here it follows the exposure of the inward spring of selfwill in violence and corruption, without duly heeding scripture and the Spirit Who leads to prayer with subjection to God, and confidence in Him and His grace.

The exhortation is as to our ordinary but God-fearing intercourse. The necessities of godly discipline are not in question. Holy love is bound to rebuke what is wrong in those guilty of it, and to warn those who may be endangered by the evil example. Wrong in these cases must be laid bare though it ought to be in sorrow; but it is due to the Lord, and for the profit of those concerned. If there be a public snare and peril, this makes a

corresponding admonition to be a duty, and is love in truth.

But to spread disparagement or discreditable imputations without a call from God according to His word, and with no effort to seek the good of the alleged evil-doers, is not only far from Christ, but beneath even a Jew. There is neither truth nor love in detraction, but constant liability to false witness: a multitude must not be followed to do such uncomely turns, any more than to favour a poor man in his cause. The nearness of our relationship is apt to lend occasion to freedom of speech, but it clearly ought rather to enforce on us the greater caution. “Speak not against one another, brethren.” Entreaty or remonstrance may be called for; but angry and especially habitual depreciation is unworthy of those that bear the Lord’s name. Is it to injure? How does He regard it? “He that speaketh against a brother, or judgeth his brother, speaketh against law, and judgeth law; but if thou judgest law, thou art not a doer of law but a judge.” Not only the uncharitable act, but the judicial assumption which it must involve, are here exposed with transparent soundness. The brother spoken against may be innocent; the evil speaker is certainly in a false position and an injurious state. The authority which all acknowledge condemns him, at least of being censorious, usurping the seat of judgment, and disputing the authority he invokes. Nor is God mocked: for we reap as we sow, if of flesh corruption; if of Spirit, life everlasting.

“But if thou judgest law, thou are not a doer of law but a judge.” How true it is that the readiest to blame others are the least careful over themselves, and need most

correction for their heedless ways and their hasty judgments!

How solemn too the appeal to conscience! “One is the law-giver and judge, that is able to save and destroy.” How grave is the rebuke to any who so offend! “But who art thou that judgest thy neighbour?” Grace and self-judgment can alone enable us to abhor the evil and cleave to the good. may we cultivate both.

Thence the Epistle turns to that unbelieving spirit and inconsiderate speech too often borrowed from the world by those who know and ought to feel how all things hang on God’s will.

“Go to now, ye that say, Today or tomorrow we will go to this city here and spend there a year, and traffic and make gain, whereas ye know not what [will be] the morrow. Of what sort [is] your life? Why, it is a vapour that appeareth for a little and then disappeareth, instead of your saying, If the Lord will, we shall both live and do this or that” (vers 13-15).

It is plain that the levity of the sentiment goes deeper than the words, and betrays the readiness of man’s mind to leave God out of the ordinary round of life, especially in the affairs of business. But to bring Him in and to refer to His will with integrity would cover the greater part of every day. Christ, yea Christianity also, shows that as there is nothing too great for us to receive from God, so there is nothing too little for God to direct us in. His will embraces all that is humble, all that is glorious. Christ is not the witness only but the fulness in both. Who ever came so low? Who is now gone so high? And He is the fife of every Christian, who is therefore called to walk as He did. But there we fail, as Christ never did;

in Whom nothing is more wonderful than His unwavering obedience; He is indeed the only Man Who always did without exception the things which pleased His Father.

It is then our duty, as it is our privilege, to consult the will of our God and Father day by day, and throughout each day. In our prayer and in His word we find the means; or, as our Lord Himself put the case perfectly, “If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done to you.” For He begins with our constant reliance on Him, and He ends with the assurance of our having what we ask; for, so doing, one only asks what is according to God’s will.

After knowing so blessed a reality as Christ’s walk on earth, leaving us an example that we should follow His steps, is it not then a dead loss and a deep wrong, that any Christian should walk as the heathen that know not God? One can understand Elijah taunting the recreant Jews who followed Baal, and especially Baal’s priests who vainly called on that demon to answer by fire. “Cry aloud: for he is a god. Either he is musing, or he is gone aside, or he is on a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth and must be awaked.” But he who believes on Christ knows Him active in the richest love to bless now and evermore, God revealed too as His Father and our Father, His God and our God. Are we not then to lay before Him every difficulty and every desire? Are we not to respond to His grace by our devotedness? Are not we too sanctified by the Spirit unto obedience, and this obedience, not of a Jew under the law, but under grace, yea expressly to an obedience like His own, of sons with the Father? As children of obedience, it is not for us to fashion ourselves according to our former lusts in our

ignorance; but as He that called us is holy, so may it be with us in all manner of living. Now the main spring of this practical course is seeking to walk in His will.

But Christian profession, and perhaps especially among the Israelites, was fast slipping into worldliness and naturalism, as we hear it pungently described in these verses. Not only is it unworthy of God's child; it is practical impiety. Who and what is a man that fears God to talk of his plans for to-day or to-morrow without a thought of Him? Who and what is he to leave where he is and go to this city here, to spend there a year? And how? To traffic and make gain! "Whereas," says our Epistle, "ye know not what will be on the morrow." How simple yet withering! "Of what sort is your life? Why, it is a vapour that appeareth for a little and then disappeareth." Of course no more is here spoken of than our earthly existence, our life in the world. Instead of that we ought to say, "If the Lord will, we shall both live and do this or that." Impossible to resist the force of this appeal. Our living here below falls as much under the Lord's will, as our doing this or that. How wretched to ignore Him! How happy to know His will and to do it!

The closing verses disclose the root of this practical leaving God out of daily life and language, but deepen the censure by pointing to that unselfish goodness to which every one is called who has the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ.

"But now ye glory in your vauntings: all such glorying is wicked. To one knowing to do a comely thing, and not doing [it], it is a sin to him" (vers. 16, 17).

The only befitting state of a creature is dependence on God; with this all vauntings, as if our life were within

our power and every act of it free for our own disposal, is wholly at issue. Bought with a price, we with such feelings and ways defraud Him to Whom we belong; and all the more, if according to God's own will we derive our new nature from Him by the word of truth. We are called to keep up the family character. Of this He Who had sovereign rights has set us the perfect exemplar; for Lord of glory as He is, He came down to be a bondman and was to the uttermost. Love animated Him in an obedience which never flagged; as love sent Him on our behalf, not only to save us when lost, but to conform us in heart and to fashion our ways and words. What can be more opposed than vauntings, unless it be to glory in them? Instead of it, let us be ashamed when we consider what we are in such godless pride, and what He was, Who, though rich, for our sakes became poor, that we through His poverty might be made rich, but rich only in the unseen and eternal. Are we any better in ourselves? Is it not solely in Him? How senseless, unworthy, and inconsistent to glory in our vauntings! Truly "all such glorying is wicked"; it savours not of Christ, but of the devil's inflation.

But we cannot, as confessors of the Lord Jesus deny what we have by faith seen and heard of Him. In virtue of life in Him we know the thing that becomes the Christian; for we are not ignorant of that which was manifested in Him, Who was its fulness and never allowed the entrance of the least foreign element. It is not here goodness in the form of benevolence (ἀγαθὸν), though we are surely to follow Him in that path also (Gal. 6:10). Here it is what is honourably right (καλὸν) in one who professes not to be a man only, but to be

born of God. If knowing it therefore, we are engaged to do it; and if one does it not, to him it is sin.

It is evident that this goes far beyond the Puritan and even more widely human perversion of 1 John 3:4, which pervades systematic divinity. It ought to be absurd in any intelligent eyes to think that James penetrates more deeply than the beloved disciple. No law is in question but “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus”; it is the law of liberty, not of bondage. John however does not speak of “the transgression of the law,” which has its own proper expression elsewhere; he presents the true and faithful character of sin, even where law was unknown: “sin is lawlessness.” It is the principle and exercise of self-will, and not only breach of the law. Being a reciprocal proposition, lawlessness is sin as truly as sin is lawlessness. Here our Epistle applies the truth on the positive side. God’s will is that we should do a thing that is right or comely when we know it: if we know and do it not, we sin. It is our own will that hinders; and this is always sin.

James 5

The address at the beginning of the Epistle helps not a little to account for the peculiarity of the denunciation of the rich with which our chapter opens, as well as other passages afterwards and before it. If directed to the twelve tribes that are in the dispersion, there is no difficulty; if it contemplated like Peter’s two Epistles only such as are saints, not a little would sound harsh, to say the least. But as the inspired writer was led to take wider ground from the start, the true key of interpretation is put into our hands thereby.

“Come then, ye rich, weep, howling over your miseries that are coming on. Your wealth is corrupted, and your garments are become moth-eaten. Your gold and your silver are rusted through, and their rust shall be for a witness to you, and shall eat your flesh as fire. Ye laid up treasure in [the] last days. Behold, the hire of the labourers who reaped your fields, that is kept back of you, [or, from you] calleth out; and the cries of those that reaped entered into the ears of Jehovah of hosts. Ye lived luxuriously on the earth and indulged yourselves; ye nourished your hearts in a day of slaughter. Ye condemned, ye slew the just one: he doth not resist you” (vers. 1-6).

The day of the Lord could not but be prominent before a godly Israelite imbued with the reiterated warnings of the prophets; and it is still hanging over man on the earth. The covenant people of old were prone to regard themselves as exceptions; but for their delusion they had no warrant or even excuse from scripture. The more privileged, if faithless, are the more guilty. “You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.” The gospel brings in grace, and through faith deliverance; but the moral principles of divine government are immutable. God’s wrath is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness, and unrighteousness of men that hold the truth in unrighteousness.

The poor are sinners no less than the rich; each have their special snares and dangers. But it is far harder for a rich man than for a poor one to follow Christ truly. Therefore, said He to His disciples, “Verily I say to you, It is hard for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of the heavens. And again I say to you, It is easier for a camel

to enter through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God."

Here however they in a general and unsparing way are warned solemnly of their miseries that are coming on. The reader may profitably compare Isa. 2:7 to the end: only idols are not set forth by the Epistle as in the prophecy. But that day will deal with every one that is proud and lofty, and with every one that is lifted up, with every high tower, and every fenced wall, with all the ships of Tarshish and with all pleasant works of art. God is against their cherished wealth, and their endless store of raiment. To his eye that saw under the surface all was corruption, their gold and silver rusted throughout, the rust a witness to them and to eat their flesh as fire. The selfish unbelief that laid up treasures in closing days was no trifle in God's sight.

But they are charged with wanton cruelty and fraud in their dealings with the labourers who reaped their fields. Their very wealth tempts the rich to withhold payment of wages to the poor; their own things are alone of moment in their eyes, while they postpone to a convenient season the claims of such as live from hand to mouth. But the debt cries aloud to Him Who ever feels for the poor, as He showed Who alone made Him fully known. Yes, the cries of the reapers, which may not have reached the rich, entered into the ears of the Lord of hosts, and His blow would fall when least expected.

The rich are next arraigned for their luxurious living on the earth, as if the God of heaven regarded it not. In a world of wretchedness and want, they indulged themselves, as if they were not stewards and had no account to render; they nourished their hearts in a day

of slaughter, as heedless as the beasts slain for food of man.

Another charge follows, still more tremendous: “Ye condemned, ye slew the just one: he doth not resist you.” This made their guilt less excusable. “He did no sin, nor was guile found in his mouth; who, when reviled, reviled not again, when suffering, threatened not, but gave [himself] up to him that judgeth justly.”

At this point the Holy Spirit brings in the coming of the Lord. It is indeed a truth of the utmost moment and of the largest application practically; and all the inspired were led to interweave it into their communications.

“Be patient, therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient for (or, over) it, until it receive early and latter rain. Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts; for the coming of the Lord is at hand. Murmur (or, groan) not, brethren, one against another, that ye be not judged. Behold, the judge standeth before the door. Take, brethren, for en example of suffering and of patience, the prophets who spoke in the name of [the] Lord. Behold, we call them blessed who endured. Ye heard of the endurance of Job, and saw the Lord’s end; for the Lord is full of compassion, and merciful” (vers. 7-11).

What motive to long suffering so powerful as the Lord’s coming! Good shall then be at ease, and evil be smitten down all over the earth. He will have the glory to Whom it is due. The heavens and earth shall be united under His head ship Who is Heir of all things. His own, even in the body conformed to His image, as they once suffered with Him, shall then be glorified and reign with Him.

Israel no longer idolatrous, the Jew despising no more their Messiah, shall have Him their King, Jehovah's anointed King on His holy hill of Zion. All the nations will bow in willing subjection to His righteous sceptre, envious no more of His choice: all that see the elect people in that day shall acknowledge them, that they are the seed which Jehovah hath blessed. In their Father's kingdom on high shall the righteous shine forth as the sun; and, below, the Son of man shall send forth His angels, who shall gather out of His kingdom all stumbling-blocks and those that do iniquity. Then Jehovah will answer the heavens, and they shall answer the earth; and the earth shall answer the corn, and the wine and the oil; and they shall answer Jezreel. And Jehovah will sow her unto Him in the land, and will have mercy on her that had not obtained mercy; and He will say to them which were not His people, Thou art my people, and they shall say, My God. And the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The sucking child too shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the basilisk's den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain. For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of Jehovah, as the waters cover the sea.

Such are the consequences of that glorious event. But His presence is more than all the rest to those that love Himself. Nor is there any truth which has a mightier effect (next to faith in His person, His love, and His death) in detaching from the world and its snares on the

one hand, and in sustaining under its hatred and persecution on the other. Be patient, therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. It is not the providential dealing with Jerusalem and the Jews, any more than death ridding sufferers from the troubles of this life. These are the misinterpretations of fallen Christendom. The truth is the hope of His own coming, which will first act on all the saints dead or living to give them consummated blessedness, and next on the land and people of Israel, as well as on all the earth.

Doubtless we have to await the moment of the Father's will. So does the farmer for the good produce of the earth, till it receive the needed rain from above, both early and later. How much more should we stablish our hearts in patience, whose hope is so much more excellent, till the last believer is called! for the Lord's coming hath drawn nigh. Can we not trust Him Who gave us His Son, and with Him all things?

There is another danger, besides impatience, which it corrects. We are apt to murmur, or groan, one against another. How unwise, ungracious, and unbelieving! With what measure we mete, it shall be measured to us again. To judge is to be judged. How much better to wait in patience, overcoming evil with good! Why should we judge? "Behold, the judge standeth before the door." The time is at hand.

Incredulity says that this was the error of the apostolic church. On the contrary it was the simple strength of their hope; and they reaped the blessing it gave them. If they fell asleep, it was also to wait with Christ, instead of only for Him. It is the true, intended, and constant hope of the Christian, as living now as from the day of

Pentecost. Christ Himself is waiting for that moment; so all saints were once, and all ought to be now.

Nor is our Lord the only pattern for us. “Take, brethren, for an example of suffering and of patience, the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord.” We tread the same path with yet brighter hope, though in substance the same. Yet another incentive is added, of no slight force. “Behold, we call them blessed which endured. Ye heard of the endurance of Job, and saw the Lord’s end; for the Lord is full of compassion and merciful.” A whole book of scripture is devoted to this aim. How fully Job was vindicated against the detraction of friends! And how blessed of Jehovah, when self was judged! Let us be of good cheer, not hearing only, but truly profiting.

From the need of patient endurance we are next warned of the danger of light or thoughtless asseverations in ordinary speech: a common habit among both Jews and Greeks, but wholly unworthy of Him Who is the truth, the great exemplar for all who confess Him Lord.

“But before all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, nor by the earth, nor by any other oath; but let your yea be yea, and nay nay, lest ye fall under judgment” (ver. 12).

As sinning with the tongue is throughout denounced, so here in particular the lack of reverence. For though the oaths in question refer to the creature rather than to God, though they may affect care for His name by substituting other forms for His; who entitles men to adopt anything of the sort in daily intercourse? He is the Judge, Who has assured us that of every idle word that men speak they shall give account in the day that

comes; “for by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.”

Indeed on the mount, in the great series of discourses of which the first Gospel gives the summary, the Lord had pronounced on the same wrong. “Again, ye have heard that it was said to those of old time, Thou shalt not perjure thyself, but shalt perform to Jehovah thy vows; but I say to thee, Swear not at all: neither by the heaven, for it is God’s throne; nor by the earth, for it is the footstool of his feet; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. No more shalt thou swear by thy head; for thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your word be yea, yea; nay, nay; for that which is more cometh of evil” (or, the evil one). The self-same duty is enforced as in this Epistle.

It is a total mistake to conceive that by either a judicial oath is forbidden. The specimens given preclude such an inference. They are not such as the magistrate puts in a court or other occasion; they were, or might be, the common phrases of every day. The sense therefore is clearly given by the A.V. rendering of “your communication.” It was not an answer to the demand of one entitled to ask in God’s name. This every one is bound to give. So our Lord was silent till the High Priest adjured, or put the oath, with that authority; as the O.T. claims it in Lev. 5:1. Here it is only the case of man with man. Even without a magistrate, but on an adequately solemn occasion we have the apostle confirming what he taught the saints by an equivalent as in Rom. 1:9; Rom. 9:1; 2 Cor. 1:23; Gal. 1:20; Phil. 1:8; 2 Thess. 3:5; so he adjures his brethren in 1 Thess. 5:27.

It is quite enough that in our converse with brethren or other men, our yea should be yea, and our nay nay. "That which is more cometh of evil." The believer is as responsible to speak as to act as in the presence of God. This is his habitual privilege, and safeguard. It may be forgotten by others, or by himself to his loss. The evil one is a liar and the father of it. No small opportunity would it be to him if the Christian were not always watchful to speak truly, and needed such expletives to gain credit for it.

From this earnest exclusion of an approach to profane speech, we are next exhorted to the course that befits in suffering or in joy, as well as sickness.

"Doth any among you suffer trouble? let him pray. Is any happy? let him sing praise. Is any sick among you? let him call to him the elders of the assembly, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil, in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith shall save (heal) the sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he have committed sins, it shall be forgiven him" (vers. 13-15).

We are short in Christian intelligence if we do not know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to those that are called according to purpose. God often sends trouble as chastening for the good of His children. Sometimes as in 1 Cor. 11 it is because of positive sin; but they totally mistake who suppose that it is restricted to that. Heb. 12 puts it on ground quite independent of so sorrowful an occasion, and treats it as flowing from His Fatherly love, and for profit, that we might be partakers of His holiness. It is as much or more to hinder sin as in consequence of its indulgence. It often is a trial of faith and an honour from the Lord, as

the apostles so well knew, and many a simple saint in no such prominence. For the disciples as such are called through many tribulations to enter into the kingdom of God.

But in any case “doth any among you suffer trouble? let him pray.” God is the resource in trouble; and the saint, instead of only bearing it or sinking under it, is exhorted to “pray.” He is encouraged to expect blessing in crying to God about the trouble. It is a practical victory over the enemy who seeks our loss by it, if our mildness or forbearance be made known to all men, and our requests be made known to God. With unbelief it is the contrary: insisting on our rights as and with men, as if God entitled any to such a plea; and making demands or requests on men, instead of looking only thus to God.

Then there is a time when one experiences circumstances of joy. “Is any happy? let him praise.” For gladness has its dangers no less, perhaps more, than trouble. It is apt to elate the spirit, throw us off our balance in the Lord, and expose us to levity in feeling, word and deed. The resource is to turn to Him in praise. Singing is not only due to Him Who gives happiness, but a safety-valve for His feeble ones, who easily at such a time slip from dependence. His praise recalls us to Himself.

There may also be the general or special need created by sickness. “Is any sick among you? let him call to him the elders of the assembly, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of [the] Lord.” It is good where any dealing of the Lord leads us to turn to Him, expecting not evil but good. In those days too, elders of the assembly were there, men of moral weight

and spiritual judgment, whose place it was to intervene in difficulties of a personal as well as public nature. They might not be evangelists or teachers; but apt to teach they were required to be, men able to take up in love and truth and faithfulness the burdens of their brethren. The sick man is exhorted to summon such as they are to pray for him with that application of oil which Romanism has distorted so wholly from God's mind. Extreme unction is a mere invention of superstition, to smooth the way when hope of recovery is gone.

It is remarkable that the inspired writer, though encouraging honour to the elders, attaches healing virtue, not to their official place or special art, but to prayer, and this of an efficacious sort through faith. He says "And the prayer of faith shall save [or, heal] the sick, and the Lord will raise him up." What a contrast this is with the gloomy superstition which sends "a priest" to absolve him and give extreme unction, because his death is regarded as inevitable! For if he recover, he will need the same hateful parody over again. Yes, unclean and drunken harlot, dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return, with no resurrection as being without life, nothing but a system of darkness and death.

Then comes the special character of the sickness, carefully discriminated from the common, "and if he have committed sins, it shall be forgiven him." It is a nice and notable point in the true rendering of the clause that the sins are in the plural, the forgiveness is in the singular. It is right that each and all should be judged in order; but grace gives the forgiveness in full.

Verses 14, 15, fully present the blessing which rested on the assembly, and the honour God put on the elders. They were encouraged to pray for the sick and assured that the prayer of faith should heal him, and the Lord raise him up. The added clause took notice of sins done, which might trouble the heart, but it assures forgiveness. This leads to a more general statement which follows.

“Confess therefore your sins [or, ‘offences’ as in the common text] to one another, and pray for one another, that ye may be healed. A righteous [one’s] supplication hath much power if it work. Elijah was a man of like passions with us, and he prayed prayerfully that it might not rain; and it rained not on the earth for three years and six months. And he prayed again; and the heaven gave rain, and the earth sprouted forth its fruit” (vers. 16-18).

Here we find Christians exhorted, where failure came in, to confess their sins mutually, and so to pray, that healing might be granted. For there is a divine government which has ever thus dealt with the saints here below, as we may see in the Psalms as well as in the history of the ancient people of God. So there was outside Israel, as in the book of Job. Neither the gospel nor the church has changed this. The saving grace of God has appeared, as it did not till Christ and His work; but as surely as we call on a Father, He judges without respect of persons according to each one’s work, as the Lord taught the disciples in John 15. Sovereign grace abides in all its efficacy; but God does not fail in faithfulness to deal with us if unfaithful. We are therefore enjoined to pass the time of our sojourning in fear, not as if we doubted, but on the contrary, as

knowing consciously that we were redeemed with Christ's precious blood as of an unblemished and spotless lamb.

This is the more consolatory in the present anomalous state of Christendom, where tradition has wrought boundless havoc with the truth, and ecclesiastical order has been swamped with inventions of men to please human activity and hide the ruin which lawlessness has everywhere brought about. Properly, elders needed apostolic authority, direct or indirect. Where this was not, and elders were lacking, or even men not easily found who had the qualities on which the apostle insisted to Timothy, the saints could and ought to confess their sins to one another with prayer; nor would the Lord's grace fail toward the need. A righteous one's supplication avails much, where really at work.

For this Elijah is cited, as one of like nature with ourselves, as indeed his inspired history reveals. But it also reveals how, as a judgment of God, rain should not fall for three years and six months because of a people rebellious and even apostate. Here we have, not the solemn sentence the prophets pronounced from God, but the inner work in the soul which preceded it, for which we are wholly indebted to this Epistle. He prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth sprouted forth its fruit; but we learn this second praying in the history as well as in the Epistle. Miracles it is a proud unbecoming thought to expect in the actual confusion that exists, yet with God and His word acknowledged. But God hears prayers with fatherly pleasure, and never fails to answer that which faith pours into His ears.

It is faith, practical faith, which has been urged, faith exercised in energetic prayer. The Epistle does not close without an earnest pressure of love in a similarly active way, and indeed in manifest connection.

“My4 brethren, if any among you should err from5 the truth, and one turn him back, let him know6 that he that turned back a sinner from the error of his way shall save a [or, his7] soul from death, and shall cover a multitude of sins” (vers. 19, 20).

One of the saddest results of spiritual weakness among Christians is the rarity of restoration. Discipline even in extreme degree is no less due to our Lord, to our sacrificed Lord (1 Cor. 5:7, 8), than requisite in the best interests of the saints. For true love of our brethren is inseparable from loving God and keeping His commandments (1 John 5:1, 2). But our God attests often and clearly and strongly His deep concern in the recovery of the straying and fallen; where self-righteousness displays its bitterness and indifference. Zeal for the credit of a sect or party and anxiety to stand well morally are as far as possible from the love we owe to Christ’s body and every member of it.

For we are exhorted to forgive (or, show grace to) one another, as God also in Christ forgave us (Eph. 4:32); yea, to be imitators of God, as beloved children, and to walk in love, even as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us. But this love divine is meant to arm us against fellowship with the ways of darkness, seeing that we are light in the Lord to walk as children of light, the fruit of which is in all goodness, and righteousness, and truth (Eph. 5:7-9). Hence the spiritual, in a spirit of meekness, are to restore one taken in some fault, “considering

thyself lest thou also be tempted." Hardness is unworthy of a Christian. "If thy brother sin, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he should sin against thee seven times in a day, and seven times return to thee, saying, I repent, thou shalt forgive him" (Luke 17:3, 4).

So here, if one brought back him that erred, or was led astray from the truth, let him know that in such a recovery he that brought him back from his way of error should "save a soul from death." Here it is not a striking answer to the prayer of faith, but a rich cheer to the love that sought and won the wanderer. To have the sick healed and raised up as the fruit of prayer may strike the eye more; but how blessed to "save a soul from death"! Thus would our God encourage a spirit of grace in the thankful knowledge that love has its victories in a world of self and hatred and evil; and this, not only in regard of him that erred from the truth and its way, but in furnishing occasion, for that which is so pleasing to God in His government — to "cover a multitude of sins." If love do not flow, wrongs multiply, and God chastens, it may be severely; for where is Christ in such a case? But if love prevail through His grace, God is glorified, and love covers a multitude of sins, which otherwise must draw out His rebukes.

1 There is ancient and excellent authority p.m. K L and more than 50 cursives, etc., for omitting the article, which would give a characteristic force, "before a God and Father." In either case "our" goes too far.

2 So run pm A B 13, and, only in the mass., Syrsch Copt. Aeth. Arm.

3 The punctuation and translation of ver, 5 may be questioned; but I have faithfully given what seems best.

4 The omission of the pronoun, as in the Text. Rec. according to the more modern copies, against the ancient and best authorities, both MSS. and Vv. detracts from the tenderness of the appeal.

5 “The way of” the truth seems an enfeebling addition, as in the Sinaitic and good cursives, besides venerable Versions. The weight of testimony is adverse.

6 The Vatican Uncial, etc., give the plural “Know ye.”

7 AP, some good cursives, and ancient Versions give “his.”